



CITY of CALABASAS

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT
JUNE 15, 2023

TO: Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Michael Klein, Community Development Director, AICP
Glenn Michitsch, Senior Planner, LEED AP
Jaclyn Rackerby, Planner

SUBJECT: Consideration of modification(s) to the City's Story Pole requirements for a proposed mixed-use project located at 4799 Commons Way.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission review the applicant's request and justification to modify the Story Pole requirements for a proposed mixed-use project located at the Commons Shopping Center, and provide direction to staff.

REVIEW AUTHORITY:

Per the City of Calabasas Story Pole Procedures (Exhibit A), story poles are required for all new freestanding commercial and multi-family projects throughout the City. Pursuant to the Story Pole Procedures, in cases where it is not feasible or practical to install 100% of the project mass with story poles, a report stating the basis of the applicant's justification shall be submitted to the Planning Commission for review and decision (Exhibit A, pg 3).

BACKGROUND:

On May 1, 2023, The Commons at Calabasas, LLC (Applicant) filed an entitlement application to improve a portion of The Commons at Calabasas shopping center, located at 4799 Commons Way. The proposed project includes the demolition of an existing 33,000 square-foot multi-level movie theater and the construction of new mixed-use buildings in the approximate location of the movie theater and a portion of the surface level parking lot. The proposed new mixed-use buildings contain 210,921 square feet of total new floor area with up to 119 residential units, including 12 affordable units, and up to 24,163

square feet of neighborhood-serving commercial uses to replace the movie theater. Residential parking will be provided in structured parking below the proposed mixed-use buildings.

The Project Site is comprised of five contiguous parcels that contain approximately 26 acres of gross lot area and 19.3 acres of net lot area. The existing shopping center is bordered by Park Sorrento and the Calabasas Civic Center to the west, Calabasas Road to the north, and Park Granada to the east and south. The Project Site is currently improved with a shopping center that contains a variety of retail and restaurant uses, distributed throughout multiple buildings, including an approximately 52,000 square-foot grocery store, an approximately 17,000 square-foot pharmacy, an approximately 33,000 square-foot movie theater, an approximately 30,000 square-foot bookstore, and a mix of community-serving retail and restaurant uses. The shopping center also contains landscaping and water features throughout the Project Site.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

- A. **Story Pole Requirements:** The City of Calabasas Story Pole policy states that the use of story poles is intended for the purpose of depicting the silhouette of a proposed structure in an effort to assist decision makers, staff, neighbors and other interested parties to visualize the location, mass and/or height of a proposed building(s), as part of the project's relationship to its surroundings.

The Story Pole Procedures stipulate that story poles shall be required to be installed for projects that are to be reviewed by the Planning Commission as follows:

- 1) All new projects and those with additions of 500 square feet or more on properties located within the Old Topanga, Calabasas Highlands and Scenic Corridor Overlay Zones, or on a designated significant ridgeline;
- 2) All new freestanding commercial and multi-family residential projects throughout the City; and
- 3) All projects seeking an exception (increase) in building height by way of a variance or development plan.

As indicated previously, the proposed project involves the construction of new freestanding mixed-use buildings. As a result, the applicant is required to install story poles in accordance with the adopted procedures, or secure an approved modification by the Planning Commission.

B. **Modification(s) per the Story Pole Policy:** The Director and Commission shall evaluate the following factors in their determination of whether or not a site is suitable for story poles:

- a. Safety, such as the presence of power lines, public right-of-ways, pedestrian access and other security and welfare concerns;
- b. Stability, such as the structure height, materials, weather, anchoring or topographic conditions;
- c. Accuracy of the depiction of the proposed project due to topography, land modifications, existing structures, grading or other site conditions;
- d. Impacts to trees, habitat, archeological or biological resources, or the need for land alterations in pole placement; and
- e. Site constraints, such as roadway re-alignments, utilities, easements and fire access requirements.
- f. Potentially excessive cost or unreasonable financial impact of designing, installing and maintaining story poles for the subject project.

C. **Staff Assessment of the Request:** The applicant submitted a Story Pole Feasibility letter (Exhibit B) and Story Pole Assessment plan (Exhibit C) prepared in consultation with licensed architects and engineers, justifying in detail the modification request. In accordance with the criteria listed above, the applicant is requesting that the Planning Commission modify the story pole requirement to allow a digital/virtual alternative to physical story poles because installing poles on the subject site would result in unacceptable impacts to public safety, site access, and operations of an existing shopping center.

In lieu of installing physical story poles, the applicant is proposing advanced digital/virtual options to assist the public and decision makers to visualize the proposed project. At the Commission hearing the applicant intends to provide the Commission with examples of the digital/virtual tools available to replace physical story poles. For the reasons stated in the Story Pole Feasibility letter, staff agrees with the conclusions of the applicant and the design team that the site is not suitable for the installation of story poles. Staff, therefore, recommends that the applicant be required to deploy an alternative digital/virtual tool that would assist the public and decision makers to visualize the project, consistent with the City's adopted Story Pole Procedures.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Exhibit A: City of Calabasas Story Pole Procedures
- Exhibit B: Applicant's Story Pole Feasibility letter, dated June 6, 2023
- Exhibit C: Story pole plan overlaid with existing site improvements