



CITY of CALABASAS

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT
DECEMBER 16, 2021

TO: Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Maureen Tamuri AIA, AICP
Community Development Director

SUBJECT: Calabasas Ridgelines
Fourth Overview of Other Agency Practices

RECOMMENDATION: That the Planning Commission receives and files this report

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission receives and files this last of 4 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:

At the Planning Commission meeting of July 9, 2021, the Commission received and filed the third background report regarding Ridgeline and Hillside management best practices. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Commissioners requested an additional background report to be prepared regarding the following:

- 1) A review of Hillside and Ridgeline practices in Westlake Village and Old Agoura;
- 2) A review of practices in the Town of Fairfax or other northern California cities;
- 3) Opportunities for Expanded Scenic Corridor Areas in Calabasas;
- 4) A discussion of Private View Protection Ordinances; and
- 5) Best Practices for Developed Ridgelines

Staff's review of the practices of each City is divided into an analysis of four primary focus

areas in order to provide consistency in the Commission’s review process:

- What is the definition of a ridgeline?
- How are ridgelines mapped?
- What tools are used to manage ridgeline development?
- What view lines are used when evaluating impacts to ridgelines?

BACKGROUND

City of Westlake Village

Definition: The City of Westlake Village defines their ridgelines as follows:

“Prominent Ridgelines” are those designated in the General Plan and which form a part of the skyline visible from any City arterial.

Mapping Style: Ridgelines are identified as a part of a “Hillside Management Area” General Plan map, and are identified as broken single lines. All mapped hillside management areas are also designated as open space.

Tools: City of Westlake Village Code section 9.17, Hillside Development Standards, contains no unique standards, and focuses on traditional impact mitigation measures such as minimized grading, use of natural landscaping and a requirement to be “visually pleasing”.

View lines: Evaluation of impacts to ridgelines are established from any City arterial street mapped in the General Plan.

City of Agoura Hills

Definition: The City of Agoura Hills contains no formal definition of a ridgeline in their code or General Plan. However, they do refer to significant ridgelines as undeveloped, while secondary ridgelines are those developed or where natural features have been removed, blocked from view, or altered.

Mapping Style: Broken lines are used to map both significant and secondary ridgelines. They are part of a larger Open Space Resources map which includes wildlife corridors, five categories of open space, parks, creeks, and school playgrounds.

Tools: Hillside and ridgeline protections are covered in a broad code category entitled “Hillside and Significant Ecological Area” management. In addition to traditional hillside protection standards, Agoura Hills has a complex sliding scale for hillside development calculated between required set aside open space areas to maximum site development area to site grade. Effectively, the steeper the slope, the smaller the allowed development, and the larger the set aside area.

View Lines: The evaluation of impacts to hillsides and ridgelines are made from the four scenic corridors in the City, which are unmapped but described (e.g. Thousand Oaks Blvd. from westerly to easterly City limits). Views of hillsides and ridgelines are additionally protected from a 101 Freeway Corridor Overlay Zone, which is 660ft inland from the Caltrans ROW edge.

Town of Fairfax

Definition: Fairfax defines a ridgeline as simply “the uppermost line in elevation traversing a major ridge (chain of hills).”

Mapping Style: Ridgelines are included on a comprehensive General Plan document which is entitled “Scenic Resources Corridor Map”. It includes seven different features, including unique ones such as city gateways, visually significant town areas, creeks, and conifer forests.

Tools: The code contains a full prohibition on development within mapped ridgeline corridors unless the project is determined to have no visual impact. Development must also meet requirements to underground utilities, eliminate roads over the top of ridgelines, contain low level lighting and screen any large, unnatural surface.

View Lines: Very uniquely, view lines are established by the Planning Commission when an application is submitted in any restricted area on the Scenic Ridgeline Corridor Map. Otherwise, the viewpoints refer to those identified on the map. At a minimum, applications must include photographs and/or illustrations from public gathering areas, neighboring properties and roadways, and critical points within the subject property.

Due to recent fires in Marin County and neighboring counties, there are both State and local efforts to require more aggressive defensible space programs surrounding developed and undeveloped properties. As such, reliance upon old approaches of landscape screening for hillside property impact mitigations will no longer be available. The extent of changes will likely be initiated by the new fire safe legislation which takes effect beginning January 1st, 2022.

Expanded Scenic Corridor Areas

Reviews of other Agency practices can be generally categorized into two (sometimes blended) approaches:

a) Designation of scenic corridors from which to view hillsides, ridgelines or other scenic features. These are often selected as a community’s major thoroughfares, such as primary or secondary arterial streets as designated within a circulation element. A few communities have also designated popular hiking trails with high use.

b) Designation of specific view locations, such as community gateways or vistas from within a community setting, such as a downtown area with high volume.

Calabasas has always had scenic corridors since its incorporation in 1991, which were expanded during the General Plan update of December 2008 to add additional arterials. There are additional primary and secondary arterials which could be added. It is interesting to note that the City's scenic corridor along the 101 freeway is not entirely within the City, a standard rarely seen in other communities surveyed. The PowerPoint presentation for this report will highlight which primary arterial corridors have yet to be designated, as well as ideas for other "viewpoints" within the City.

The value of scenic corridors must also be balanced against the City's mature tree canopy and landscaping. The Las Virgenes Corridor Design plan of January 1998 called for extensive "landscaping and tree planting" along the roadway in order to soften and beautify the commercial zones, much of which was formally implemented in the early to mid-2000s.

The narrowing of Mullholland Highway in the mid-2000s included additional landscaping and trees throughout the Corridor, softening views of homes and backyards and shading the roadway. Over time, the planting has further limited vistas of open space and ridgelines. It is highly anticipated that climate change proposals in the future will continue the trend of planting along streets and roadways and parking areas to address heat island effects, thus limiting view lines along scenic corridors.

Private View Protection Ordinances

Under California law, there are limits to a property owner's right to a view. When local ordinances are passed, they generally are enacted to address conditions where an adjacent property owner has blocked a view from another property with a structure or landscaping which does not benefit them (e.g. tall fence or hedge). It is exceedingly rare to find laws in California which prohibit all development which blocks an established view.

Most ordinances set forward a process under which two property owners can address a dispute regarding a view. A neighbor who wants to re-establish their view must first approach the neighbor and request that the fence or tree be removed or cut back. The complaining person typically bears the cost of trimming or topping, unless the tree was planted after the law became effective, or the neighbor refuses to cooperate. In the end, someone who has lost a view may need to eventually obtain a court order requiring a neighbor to restore their lost view.

Locally, the City of Malibu is the only community we are aware of with a private view protection ordinance. The effort is complex and time consuming, as private views must be documented and the redress process administered through City staff. A copy of the ordinance and guidelines are provided as an attachment to the staff report.

Best Practices for Developed Ridgelines

Staff undertook research of other neighboring and similar communities to identify any specific requirements to be applied when modifying or adding to an existing structure. Other than any specific physical limits to the size of an addition, or final property FAR, we could not find any specific controls. Instead, general controls for any ridgeline development, such as color, height, roofline, silhouette, are applied. The City's current codes and approach to developed structures generally aligns with best practices of other agencies.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Exhibit A: City of Westlake Village Ridgelines Policy
- Exhibit B: City of Agoura Hills Ridgelines Policy
- Exhibit C: Town of Fairfax Ridgelines Policy
- Exhibit D: City of Malibu Ridgelines Policy