



**CITY of CALABASAS**

**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

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**DATE: AUGUST 15, 2016**

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBERS**

**FROM: MAUREEN TAMURI, AIA, AICP, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR**  
**TOM BARTLETT, AICP, CITY PLANNER**

**SUBJECT: DISCUSSION OF CITY RIDGELINES, ASSOCIATED CODES AND POLICIES, AND DIRECTION TO STAFF**

**MEETING DATE: AUGUST 24, 2016**

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**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:**

It is recommended that the City Council discuss mapped City ridgelines and associated codes and policies, and then provide direction to Staff.

**BACKGROUND:**

City of Calabasas has had a long-standing policy of protecting significant ridgelines. The City's first General Plan included ridgeline protection policies, and the City's most significant ridgelines were mapped and documented in the original General Plan. The newer 2030 General Plan (adopted in 2008) carried forward the mapped significant ridgelines, with several additional ridgeline extensions. Furthermore, as part of the City's Development Code update in 2010, ridgeline policies were amended to include more stringent protections, including the 50-foot vertical and horizontal setback from ridgelines for any structure that requires a permit.

## Mapping

Since the adoption of the 2010 Development Code, staff has processed a number of additions to existing homes located on mapped ridgelines, and consequently, has become aware of anomalies in the mapping of the Significant Ridgelines. Research indicates that the current ridgeline mapping was drawn from USGS topographic maps dating to the 1980's, prior to many of the subsequent tract developments. Severe degradation, and in some cases, elimination of the ridgeline occurred during construction of Calabasas Park Estates, Westridge, Vista Point, Calabasas Ridge and the Oaks, where a number of ridgelines were graded and significantly modified, resulting in a topographic form which is substantially different than what is portrayed in the "Significant Ridgelines" map (Figure III-4) in the 2030 General Plan.

While the 2030 General Plan repeatedly calls for protections to the natural hillsides and ridgelines, the current developed condition of ridgeline properties in tract development areas makes adherence difficult, at best, and mostly impossible. In some cases the ridgeline has been moved, flattened and re-graded to the point where homes on mapped ridgeline properties are often physically below their neighboring homes.

## Development Code

In 2010 the Development Code update included, as a last-minute component recommended by community members, a new ridgeline development standard intended to add greater protection for the designated e.g., (mapped) significant ridgelines. The standard, extracted from Los Angeles County Code, specified that no portion of any structure requiring a permit may be constructed within 50 horizontal feet or 50 vertical feet of any designated significant ridgeline (CMC 17.20.150.C.2). Staff refers to this code requirement as the "50 foot rule".

Recent development activity has shown that application of this standard for additions to, or construction of accessory structures at existing homes located on mapped ridgelines in tract developments is problematic. There are currently 180 existing homes on mapped ridgelines, and all but 8 consist of properties too small, too flat, or with homes already existing on top of the ridgeline, therefore preventing them from being able to comply with the 50-foot rule.

Application for additions not meeting the standard must apply for a variance to the "fifty foot rule," at a cost of \$1,027 plus the cost of mailing labels to all property owners residing in a 500 foot radius, and the cost of story pole surveying, mapping and installation. The additional application time to appear in front of the Planning Commission is estimated at 10 to 12 weeks.

Subsequently, staff determined that Los Angeles County has an exception for additions to existing ridgeline homes of up to 25% of the floor area, or 1,200sf

maximum square-feet; the City's ridgeline protection code was adopted without any exceptions.

### Story Poles

The Council adopted its revised story pole policy in June 2015. It requires new homes, additions to existing homes, and construction of accessory structures, on mapped significant ridgelines to erect story poles depicting the new construction area. The policy has been adhered to, and staff has observed the following:

- a) Most homes are located in gated communities, where public access is not available. In some instances, staff has struggled for vantage points outside of neighboring backyards in order to view additions. Very few commissioners (and no councilmembers) to staff's knowledge have elected to visit single family home addition projects with Story Poles.
- b) Applicants are reluctant to approach the Planning Commission to seek a waiver of requirements. The time to prepare the staff report and appear before the Planning Commission is a four week process; applicants are already required to erect poles for a 30 day period prior to their Planning Commission hearing, and are fearful that if turned down, they will lose additional time to their schedules.
- c) The cost of the average story pole erection for a 200 sf to 500 sf addition ranges between \$100 and \$1,000.

### **DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS:**

Staff is seeking direction from the Council on its desire to address the anomalies in the mapping, and the "50 foot" rule, in that it disproportionately affects 180 existing ridgeline homes in the City. For the remaining 18 privately held, undeveloped lots located on significant ridgelines, Staff believes that the ridgeline mapping is generally correct and the setback standards appropriate. Staff notes that an additional 47 lots on mapped significant ridgelines are held by HOA's or public agencies such as the SMMC, and cannot be developed.

Staff is seeking guidance from the Council on the current ridgeline anomalies. Options available to the Council include:

- 1) Maintaining the status quo;
- 2) Determining that a re-mapping of ridgelines should be accomplished;
- 3) Revisiting CMC development standards for ridgeline development, including the "50 foot" rule;
- 4) Creating exemptions for additions to existing homes on ridgelines;
- 5) Exempting story pole requirements for additions on ridgelines;

- 6) Initiating temporary suspensions of either the "50 foot" rule and/or story pole requirements while consideration of new maps and/or codes and policies are underway.

To date, since enactment of the "50 foot rule", there have been 10 minor projects that have been required to appear before the Planning Commission to seek a variance. Staff is currently processing an additional three.

**FISCAL IMPACT/SOURCE OF FUNDING:**

This is a discussion item only; there are no fiscal impacts at this time. The Council has received a request from an applicant who is seeking a refund for the costs of their additional efforts to obtain a variance for construction of two rear-yard open-lattice trellises. Staff notes that in addition to this applicant, there are nine projects who have experienced similar costs.

**REQUESTED ACTION:**

It is recommended that the City Council discuss City ridgelines, associated codes and policies, and provide direction to Staff

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- A. Power-point Presentation
- B. CMC 17.20.150 Hillside and Ridgeline Development
- C. Letter to the Council from Mr. Perlmutter