

**Public Comments Oak Park Municipal Advisory Committee Meeting 9-26-24 Agenda Item 17. Introduction of New Public Works Director Gregg Strakaluse . Public Works Director -Medea Creek Concerns**

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**9/24/24**

To: Greg Strakaluse C/O The Oak Park Municipal Advisory Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to submit written comments regarding the new Ventura County Public Works Director, Greg Strakaluse. My name is Steven Kozel and I am a resident of Oak Park in Ventura County. I write to extend a welcome to Mr. Strakaluse and to share some observations and expectations regarding Ventura County Public Works and our community of Oak Park. As you become familiar with our community you will find residents appreciate the opportunity to live in an area with abundant open space and many opportunities for outdoor recreation. We value our environment and have a strong desire to preserve what makes Oak Park special. You will also find a significant number of folks in the community pay attention and have a deep knowledge of the history of the community and a deep knowledge of the surrounding environment. We are ready to step up and work with the Ventura County to protect our community and its surrounding open space. We are proud of the fact the open space including Rancho Simi Recreation and Parks Department is also a destination for many in the Southern California region.

It is in this context I share the following experience with Ventura County Public Works and our beloved Medea Creek. Medea Creek drains the Oak Park community and ultimately its water enters the Malibu Creek and the Pacific Ocean at Surfrider Beach in Malibu. The Malibu Creek watershed is one of the southernmost ranges of the steelhead trout. Folks in this area are dedicated to restoring the range of the steelhead, and critical to that is the health of the Malibu Creek watershed. When Medea Creek is adversely affected so is Malibu Creek.

Actions by Ventura County Public Works adversely affected the northwest tributary of Medea just south of Kanan road along Oak Hills Drive last October. Apparently, concerns were raised about potential flooding of residences along Hollytree Dr. north of Kanan Road due to a blocked storm drain and culvert that drains water from a natural drainage north of the residences. This area experienced flooding in the past, so action was warranted. It was the extent of that action that is at issue. Over many days, about 250 feet of Medea Creek streambed and riparian habitat was "clearcut" by contractors to mitigate potential flooding. Keep in mind no flooding had occurred during tropical storm Hilary in late August 2023 (rainfall during this event exceeded 4 inches). The necessary mitigation should have only required the removal of a few willows blocking the Kanan Road culvert and removal of some small brush and sediment from

the Oak Hills culvert draining the area above the Hollytree residences. Community members including folks with practical and professional expertise walked the site after the work was completed. Significant damage to the habitat occurred and it was stunning. The area has not recovered. What were some of the system failures contributing to this outcome?

1. County Public Works assumed it had a permit from CDFW to conduct the work. The existing CDFW permit did not apply to this stretch of Medea Creek. Local residents did not observe a biologist on site during the time the work was performed. It is incumbent on the leadership of Ventura County Public Works to ensure policies and procedures insure compliance with the law.
2. When community members contacted various Public Works departments during work, staff did not seem to be aware of the work and could not respond to concerns raised by those members. There was also a question of jurisdiction. Was this Ventura County or was this Rancho Simi Recreation and Parks Department ordering and subcontracting the work?
3. When community members asked to see the county CDFW permits, documents were not produced in a timely manner. Only recently did members of the community receive the CDFW permit documents. A quick read of these documents established the affected stretch of Medea Creek was not included in the permits.

In my opinion this event demonstrated communication failures, jurisdictional responsibility failures, and a lack of transparency. From a community perspective, we ask, how can you assure us system changes have been made so this will not occur again?

In my opening comments I mentioned we are members of a community with in-depth knowledge of our surrounding open space. Residents are ready and willing to contribute information that may not be known by Public Works leadership. When the community experiences a situation similar to work performed on Medea Creek in October 2023, we have questions. Questions typically require an after action report which requires additional resources from the county to address the issues raised by the community members. This is not an efficient use of resources.

We are all stakeholders; we will step up. Community members in Oak Park can provide input. We are ready to work with Public Works to address issues constructively and achieve productive outcomes. We all benefit by doing so. Please give my comments some consideration and thought. Thank you for your time.

Regards,  
Steven Kozel  
Oak Park-Mae Boyar

Dr. Steven Kozel, Pharm.D.