



CITY of CALABASAS

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT
AUGUST 16, 2018

TO: Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Maureen Tamuri, AIA, AICP
Community Development Director

PROPOSAL: Ridgeline Overview: Review of City Documentation

RECOMMENDATION: That the Planning Commission receives and files this first of three background reports regarding Significant Ridgelines.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission receives and files this first of three background reports regarding Significant Ridgelines.

REVIEW AUTHORITY:

The Planning Commission is reviewing this report because the City Council, at its meeting of September 28, 2016, asked the Planning Commission to study and make a recommendation to the Council on amending the current anomalies in the Significant Ridgeline mapping.

BACKGROUND

The City of Calabasas has a long, well documented history of protecting the City's natural beauty. From the initial Council efforts in 1991 to record and document scenic features, to today's current General Plan policies, hillsides and ridgelines have been noted as significant features to preserve. The following is a brief history of key City documents that have provided guidance to staff and decision makers regarding significant ridgelines within the City.

November 1991: Foundation Planning Document for the City of Calabasas (Exhibit A)

This short 11-page document, while never formally “adopted”, was the earliest in the City’s history to identify a vision for Calabasas’s growth that could be further developed in a General Plan. Having identified that the natural beauty of the City required protection from growing development pressure, the Council dedicated itself towards the “inventory, assessment and preservation of the remaining natural environment”. The plan called for the preservation of key environmental features through thoughtful planning controls. Ridgelines, habitat linkages, open space, scenic corridors and significant ecological areas were specifically highlighted.

August 1992 Ord. 92-30 Permanent Scenic Corridor (Exhibit B)

The City Council took early action to immediately protect the scenic beauty of the City, which was under immediate threat from project approvals issued by Los Angeles County. The early assessment of environmental protection as a strong community priority in the Foundation Planning Document led to the designation of 4 roadways as Scenic Corridors, and the first performance standards aimed at protection of ridgeline and hillside visual amenities.

1992: (Draft) City of Calabasas General Plan (Exhibit C)

By 1992, the City had developed a draft General Plan built on the framework of the Foundation Planning Document. Now expanded to 76 pages, the document established a clear Community Vision for the City as a sustainable, balanced community, placing emphasis on protections for the natural environment and hillside development. In fact, the General Plan states a simple goal, which is to preserve natural ridgelines. The Land Use policies called for hillside overlay zones to protect the visual amenities of hillsides, acknowledging that identification of natural ridgelines is an issue yet to be addressed. In addition, perhaps most importantly, the document contains Hillside and Ridgeline protection objectives, policies and standards which were intended to supplement the Los Angeles County Code still in effect.

January 1993: Community Issues (Exhibit D)

In late 1992, the City embarked on a formalized, four part effort to prepare a comprehensive General Plan. The first step consisted of extensive outreach efforts to identify key issues of concern for the community. The January 1993 Community Issues document is the summary of data collected through surveys, interviews and workshops. Approximately 90% of respondents indicated that open space preservation and hillside protection was a very important issue for the General Plan, and identified protection of significant ridgelines a critical concern under A. Environmental Responsibility. Section D.

Community Design, identified the existing valued natural characteristics of the City, and included the first definition of Significant Ridgelines. The section provided recommended General Plan programs to protect the natural environment.

May 1993: Community Profile (Exhibit E)

The Community Profile was the second foundational document developed as background to the General Plan. Building from data from the Community Issues exercise, it identified the value of significant ridgelines as reference points and backdrops over an expanded study area. The Scenic Features Map (Figure II-4) identifies significant ridgelines in a regional study area, some mapped as far away as Piuma Road. The definition of significant ridgelines as a dominant visual feature was strengthened in both definition and numerous references, paralleling the City's recent adoption of a Scenic Corridor Ordinance in 1992. The document acknowledges that scenic vistas and natural terrain are in competition with the likelihood of future development.

September 1995: Agenda For The 21st Century, General Plan (Exhibit F)

The City's first adopted General Plan continued its focus on protection of natural visual features, such as hillsides and ridgelines. It acknowledges continuing development pressures, and introduces new policies, such as avoiding "mega pad" grading, to maintain gentle hillside contours and landform features. Special Land Use Zones are developed for Hillside and Rural settings where preservation of natural features is paramount. Follow up efforts to a) prepare hillside standards as part of a future Calabasas Development Code and b) conduct a natural features inventory are called for.

September 1995: Consistency Review Program (Exhibit G)

The Consistency Review Program served as an interim City "development code" as Calabasas began an effort to replace the County of Los Angeles development codes with its own. This document outlined rules and standards by which individual projects could be found to be consistent with the General Plan. Of note is the development of "Land Management" classifications under which degrees of environmental feature protections could be evaluated and addressed.

July 1998: Land Use and Development Code (Exhibit H)

This document was developed to replace the Los Angeles County Development Codes, which were adopted under an urgency ordinance when the City incorporated in April 1991. In it, the City codified many of the performance standards adopted in the 1995 Consistency review. The new Hillside and Ridgeline code did expand on siting principles, establishing a desired project development standard of 25 feet below or from a ridgeline for grading or visual intrusion.

2008: 2030 General Plan (Exhibit I)

The 2008 General Plan was structured to focus on objectives and policy, and retired all performance standards to the Development Code. The document continued the long standing policy of protecting and enhancing the natural environment, and acknowledged that it was a setting for residential development. However, this General Plan did not carry over the management approach classifications contained in the 1995 General Plan, which now affords every ridgeline property equal natural resource protections, regardless of its actual development status. The General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) expanded the significant ridgeline maps, but did not undertake a review of prior ridgeline mapping.

2010: Chapter 17 Development Code (Exhibit J)

While the majority of the 1998 Development Code provisions concerning Ridgelines and Hillside carried over into the current code, community members advocated for inclusion of the County's set back standard of 50ft away from and below significant ridgelines. Because the vast majority of the mapped ridgelines are occupied by single family homes, application of the standard proved to be impactful to residents seeking home improvements. In 2016, the City Council modified the hillside and ridgeline code to include the County's exception of a maximum of 1,200 sf addition to homes on significant ridgelines.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

Since the City's founding, protection of natural ridgelines and hillsides have been at the forefront of City policies. While earlier versions of the General Plan and Development Codes provided better guidance on the management of ridgeline properties based on the land's resource value, later versions lost this nuance and did not distinguish between developed vs. undeveloped sites. There is no evidence that any significant ridgeline mapping documents ever went through a rigorous analysis, review or updating since their initial introduction in City planning documents dating back to 1991.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Exhibit A: Foundation Planning Document for the City of Calabasas, (Draft) 11/16/91
- Exhibit B: Ordinance No. 92-30 Permanent Scenic Corridor, August 1992
- Exhibit C: (Draft) General Plan, Winter 1992
- Exhibit D: Community Issues, January 1993
- Exhibit E: Community Profile, May 1993
- Exhibit F: General Plan – Agenda for the 21st Century, September 1995
- Exhibit G: General Plan – Consistency Review Program, September 1995
- Exhibit H: Land Use and Development Code, July 1998

Exhibit I: CMC 17.20.150 Hillside and Ridgeline Development

Exhibit J: October 2015: City of Calabasas 2030 General Plan Open Space Element

Exhibit K: Hillside and Ridgeline Overview #1 Power Point