

June 4, 2015

Wordcount: 422

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Foreman Robert Stewart

Tel: 805/477-1600

Email: Robert.Stewart@ventura.org

Who Is Responsible for Fixing Cracked, Broken, and Raised Sidewalks?

Who is responsible for the condition of the sidewalks in front of our houses? Most incorporated cities within Ventura County have accepted sidewalk maintenance as their responsibility. But if you live in an unincorporated area, it's a different story. There, sidewalks have been an issue since 1978's Proposition 13 limited property tax dollars, which led the Ventura County Board of Supervisors to rescind previous funding for sidewalk maintenance. Instead it adopted procedures in the California Streets and Highways Code that place this responsibility on owners of properties adjacent to sidewalks.

Last fall the supervisors denied a motion to return to funding sidewalk maintenance and repair. However, it directed the county's Public Works Agency to use grinding (the shaving down of raised concrete slab edges), if appropriate, as a temporary repair method, at no cost to property owners.

In response to public complaints, the 2014-2015 Grand Jury investigated the issue of sidewalk maintenance and repair in unincorporated areas by comparing the policies of cities within the county; interviewing county personnel; reviewing Board of Supervisors' meeting minutes, exhibits, and videos; conducting Internet research; and reviewing California law.

The grand jury concluded that the current county practice of sidewalk maintenance and repair is haphazard and complicated, because both temporary and permanent repairs are only carried out when the Public Works Agency Transportation Department is already in an area doing street repair work. What's more, the policy adopted last fall of grinding sidewalks as a free temporary repair is not explained or readily available on the Public Works Agency's website or in its published brochure.

(more)

The grand jury recommends that the Board of Supervisors direct the Public Works Agency to regularly assess the condition of sidewalks in unincorporated areas, develop a repair/replacement plan, and oversee the completion of all needed work independent of street repair projects. The grand jury takes no position on funding for the repair.

The grand jury also recommends that the Public Works Agency website be more complete and easily accessible, especially with regard to current practices related to sidewalk maintenance in unincorporated areas. The *Sidewalk and Street Tree Maintenance* brochure should include information about grinding of sidewalks at county expense, as well.

The complete report, "County Responsibility for Sidewalks," may be accessed at www.ventura.org/grand-jury; click on the Annual Reports tab and consult "Fiscal Year 2014-2015."

The grand jury is a civil investigatory panel of 19 citizens created to serve as a voice of the people and a conscience of the community. Jurors are not appointed by politicians but are independent volunteer citizens.

#