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Coastal Commission should consider justice of gas tanks

By Clay Lambert Feb 7, 2017 Updated 7 hrs ago

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In an October column in this newspaper, San Mateo County Supervisor and California Coastal Commissioner Carole Groom took umbrage with an earlier Review editorial. I had written that sometimes it seems the Coastal Commission's work is "government of white people, for white people and by white people."

I confess that was a bit of hyperbole and perhaps I shouldn't have written it. But my point holds true. The vast majority of troubled waters into which the Coastal Commission dips a toe swirl around beach access issues that are most important to the state's well-heeled residents and visitors. Poor communities, communities of color haven't been in an uproar about access to Martin's Beach, for example. Perhaps they have more immediate concerns.

The Coastal Commission is supposed to broaden its work to include environmental justice issues now that AB2616 has been written into the California Coastal Act. The revisions, which took effect last month, require the governor to appoint a commissioner who "lives in and works with communities most burdened by high levels of pollution and environmental justice issues." It further orders the commission to consider matters of environmental justice and not simply access when it deliberates on development matters.

With that in mind, I hope Groom reads with similar interest our story this week about the creeping and creepy danger posed by unpermitted expansion of the Amerigas facility in Moss Beach. A couple of empty gas tanks there have become dozens and some are now much closer than they once were to the Pillar Point Manufactured Home Community.

As Midcoast Community Council member Lisa Ketcham observes in our story that that would not be allowed adjacent to more wealthy Coastsiders. Think otherwise? Try to imagine an unpermitted dumping ground of "de-valved" natural gas tanks that intermittently smells like a gas leak in progress in a lot next to Ocean Colony.

The Amerigas facility is not currently up for permit, and it isn't clear what government regulators are willing to do about it now. As a good neighbor, however, the company should be concerned about the hazard it potentially poses to people nearby. Amerigas should resolve to move to a more suitable location, away from all residents, regardless of their ability to fight for what is right.