



CINDY MISCIKOWSKI

City of Los Angeles
Councilwoman, Eleventh District

Committees
Chair, Public Safety

Vice-Chair, Planning and Land
Use Management

Member, Budget and Finance

September 10, 2001

Valerie Lynn Shaw, President
Board of Public Works
200 N. Spring Street, Room 361
Los Angeles, CA 90012
MS 464

Dear Ms. Shaw:

A public safety issue has recently come to my attention through contact by various constituents and discussions with Bureau of Engineering staff in the West Los Angeles District office. These discussions pertained to single-family home development in the Mandeville Canyon area of my district and an adjacent watercourse.

The Mandeville Canyon area has a natural watercourse running down its entire length, from just below Mulholland Drive south to Sunset Boulevard. This watercourse, essentially an above ground storm drain, runs alternately on both sides of Mandeville Canyon Road, often behind or in front the single family homes along its length. Many residents must access their homes by crossing bridges. In some areas it flows through underground pipes that the City has permitted over the years to carry storm water. During rain events, this normally dry watercourse becomes a small stream. During larger rain events, the stream becomes a fast-flowing river.

According to Department of Building and Safety staff, Mandeville Canyon is unique in that rainstorms tend to bring significant amounts of debris down off the hillsides into the canyon, particularly in years following area fires. In two major rain events in the canyon over the last few decades, after wildfires in or near the canyon, huge amounts of water, mud, rocks and debris made its way down the canyon through the watercourse. For example, in a flood in the winter of 1980, significant property damage occurred, as well as loss of life. In many cases, this damage and loss was directly attributed to the fact that the watercourse, carrying a huge amount of debris, was channeled into underground pipes, pipes which could not handle the mass of material coming at once.

Though over the years the Bureau of Engineering has continued to issue permits to private builders to allow the watercourse to be diverted into pipes, it has become apparent to staff that the City should no longer issue permits without thorough and adequate analysis, if at all. Our

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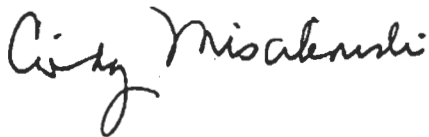
engineers now believe that in the unique case of Mandeville Canyon these calculations simply cannot be found to allow for a pipe. Essentially, the flow in the canyon has repeatedly been shown that it simply cannot fit into a 36", 48" or larger pipe. Any pipe will work with the debris and mud and create a dam effect, forcing the water and all it carries with it out of the watercourse and into homes and onto the street.

Unfortunately, there have been a few instances in the last several years where the Bureau has issued such a watercourse permit, as staff has not fully reviewed the problems which could result during a worst-case scenario. Though we have been fortunate not to have had a major flood since the one in 1980, now that we are aware of the impact of these watercourse diversions we must be vigilant and not issue new permits which might constrict and possibly block the watercourse unnecessarily.

I am therefore asking your Board to work with the Bureau of Engineering to create a policy which all City engineers can look to when confronted with an application to cover or alter the natural watercourse in Mandeville Canyon. Such a policy will ensure that all engineers need to be aware of the conditions in the Canyon and that all future and other like private development in the Canyon is done appropriately and safely.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter.

Sincerely,



cc: Vitaly Troyan
Bureau of Engineering, West Los Angeles District Office
Department of Building and Safety, Grading Division
Mandeville Canyon Homeowners Association
✓Upper Mandeville Canyon Homeowners Association