

June 8, City Council meeting
Re: Items 14 and 15

Last week this council approved the Negative Declaration for the Long Beach Building Standards Code Amendments Project relating to ordinances regulating construction adjacent to abandoned oil or gas wells, and construction near areas exhibiting detectable amounts of methane gas; Declare an Ordinance amending Title 18 of the Long Beach Municipal Code by adding Chapter 18.78 relating to construction in the vicinity of oil/gas wells, read for the first time and laid over to the next regular meeting of the City Council for final reading.

The staff report states: “There are a total of 6,640 wells (1,947 active, 775 idle, and 3,918 abandoned) in Long Beach. The City of Long Beach currently requires that construction projects proposing to develop near wells adhere to the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CALGEM) standards. The proposed action will create tailored regulations specific to Long Beach that provide better outcomes.”

Better outcomes for whom? The answer can be found in the Negative Declaration:

”The City has received numerous requests from potential developers and property owners regarding development of habitable and non-habitable structures in the vicinity of existing oil/gas wells. Methane leaks from abandoned wells, pipelines, or processing equipment can occur and result in hazardous conditions for adjacent uses while substantially increasing greenhouse gas emissions. The current CalGEM well abandonment standards prohibit development on sites with previously abandoned wells in the City. Additionally, the City does not have any adopted methane gas mitigation standards.”

This proposed ordinance is an attempt to eliminate CalGem regulations to allow more development in places such as 3701 Pacific Place, 712 Baker St., Alamitos Heights, the Los Cerritos Wetlands and other oil and methane producing areas.

The Staff report states:

“To develop near oil or gas wells, CalGEM requires that wells be abandoned in accordance with the most current State regulations, which

currently requires as many as eight cement plugs, and that all structures be set back certain distances from the abandoned wells.”

This ordinance will allow the use of only 3 cement plugs instead of up to 8. It also allows building directly over abandoned wells, with only a membrane barrier to contain the methane. This will result in putting the lives and health of the residents at risk. The build-up of flammable and toxic methane has been compared to living on top of a volcano.

By requiring such projects as hospitals, caregiving facilities and schools, as well as “high rise” occupancy classifications, to continue to follow the current CALGEM standards, the City is recognizing the dangers to human health and safety in this ordinance.

It is not too late for this Council to deny this ordinance change and adhere to current CALGEM standards. Please vote NO.

Sincerely,
Ann Cantrell
Sierra Clug Los Cerritos Wetlands Task Force
Citizens About Responsible Planning
Riverpark Coalition