



**CITY of CALABASAS**  
**CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

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**DATE:** AUGUST 1, 2023

**TO:** HONORABLE MAYOR AND COUNCILMEMBERS

**FROM:** KINDON MEIK, CITY MANAGER  
MICHAEL KLEIN, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR, AICP

**SUBJECT:** CALL FOR REVIEW OF THE PLANNING COMMISSION'S DECISION NOT TO APPROVE A REQUEST TO MODIFY THE CITY'S STORY POLE REQUIREMENTS FOR A PROPOSED MIXED-USE PROJECT LOCATED AT 4799 COMMONS WAY. THE PLANNING COMMISSION VOTED NOT TO APPROVE THE REQUESTED MODIFICATIONS AT A PUBLIC MEETING HELD ON JULY 6, 2023

**MEETING DATE:** AUGUST 9, 2023

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**SUMMARY RECOMMENDATION:**

That the City Council 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.

**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 existing retail buildings on either side of the existing movie theater building will not be demolished and will remain retail 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 several pedestrian plazas, parking spaces, 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 leu of physical story poles (agenda packet from June 15 can be viewed here: <https://www.cityofcalabasas.com/Home/Components/Calendar/Event/5520/17> ). During the meeting, the Commission took public testimony and discussed the item. Public comment was favorable to the use of augmented reality in leu of story poles due to the concerns over safety and impacts to the shopping center that is heavily utilized by the community. After discussion, the Commission continued the item and requested that the applicant provide additional information on 1) how they will notify the public of the digital/virtual tools, and 2) that the applicant consider installing a limited number of story poles or other means to represent the height of the buildings in the field.

The applicant provided an updated proposal to address the Commission's direction (Attachment A), and presented the proposal to the Commission on July 6, 2023. During the meeting, the Commission took public testimony (all public comments were in support of the updated proposal) and discussed the item. Commissioner Fassberg made a motion, seconded by Commissioner Washburn, to approve the updated proposal presented in Attachment A (Applicant's Story Pole Modification Request) and the plan in Attachment B (Applicant's Story Pole and Signage Plan). After discussion regarding the motion and the story pole options, the motion failed with three no votes and two yes votes, resulting in an action to not approve the applicant's request. The Commission took no further action. An archive video of

the meeting can be watched here:  
[https://calabasas.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view\\_id=4&clip\\_id=7541](https://calabasas.granicus.com/MediaPlayer.php?view_id=4&clip_id=7541) .

## **DISCUSSION/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 Story Pole Policy, or secure an approved modification by the Planning Commission.

- B. **Modification(s) per the Story Pole Policy:** The City's Story Pole Policy dictates that the Community Development Director and Planning 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 rights-of-way, 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. **Story Pole Proposal:** As discussed above, the applicant sought approval from the Planning Commission to deploy a modified story pole plan, with some story poles and an augmented reality technological approach to depict building bulk, mass, and height. Due to site constraints, the applicant provided the Planning Commission with documentation to demonstrate that it is not practical to install 100% of the story poles on the subject site (see Attachment C). In response to the Commission's discussion on June 15, the applicant submitted an updated proposal utilizing the following hybrid approach:

4) Digital/Virtual component:

- a. An Augmented Reality (AR) tool will be the primary tool available to help the community visualize the location, mass, and height of the proposed buildings.
- b. The AR tool will be publicly available at least four weeks prior to any Public Hearing for the project.
- c. The AR tool will consist of quick response (QR) codes that can be scanned by visitors from their mobile devices or iPads, provided by the applicant with available technical assistance, that will allow them to see how the proposed project would look when facing the mobile device towards the improved site. A viewer looking through the AR tool will see on the screen the camera's view of the existing buildings as a photo with the proposed project's buildings digitally overlaid on top of the camera/photo view of the existing buildings. The AR tool will dynamically adjust the digital overlay as the viewer moves around the site, within certain distance bounds. The applicant has committed to lend iPads to any person who does not have a compatible smartphone, together with technical assistance, to use the AR tool.

5) 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.

6) 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.

As discussed above, on July 6, 2023, the Planning Commission reviewed the updated hybrid proposal and voted not to approve the request. The Planning Commission took no further action.

D. **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 the modification request. In accordance with the criteria listed in the City's Story Pole Procedures, the applicant is now requesting that the City Council consider modifying the story pole requirement to allow a digital/virtual augmented reality alternative (with some physical story poles) to the installation of 100% of story poles for the project 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 to depict the complete mass of the proposed buildings, the applicant is proposing a hybrid approach utilizing advanced digital/virtual augmented reality tools and a limited number of physical story poles to assist the public and decision makers to visualize the proposed project. The proposed AR tool 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 (the western and eastern edge of the buildings) and height of proposed buildings. Staff, therefore, requests that the City Council provide direction regarding the applicant's request for approval of a modified approach, consistent with the City's adopted Story Pole Procedures.

**FISCAL IMPACT/SOURCE OF FUNDING:**

All development costs are borne by the applicant. No fiscal impacts or City costs are associated with this project.

**REQUESTED ACTION:**

That the City Council 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.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- Attachment A: Applicant's Story Pole Modification Request, dated July 30
- Attachment B: Applicant's Story Pole and Signage Plan, dated July 28
- Attachment C: Applicant's Story Pole Feasibility letter, dated June 6
- Attachment D: Adopted Story Pole Procedures
- Attachment E: Staff's PowerPoint
- Attachment F: Public Comment