

**Key, Lori**

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Monday, November 9, 2020 3:29 PM  
**To:** ClerkoftheBoard  
**Subject:** Public Comment, Agenda Items #34 and #47, BOS Hearing 11/10/20

Dear Clerk of the Board,

Please accept my public comment for tomorrow's Ventura County Board of Supervisors Meeting, enter it into the public record, and distribute it to each of the Supervisors in advance of tomorrow's proceeding.

Thank you,

Rose Ann Witt  
[REDACTED]  
Thousand Oaks, CA 91362

Rose Ann H. Witt

[REDACTED]

November 9, 2020

County of Ventura  
Board of Supervisors  
800 South Victoria Ave  
Ventura, CA 93009

Re: Public Comment in Support of Agenda Items #34 and #47

Dear Ventura County Board of Supervisors:

I am writing as a biologist, 26-year resident of Ventura County, Woolsey Fire survivor, and the parent of a young woman who lives with and suffers daily from petroleum-pollution-triggered asthma, in support of tomorrow's Board of Supervisors Meeting agenda items #43 (regarding zoning ordinance amendments that limit discretionary permits for oil and gas operations to 15 years, increase bonding for site restoration, and incorporate measures to assure the timely and permanent plugging and restoration of wells idled for 15 or more years) and #47 (regarding updates to antiquated Conditional Use Permits (aka CUPs) to better protect public health and the environment on which both life and health is dependent).

Idle oil and gas wells that remain unplugged can contaminate air and drinking water aquifers through the release of hazardous emissions, including poisons like arsenic, chromium and lead, and of explosive gases leaking from both the casings and the pipes that connect to them ... including methane, which is an extremely potent, climate-warming greenhouse gas. People who live within a mile of unplugged oil and gas wells also face exposure to carcinogens like benzene and formaldehyde. More than 2,000 such idled wells are situated in Ventura County alone.

Additionally, a recent L.A. Times/Center for Public Integrity investigation found that bonds posted by seven of California's largest drillers, accounting for more than 75% of all wells in our state, cover an average of just \$230 for every well that must be decommissioned ... while the average cost to cap just one of those wells and dismantle the associated surface infrastructure costs upwards of \$40,000 to \$152,000, depending on whether the well is located in a rural or urban area. Either way, according to Judson Boomhower, an environmental economist and lead author of the California Council on Science and Technology report, "the amount of the bonds currently on file is really small compared to the magnitude of the plugging obligations." This is especially concerning considering the fact, per Boomhower, that "oil companies often find it cheaper to forfeit an insufficient bond than to pay for cleanup and capping."

This financial shortfall for environmental remediation represents a long-term, ongoing health threat to nearby residents as well as a looming multibillion-dollar liability for citizens at large; because when oil and gas companies idle and abandon wells without posting adequate bonds, we the taxpayers are left with two equally untenable choices: spend our limited resources to clean-up the resulting pollution or leave sites contaminated.

As such, Antiquated Conditional Use Permits should not be misconstrued to allow the oil and gas industry an unfettered license to pollute without adequate review and oversight for an indefinite period of time at the expense of Ventura County families' air, water, soil, climate, health and tax dollars. Allowing operators to continue expanding operations indefinitely under old Conditional Use Permits threatens our residents' health, safety, environment and fiscal resources, as well as both our current and future quality of life..

Ventura County families deserve an up-to-date and transparent picture of oil and gas operations within our County. A lack of regulatory oversight for permits issued 50-75 years ago, prior to modern environmental regulations, not only threatens public health and safety but undermines our collective efforts to stall one of the most urgent challenges humanity has ever faced – healing a dangerously destabilized climate. We have both fiscal and moral obligations to our fellow humans, including our children and grandchildren, to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and eliminate polluting practices as thoroughly and quickly as possible. Requiring discretionary review of all new or expanded extraction will provide our elected officials the review and oversight they require, and which our citizens expect, to ensure that all new and/or expanded oil and gas operations are in compliance with modern standards, current land use practices, and all other applicable environmental, health and safety requirements.

Oil corporation claims that discretionary review will destroy their industry are completely false. The fact is that most other land uses in Ventura County are already permitted through discretionary review, including renewable energy production. There is absolutely no reason why fossil fuel energy production shouldn't be held to the same strict land use rules and standards that every other business is required to follow ... especially given the devastating oil-generated pollution and climate impacts our County is already experiencing. The people of area code 93030 in Oxnard are already subjected to elevated asthma rates, per CalEnviroScreen 3.0, from living adjacent to multiple sources of industrial pollution; and Ventura County as a whole is already the fastest warming county in the continental United States, with an average temperature increase of 4.7F degrees (2.6C) since 1895 and a projected *additional* temperature rise of 2-5F degrees more within the next 20 years. Those projections could bring nearly a full extra month of 90-plus-degree heat and a 700% increase in days topping 100F degrees annually, on average, to our County. If you allow it, that mounting pollution and extreme heat intensification will mean worse health for our residents as well as more severe drought and wildfires, more air pollution, increasingly compromised and limited water resources, and a reduced quality of life for every one of us.

In an era of escalating climate and biodiversity crises, we can no longer allow any individual or corporate entity to claim an unlimited right to expand in ways that exploit and pollute our air, water, soil and climate to the detriment of their neighbors. We can no longer allow for an indefinite expansion of oil and gas operations under antiquated Conditional Use Permits which were handed out decades ago, *before* the longterm consequences of oil production on human health, public safety and climate stability were either understood or protected. Rubber-stamping new and expanded drilling under ancient "permit-to-pollute" rules, in full knowledge of our

modern understanding of the accelerating threat they pose to all life on our planet, and the urgency with which we must reverse that threat, is not only dangerous for Ventura County families, it is both irresponsible and immoral as well. Changing permitting requirements, like those proposed by agenda items #43 and #47, is the kind of visionary action desperately needed to significantly improve our County's air quality, lower our greenhouse gas emissions in line with our recently passed 2040 General and Climate Action Plan Updates, and provide our County a reasonable chance for continued prosperity and a desirable quality of life.

It is time that corporations recognize and be held accountable for preserving the "vested rights" of actual people ... living, breathing men, women and children ... who rightfully expect that the most basic of human needs for clean air, clean water, and the shelter of a stable climate, on which each of our health, safety and survival, and that of our families, depends, be given full protection from unrestricted exploitation of our shared natural resources.

Thousand of county oil wells operate under "antiquated permits" that were issued as long as 75 years ago ... *before* my birth 60 years ago, *before* the human health impacts of oil and gas extraction were known, and *before* many of our clean air and water protections even existed. No more can we afford to outsource decisions that so adversely impact not only every County resident but every human being on our planet. No more can we allow an unlimited number of wells to be drilled forever, with no community input as to which techniques, no matter how extreme, dangerous or polluting, can be deployed.

I urge you to approve the zoning ordinance amendments proposed in both agenda items #34 and #47 to ensure wells idled over 15 years are fully bonded, plugged and remediated, and to establish a single, consistent Ventura County permitting process ... one that complies with all current health, safety and environmental standards ... for ALL new oil and gas drilling, extraction, expansion, and any other development proposals, including the high-risk techniques of hydraulic fracturing and cyclic steam, regardless of the age of the original underlying permit.

You are duty-bound to protect the health and safety of Ventura County. To discharge that duty responsibly in an era of unprecedented Climate Emergency, environmental impact reviews, review and oversight of ALL local oil and gas drilling decisions are the LEAST residents can expect. Please vote to APPROVE the zoning amendments.

Sincerely,

Rose Ann Witt

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