

March 19, 2024

City of Calabasas
Planning Commissioners

Dear Commissioners,

Please take into consideration my following comments regarding the March 21, 2024, agenda item, "Update and Discussion of Woolsey Fire Overlay Zone Implementation".

Having had a front row seat to the devastation and impacts of the Woolsey Fire in our Malibu Canyon neighborhood, we watched helplessly as our friends and neighbor's homes burned to the ground. Like most, we supported the City of Calabasas wanting to try and make the recovery process a speedy one for the homeowners. The Woolsey Fire Overlay Zone ("Overlay") was put forth and approved to that end.

Unfortunately, what we have seen, and continue to see, is either an abuse of the expedited project review process created by the Overlay or a lack of community representation by staff. Perhaps a mixture of both. The Overlay allows those who rebuild at up to 20% more square footage than pre-fire numbers, to proceed with a simple Zoning Clearance. A ministerial permit with no public hearing - meaning zero notification or opportunity for existing residents' concerns to be heard. The majority of the rebuilds have stayed within this 20% threshold (excluding those that also added ADUs), resulting in no public comment or review taking place. We watched as these homes were built, and our hearts sank as we saw some of them had designs very inconsistent and incongruent with the "feel" and aesthetic of the homes around them (gratitude and kudos to the Zone family with the choices they made in their rebuild at 5444 Parkmor). Even more disheartening was to learn that City representatives played a hand in design by providing "free plans" from a certain builder where all the designs were completely incompatible with the neighborhood – case in point, the albatross built at 5456 Parkmor.

The time for the Overlay "benefits" has come to an end. In reality, it should have sunset at its original end date of December 31, 2022, at which point those homeowners who were truly displaced were already underway with the process and their rebuilds. The "urgency" has long passed, and we are left now with what appears to be spec builders and new owners that had zero adverse impact from the tragic fire.

The property at 5421 Parkmor is a perfect example. I encourage you to review the project and the public input given at the Administrative Plan Review in December 2023. This particular lot was sold and will now support a 3,904 sq ft build on a 7,899 sq ft lot that previously featured an 1,804 sq ft single family residence. Due to this applicant seeking a near 50% (49.7%) size increase, the project went to an Administrative Plan Review heard by City Planner Tom Bartlett. Several residents attended the public

hearing and voiced their concerns only to walk away feeling unheard. Upon arrival, attendees were given a “draft” Decision Letter and Report with conclusions already reached. At the end of over an hour-long discussion, the takeaway from the planner was to ask the applicant to put in some landscaping.

This project illustrates part of the problem with the Overlay being carried forward to new, non-fire victim applicants. Even when the Overlay provided for public input, and significant input was given, the review process still fell short. Instead of a new, monstrous, incompatible, mini-mansion having been subjected to review by the Planning Commission and perhaps the Architectural Review Board and others, it was greenlighted by a single staff member. “Just because you can, doesn’t mean you should” says it best. As residents, we are forced to rely on our elected officials and their subsequent appointees and hires to be our voice, to represent our needs and interests, and that is not happening. This stage of the review allows for subjectiveness and input that isn’t strictly based on what is on the books. However, the overwhelming decisions are based on “nothing says they can’t do it” and the concerns of residents are squashed. Instead, our community now has yet another out of place, oversized home setting precedent that will be used to justify the next inappropriate, oversized build. The Overlay has exacerbated an already problematic process.

The spirit and perceived intent of the Overlay was for the purpose of “assisting impacted property owners with rebuilding”, to provide relief to fire victims and streamline/expedite the process. That has already happened for the fire victims, those that needed to rebuild and move back into the neighborhood have done so. It has been over five years since the Woolsey Fire and the need for urgency has expired – as should the Overlay Urgency Ordinance. It was not intended to fast track new construction, essentially unchecked, for new property owners - giving them an essentially unrestricted chance to build a monstrosity that impacts every homeowner in the neighborhood.

I would also like to suggest that pursuing the implementation of a design standard of some sort be put forth to perhaps address the concerns of the neighborhood and the changes being made.

Respectfully,

Bettina Leeney