ENERGY, CLIMATE CHANGE, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE & RIVER

MOTION

The Los Angeles City Oil Field was discovered in 1890 and made famous by Edward Doheny who drilled a deep well in 1892 at the corner of Colton and Patton Streets. With no regulations on well spacing, wells sprouted on the field interspersed between homes and businesses. By the end of 1897, 270 wells had been drilled into this new area, peaking in 1901 with 1,150 active wells pumping over 1.8 million barrels and over 200 separate companies in operation. Production declined quickly after the peak and after 1915, only two new wells were drilled on the field.

These boom years preceded the formation of regulatory agencies in California. Over time, one by one, the wells were abandoned, and predominantly residential development was built over the former oil field. Public regulatory agencies have since been established to address public health and safety concerns associated with these sites. Today real estate construction activity requires clearance by the California Geologic Energy Management Division (CalGEM) in permanently plugging and abandoning known oil wells, and wells previously unknown but discovered. As recent as 2016, two orphan wells were located in the front yards of residential properties on Firmin Street. CalGEM began working to permanently plug and abandon the orphan wells but the process required operation of large, industrial stationary equipment (workover rigs and cement pumps) as well as mobile equipment (power rigs and heavy trucks) within several feet of homes and a residential population.

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health (DPH) conducted an investigation and observed health and safety hazards, including particulate matter and noise from well workover activities, in proximity to residential households. Residents had reported that "rotten egg" odors had been intermittent throughout the years. The Southern California Air Quality Management District (SCAQMD) investigated this matter and reported that levels of methane and hydrogen sulfide did not pose a health threat. However, the DPH determined that noise, odor, dust, and diesel emissions associated with the permanent plugging and abandonment procedures taking place in proximity to homes did pose risks to the community, including safety hazards, as well as short-term and long-term health effects. DPH also identified the presence of a third well on Firmin Street in the backyard of two residential properties considered to be idle. As a result, CalGEM issued a notice of violation to the operator.

In early 2021, oily water was discharged on to the ground near the public sidewalk at a site with active new construction in the vicinity of Court Street and Toluca Street, and where a well abandonment company was in the process of abandoning a well. A local resident reported the incident to CalGEM which issued a Notice of Violation, citing oil and waste released from a vacuum truck and failure to notify CalGEM of the spill. The spilled fluid was subsequently cleaned-up and oil field waste disposed of properly. CalGEM eventually closed the investigation.

According to the "Oil and Gas Health Report" published by the Office of Petroleum and Natural Gas Administration and Safety, Department of Public Works, (dated July 25, 2019, Council File No. 17-0447), today there are a total of 5,229 oil and gas wells in the City of Los Angeles. In the First Council District, there are a total of 704 wells with zero active, 23 idle, 267 plugged and 414 buried.

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As the City and development projects pursue closure of oil and gas wells, it is critical that these activities be conducted in a safe and protective manner. Noise, odors, dust and fuel emissions related to closures should be significantly mitigated to reduce impacts to local communities. To achieve this, a set of protective protocols should be integrated into the City's land-use, environmental review and permitting process. In addition to state agencies, such as CalGEM, City departments play a role in the permitting and enforcement of regulatory requirements for real estate developments on these sites, including the Department of City Planning, the Fire Department and Department of Building and Safety. Interagency coordination is critical, and communication with the Council Member of the District and local community residents is paramount, to protect the public interest.

A viable protocol option should include the document titled "Community Health, Safety and Notification Plan" prepared by the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. This document includes vital information for the public to know such as project duration, plans in place to protect the community from possible hazards, whom to call in case of an emergency, and identification of the agencies that regulate the project. The integration of the "Community Health, Safety and Notification Plan" in the City's permitting process would help ensure the health and welfare of City residents.

I THEREFORE MOVE that the Council instruct the Petroleum Administrator, in consultation with the Department of City Planning, Department of Building and Safety, Fire Department and Los Angeles County Public Health Department, to prepare and present a report with policy recommendations on how to integrate the document titled "Community Health, Safety and Notification Plan" prepared by the Department of Public Health into the City's land-use, environmental review and permitting processes related to real estate development activities on sites with abandoned gas and oil wells.

PRESENTED BY: _____
GILBERT A. CEDILLO
Councilmember, First District

SECONDED BY: _____

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