

From: Luresa Byrne <luresab@outlook.com>
Sent: Thursday, July 21, 2022 4:18 PM
To: info <info@cityofcalabasas.com>
Subject: Safety and Circulation Element updates Planning Commission

Dear Honorable Planning Commissioners,

Having read the proposed 'updated' Safety and Circulation Elements with their related appendices, I am left confused and disappointed with what is being presented as an update to the current plan for keeping Calabasas residents prepared and safe in the next wildfire or natural disaster. Emergency preparedness plans of yesterday are certainly inadequate for the wildfire reality of today. The location and topography of the Las Virgenes Valley (west Calabasas) presents severe challenges with regards to wildfires and we have no effective plan for evacuating or ensuring our safety when an emergency presents itself and we are asked to leave our homes. According to the updated Elements/Policies, Calabasas will "improve our evacuation success" and "develop evacuation alternatives" as an answer to the chaos and gridlock that ensues with every emergency situation involving the Las Virgenes Valley.

As a homeowner in the Las Virgenes Valley for 25 years, I have first hand knowledge and personal experience of how ineffective and frightening our current emergency evacuation plan is. The cold reality is that west side residents are not able to get out of this valley safely when we are faced with even a slight emergency. No computer simulation, no algorithm, and no boiler plate recommendations will replace the actual reality of what happens when the emergency is upon us. Whether it is a plane making an emergency landing on the US101, a tragic helicopter crash along Las Virgenes, police activity, or wildfire- if it happens in the Las Virgenes Valley...those of us who live here are trapped. Calabasas should be preparing for the worst, not offering us conceptual solutions or pretend scenarios where half of our city is evacuated in an hour and all we have to do is go east or west on the US101.

Many of the policies in the Safety Element sound good on paper, but offer the residents little more than what we have always had...the option to go east or west on the 101 freeway. Unless the freeway has been closed, then we are trapped. This plan is unacceptable as it is posted on the city website.

So many variables that have already been experienced during wildfires are not taken into account in the report attached to the Element updates. For example; when telephone poles and cell towers are exploding and burning, which many of us watched happen during the Woolsey Fire, what is our back-up plan? When the lights go out and we have no power, how will residents know or be notified on the status of the fire, their homes, or re-population plans? Why is there no real evaluation of the tenuous and overloaded Las Virgenes Road as it is both an evacuation route and a designated emergency disaster route and the only way out for hundreds of Calabasas residents . The current ratio of residents (people) to exit routes does not allow for safe evacuation of residents living in the Las Virgenes Valley.

In the 4 scenarios presented for evacuations, every one of them is as useless to valley residents as the current evacuation plan, which is a map of the region and the US101 Freeway with a big red arrow pointing east and another big red arrow pointing west. The new solutions listed in the updated Safety/Circulation Elements are for people to use the US 101 for safe exit in all 4 situations. What is the back up plan for when officials close the US101 ? I have been trapped and forced to make decisions about whether to leave and risk burning in my vehicle, or sheltering in place and taking my chances because of the chaos and gridlock I have experienced each time there is an event crisis in the Las Virgenes Valley.

Calabasas needs to coordinate it's plan and responses to emergencies based on infrastructure needs and capabilities and the safety of it's residents. It would make sense to include the public (stakeholders) on a broad scale and really enlist our participation in developing a solid plan for evacuations and safety. We have experience, insight, and a vested interest in having a way to protect ourselves and our families when the next wildfire rages through this valley. The General Plan for our city is a document that was

written with input from members of the public who had an eye on the future and worked with the City of Calabasas to provide guidelines that were sustainable and acceptable to the community. It seems wrong to make changes of this proportion to such a document without public approval. We are not safe to evacuate on the west side of this city and many of us will not even attempt to leave in the next fire because we saw what happened in Paradise, California and I won't forget that 2 of the 3 lives lost in the Woolsey Fire were trapped in their vehicle...trying to evacuate.

Please do not rush these updates through as they are currently written. It offers us nothing to improve our chances for survival in the next disaster. We, the evacuees, deserve better.

Respectfully,
Luresa Poe Byrne

Sent from [Mail](#) for Windows

July 20, 2022

City of Calabasas Planning Commission
100 Civic Center Way
Calabasas, CA. 91302

Dear Planning Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the changes proposed for our General Plan's Circulation and Safety Element Update.

Proposed Safety Element Policy VII-36 states that new development should be permitted only in areas that have "adequate water pressure or fire flows." I have to assume that in this day and age, we have adequate water pressure throughout the city. If there are portions of the city that currently do not have adequate water pressure, those should be specified.

In the proposed Disaster Response section, Las Virgenes Road is listed among the City's evacuation routes. However, Las Virgenes Road is also a County designated Disaster Route. This has the potential to negatively affect evacuation capacity. I strongly believe this must be noted in the General Plan. It's important that we not gloss over relevant safety information. Evacuation in the western part of the city ("Malibu Canyon area") has many challenges, including communities with a single ingress/egress. As it pertains to the Safety Element, Las Virgenes Road must be considered in its entirety, not just within City limits. Most of Las Virgenes/Malibu Canyon Road is a single lane in either direction. As a County Disaster Route, one lane is used for first responder vehicles. We cannot safely assume that both lanes would be available to evacuate residents from multiple cities if first responders need to use Las Virgenes Road.

Our General Plan will be quoted in future EIRs for years to come. It's the standard to which all future development/infill will be held. In recent years, I've seen EIRs that state that evacuation is essentially no problem because of a development's proximity to the Ventura Freeway. However, the evacuation of *all* residents that would use Las Virgenes/Malibu Canyon Road should be considered. That will only happen if the General Plan specifies that Las Virgenes/Malibu Canyon Road may have limitations when used for evacuations. If this fact is omitted from our General Plan, it will be omitted in future EIRs.

While reading the proposed update, I came across some minor typos/errors that should be corrected in the final document:

- Circulation Element, page VI-1: has a typo in the last goal ("efficeint")
- Additionally, page VI-18: the first bullet point under Prohibited Actions lists "steep slopes to the eat."
- In Safety Element, pages VII-29 – VII-30, it appears that Policy VII-66 and VII-76 are virtually the same, with the exception of a few words. If there's a reason they're listed like this, I missed it.
- Also, page VII-26: Figure VII-9 (Map of Single-Access Road Residential Neighborhoods) shows "Loan Oak" on Las Virgenes Road.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Best Regards,
Frances Alet
Calabasas, CA.

July 19, 2022

To: The Planning Commission

From: Joanne Suwara

Re: Item #3 on the July 21, 2022 Agenda – Circulation Element and Safety Element Update the General Plan

Dear Commissioners:

As a founder of The Calabasas Coalition I know that the vast majority of our members consider traffic, evacuation routes, wildfire risks and disaster preparedness a top priority. This is a city-wide concern, especially in the Las Virgenes Valley. So it was with great interest that I attempted to review the well over 100 pages of updates attached to the agenda.

I would like to offer the following comments and hope you will address them when you meet.

The policies in both elements are beautifully written but are, for the most part, too subjective and open-ended. There are no measurable goals or any timelines laid out to achieve what is stated. And some of the policies, given existing environmental and/or governmental constraints, are not even realistic.

Please go back and look at the policies and ask yourself “Who in the City, specifically, will implement this policy?” “What is the end result that will improve the safety and welfare of the residents of Calabasas?” “When will we see these policies as a reality and not just words on a piece of paper?”

The General Plan is constantly referred to when considering approval of proposed developments. It is worrisome to me that it will be too easy for developers to argue compliance with the General Plan if these updates are adopted as written. Statements and policies in the General Plan that were open to interpretation are part of the reason the City is fighting a lawsuit right now.

WE need Circulation and Safety Elements that reflect the reality of living in a Very High Fire Severity Zone. We need to admit what we realistically accomplish and not just “check off boxes” to complete a task.

Thank you for listening.

Joanne Suwara

From: [Joe Chilco](#)
To: [info](#)
Cc: [Michael Klein](#)
Subject: Planning Commission 7-21-22 meeting - agenda item #3 - Public Comments
Date: Monday, July 18, 2022 7:26:14 PM

To the Planning Commissioners:

With regard to agenda item #3, "Circulation Element Update and Safety Element Update to the Calabasas 2030 General Plan", please consider the following comments:

The proposed updates to the Calabasas 2030 General Plan include changes/additions to existing policies and goals. The Safety Element addresses fire hazards and emergency evacuation routes, among other concerns. The Circulation Element addresses traffic flow on existing roadways within the City, which impacts emergency evacuation routes. These proposed updates have consequences and impacts that affect the residents' quality of life.

The specific language contained within these elements of the General Plan will be included in any Environmental Impact Report (EIR) of any project requiring such under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). It is important that this language reflects the reality of conditions in Calabasas.

The proposed Safety Element Update includes language that states that the "...most dangerous type of wildfires, (is) one occurring from prevailing south winds and approaching the City over the heavily wooded landscapes at the southern edges of the Plan Area...".

The most recent devastating fire event, the Woolsey Fire, came down from the north.

The Calabasas disaster preparedness and evacuation planning defines two evacuation routes for the city: the first is Ventura Freeway (US101) and the second includes Las Virgenes Road, Mulholland Highway, and Old Topanga Canyon Road.

We have actual data from the 2018 Woolsey Fire. We've seen that the emergency evacuation measures in that case were inadequate and ineffective due to the impact on local roads and the freeway, which left many residents trapped due to the closure of the 101 freeways, their designated evacuation route.

The General Plan recognizes that "There are currently 18 neighborhoods in the City that have been identified as having only a single access road." Further, "...the City has several communities that do have secondary access points but that are restricted by gated entry". Finally, "These neighborhoods pose additional logistical challenges when coordinating disaster response. Policies VII- 57, VII-59, VII-63, and VII-64 include policies that seek to alleviate evacuation challenges associated with single access neighborhoods."

The General Plan has been called "a blueprint" but the Calabasas Municipal Code (CMC) is the law that governs. While agreement in principle is an important first step, the public needs to know what the next steps will be in this process.

Specifically, this would include the manner in which goals will be measurable and achieved, as well as which Department staff will be responsible for ensuring the goals are achieved. Additionally, how will the policies of the General Plan be codified in the CMC?

I ask that the Planning Commission consider proposing language modifications that will address the specific concerns I have raised in its recommendations to the City Council.

Thanks,
Joe Chilco
Calabasas resident
(address on file)

From: John Suwara <johsuwa@yahoo.com>

Sent: Wednesday, July 20, 2022 9:26 AM

To: info <info@cityofcalabasas.com>

Subject: Planning Commission Meeting of July 21, 2022. Agenda Item 3: Circulation Element Update and Safety Element Update to the Calabasas 2030 General Plan

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. These comments are based on my initial reading of the extensive documentation submitted to support this item. I am impressed at its broad scope. It is obvious that lot of work has gone into developing this document. With broad strokes it appears to cover most things that might happen in Calabasas regarding wildfires and safety.

But detail is lacking in how this will be implemented. The Woolsey Fire was a terrible lesson. Much can be learned and applied from it. The biggest lesson is that Mother Nature is a force that cannot be controlled. It had high winds out of the East and Northeast. Wildfires are difficult to control and sometimes impossible to stop during these high wind events.

The fire started on Thursday, November 8, 2018 because of short circuits in SCE's 16KV high voltage grid at the Santa Susana Laboratory in the Simi Hills. The short circuits caused hot metal to fall into combustible vegetation at 2 locations igniting the fire. The fires burned overnight in the Las Virgenes Open Space and into Bell Canyon. Evacuations started that night in our housing tract, Malibu Canyon. The Sheriff had cars cruising the streets with speakers announcing the need to evacuate. Many people left their homes that night with evacuations being swift and orderly. By early morning most people had evacuated the Las Virgenes Valley.

On Friday the Santa Ana winds continued causing the fire to spread rapidly into Oak Park to the West and South down the Las Virgenes Valley to the 101 Freeway. Firefighting resources were stretched thin because of the large area burning. Houses were lost and damaged areas included Bell Canyon, Malibu Canyon, Mountain View and Oak Park.

During the morning the brush on the large hillside between Alicia Canyon and the Malibu Canyon Tract started burning coming from the open space to the east and pushed by the wind towards Adamor Road. Several of us with garden hoses stopped the fire from reaching homes at the top of hill at Belbert Circle. Eventually the fire reached the houses below us on Adamor Road opposite Lupin Hill School. Two houses started burning. Wooden patios at several neighboring houses were also ignited. A resident who did not evacuate stopped the patio fires with a garden hose. An LA County FD strike team arrived at the house fires with 5 firefighting vehicles and put out the house fires.

But the fires were not out. They were smoldering in the timbers. That evening the fire reignited and the two homes were lost. These homes were worth hundreds of thousands of dollars and burned because firefighters did not know timbers were

smoldering. If they had had thermal imaging devices they could have located the hidden hot spots. (One of my 2 FDNY brothers told me about them). If LACFD now has thermal detectors available for firefighters that would be great. If not, perhaps the city could politely request that LACFD acquire them.

Some residents did not evacuate and used garden hoses to wet down vegetation and houses. If they had not remained putting out fires and hot spots the damage would have been worse.

The Fire Department also used water dropping helicopters and airplanes control the spread of the fire. They dropped water where we were fighting the fire on Belbert Circle and it was a big help.

By midday the fire jumped the Freeway at Las Virgenes Creek plus additional locations East and West of Las Virgenes Road. At various times The Freeway, Mureau Road, Agoura Road, Mulholland Drive and Las Virgenes Road were to traffic. It was difficult to go anywhere. The fire continued to move in Southwesterly direction towards Malibu where it eventually burned and damaged hundreds of homes..

Winds are the force that control the direction of wildfires. The effect of the wind on the fire was very evident at Las Virgenes Road and Mulholland Drive where the wind out of the northeast blew the fire to the southwest across Las Virgenes Road. That wind is also the prevailing force that makes the Las Virgenes Valley a historical corridor for many of the fires originating to the north that pass through our housing tract and then crossing the freeway going to Malibu and the ocean. Post fire presentations in Malibu, Agoura Hills and Calabasas all discussed home hardening and defensible space as best practices in a high severity fire zone. Since we live in high fire severity zone home hardening and defensible should become code.

As a result of the Woolsey Fire we attended the Resource Conservation District training on Home Hardening and Defensible Space. We have increased the defensible space on our property by removing vegetation and hardening our home with 1/8" screening on eave, gable and garage vents plus attic turbines. We also installed cement siding over our redwood siding and have replaced wooden gates and fencing next to the house with metal fencing and gates.

But we are still dependent on our neighbors and their taking care of their property. For example, a neighboring property has an enormous 30 foot high palm tree with fronds hanging down the entire length of its trunk. If it catches on fire it will destroy not only our neighbors house but also our house. This is to suggest that Calabasas also adopt policies regarding home hardening and defensible space for all properties in the city.

My wife, Joanne, and I attended a CERT Training class in 2020 that was cut short by COVID. There were about 25 people in the class. We were disappointed to learn that the city has no plans to use these people as volunteers. I am further disappointed to not see CERT mentioned in either the fire or safety element. That is a major omission.

Why is CERT being so obviously ignored from this document. It is particularly ironic because I believe there is currently a CERT class scheduled or underway in Calabasas.

When I volunteered to help out at the vaccination event at the Agoura Hill Calabasas Community Center I was surprised to see CERT Volunteers from Agoura Hills and Hidden hills highly visible wearing their CERT Vests. We were in Calabasas. Where were the Calabasas CERT people? I was there but never contacted by anyone from CERT. In fact, when asked what do you do after CERT training in Calabasas it was suggested to join either the Agoura Hills or Hidden Hills CERT groups. Yet there is another Calabasas CERT Class currently underway. Please consider using Calabasas trained CERT people as volunteers in Calabasas. The current status of CERT in Calabasas is very confusing.

We also increased our solar and battery storage so we will have electricity should there be another (hopefully not) major blackout like there was during the Woolsey Fire.

Mother nature is tough to control and not everthing can be mitigated. Natural disasters will happen. It is important that we remeber Measure O and there are areas where we cannot build. I hope that is somewhere in this document.

So far it appears that the drought is getting worse. Given the threat of more severe water retriction and threat of wildfires the best course of action is a moratorium on developmet.

Please control what we can..Thank you for your work. Now for the hard part. Please devise an implementation plan with goals and schedules.

Thank You,

John Suwara

John