



CITY of CALABASAS

**PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT**  
**JULY 6, 2023**

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**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.

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**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, 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.

**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.

On June 15, 2023, the Planning Commission reviewed the applicant's request to modify the story pole requirements to authorize digital/virtual tools to depict the massing of the proposed project in lieu of physical story poles (agenda packet from June 15 can be viewed here: <https://www.cityofcalabasas.com/Home/Components/Calendar/Event/5520/17>). The Commission continued the discussion and requested that the applicant provide additional information on 1) how they will notify the public of the digital/virtual tools, and 2) the ability to install a limited number of story poles or other means to represent the height of the buildings in the field. The applicant has provided an updated proposal to address the Commission's direction (Exhibit A).

### **STAFF ANALYSIS:**

A. **Story Pole Proposal:** As discussed above, the applicant seeks approval from the Planning Commission to deploy a modified story pole plan. Due to site constraints, the applicant has provided documentation to demonstrate that it is not practical to install 100% of the story poles on the subject site (see agenda report from June 15, 2023). In response to the Commission's discussion, the applicant proposes the following hybrid approach:

1) Digital/Virtual component:

- a. Augmented Reality (AR) will be the primary tool available to help the community visualize the location, mass, and height of the proposed buildings.
- b. The AR will be publicly available at least four weeks prior to any Public Hearing for the project.

2) Physical Pole installation:

- a. Two timber and/or composite poles will be placed behind the theater building to illustrate the elevation of Building A. One pole (near the western edge of the existing theater) will illustrate the maximum top of roof for the proposed amenity space and average top of roof, the other pole (near the eastern edge of the existing theater) will demonstrate the top of roof. Together, the poles will illustrate the general footprint of Building A.
- b. Two timber and/or composite poles will be placed in the existing surface parking lot that generally depict the footprint area of Building B and illustrate the building height.
- c. All four poles will include a security fence enclosure
- d. The tops of poles will be painted in a bright color, to illustrate the top of roof. As the proposed buildings vary in elevation, height will be illustrated at multiple intervals.
- e. The poles will be installed at least four weeks prior to any Public Hearing for the project.

3) Community Notification:

- a. Two signs will be placed along Calabasas Road in front of Citibank on the northwest portion of the property and in front of King's Fish House on the northeast portion of the property. The signage will include (1) at least one project rendering, (2) the AR code, (3) the date, time and place of the hearing; the name of hearing body; and a general explanation of the matter to be considered, (4) the Project web address, and (5) details on the physical representation.
- b. Four kiosks will be placed in the existing shopping center near the theater building, pond, Park Sorrento (near Ralphs) and the rose garden. The kiosks will include the following: (1) at least one project rendering, (2) directions on how to use the AR technology, (3) details on the physical representation, and (4) applicant contact information. Note: in the event a member of the community does not have a smartphone, an iPad will be provided by the applicant team.
- c. Information regarding the AR technology and poles will be included on the applicant's website at: [thecommonslane.com](http://thecommonslane.com) and the City's website.

B. **Staff Assessment of the Request:** At the June 15, 2023, Planning Commission meeting, the applicant submitted a Story Pole Feasibility letter and Story Pole Assessment plan prepared in consultation with licensed architects and engineers, justifying in detail the modification request. In accordance with the criteria listed in the

City's Story Pole Procedures, the applicant is requesting that the Planning Commission modify the story pole requirement to allow a digital/virtual alternative to the installation of 100% of the project with 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 a hybrid approach utilizing advanced digital/virtual tools and a limited number of physical story poles to assist the public and decision makers to visualize the proposed project. The proposed AR will be the primary tool to help the community visualize the location, mass and height of proposed buildings, while the limited number of story poles will help the community see the general footprint and height of proposed buildings. 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 100% of the project story poles. Staff, therefore, requests that the Planning Commission provide direction for a modified approach, consistent with the City's adopted Story Pole Procedures.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Exhibit A: Applicant's Story Pole Modification Request
- Exhibit B: Applicant's Story Pole and Signage Plan