



CITY of CALABASAS

## HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

May 1, 2024

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**TO:** Members of the Historic Preservation Commission

**FROM:** Tom Bartlett, AICP, City Planner

**SUBJECT:** Discussion of the El Camino Real Bell marker in Old Town

**RECOMMENDATION:** That the Historic Preservation Commission discuss the El Camino Real Bell marker in Old Town, and advise Staff on the merits of designating, and provide direction for next steps.

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### **BACKGROUND:**

Located in Old Town Calabasas, the City's El Camino Real Bell is one of the original El Camino Real markers. And, at approximately 110 years of age, the historic bell marker is among the oldest landmarks in the City. The Historic Context Statement completed in 2009 found that the El Camino Real Bell in Old Town can be considered amongst the historically important objects and structures in Calabasas. Extending approximately 700 miles, the El Camino Real was originally formed and used by the indigenous people of Southern and Central California. Later, in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the route was used by the Spanish and Mexican peoples, linking the missions and presidios up and down the coast. The El Camino Real Road was designated a California Registered Historic Landmark in 1963.

With the first installation in 1906, and several hundred more placements over the following decades, the El Camino Real bell markers served to memorialize the historic route. The markers also assisted early motor vehicle travelers with navigating the earliest improved roadways along the route. Including the remaining original bell markers and all subsequent replacement and new markers, nearly 600 bell markers now span the route's total extent.

During the February 21, 2024 Historic Preservation Commission meeting, the Commission requested Staff to prepare a report to inform the Commission about the process for landmark nomination as provided in the Calabasas Municipal Code, the California Register of Historical Resources Listing Criterion, and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Historic Places. In addition to the foregoing, Staff also referred to and considered the Historical Context for the City of Calabasas (completed in 2009) and the Historical Resource Survey completed by staff for the El Camino Real Bell to inform the analysis in this staff report.

## ANALYSIS:

In determining whether to recommend for landmark designation, the Commission shall take into consideration the Calabasas Historic Preservation Ordinance (CMC [Chapter 17.36](#), which outlines the eligibility and designation criteria, and stipulates the procedures for Landmark designation.

The Historic Preservation Commission shall evaluate each application for landmark nomination at a public hearing, and shall decide by majority vote whether to approve any nomination and forward it to the City Council with a recommendation for historic landmark designation. [Section 17.36.050](#) outlines the eligibility criteria that covers surveying of properties or cultural landmarks in accordance with standards set forth by the California Office of Historic Preservation. An eligible historical resource may be designated an historic landmark by the City Council if it meets the criteria established for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, listing on the California Register of Historical Resources; or a local landmark designation if the resource meets at least one of the following criteria:

1. Is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Calabasas' history;

*The El Camino Real Bell serves as a physical record of events that shaped California's history and is associated with the original Spanish trail that linked together the twenty-one missions. This route became an important stagecoach line used by Mexican and American settlers who formed towns along it. With only a few variations, the route is now the Ventura Freeway (Highway 101). The historic highway is commemorated by a series of mission bell markers along its entire length. Most bell markers found today are later examples placed alongside relocated and widened highway section, and they do not represent true and accurate locations along the ancient travel route. Original El Camino Real Bell markers like this one are rare, and they typically stand in or very near their original locations, along older roadway segments which were components of the earliest network of state highways.*

2. Is associated with the lives of persons important to Calabasas' history;

*Calabasas was located on the path of El Camino Real and in the middle of Rancho Simi, Rancho Las Virgenes and Rancho Ex Mission De San Fernando. Several Basques played important roles in the history of Calabasas. Indeed, the very name Calabasas is attributed to Antonio Jauregui, a Basque farmer from Oxnard. The story goes that in 1824, Jauregui was transporting a load of pumpkins, or gourds, in a crude horse drawn cart. He was traveling west along El Camino Real and was headed toward Los Angeles to sell his produce. Furthermore, The Leonis Adobe (an original 1840 adobe residence which designated a local historic landmark by the City of Los Angeles) is located on route, across the street from the El Camino Real bell.*

3. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region or method of construction; represents the work of a master; or possesses high artistic values;

*Mrs. A.S.C. Forbes designed the original bell and staff and final designs were approved in early 1906. The Bell embodies distinctive characteristics of the original cast iron bells and the Bell located in Old Town has been determined to be a "first generation" installation. Also, based on historic photographs, the current location is almost certain to be the original location.*

4. Has yielded, or has the potential to yield, information important to the prehistory or history of the local area, California or the nation.

*Ventura Road, formerly part of El Camino Real and now called Calabasas Road, was the main path of travel between Los Angeles and Ventura Counties in the late 19th century. Although Calabasas remained thinly populated, it became a stop for stagecoach lines that generally followed the former route of El Camino Real through Los Angeles County. The location of the El Camino Real Bell in Old Town is a very familiar and established visual feature in the City.*

### **Local Designation Procedures**

The Calabasas Code of Ordinances [Section 17.36.080](#) outlines the designation procedures for landmark nominations, including initial application review and the procedure for landmark recommendations by the Historic Preservation Commission to the City Council.

The City may request designation of a local historic landmark by submitting an application prepared by the City's Historic Preservation Officer. The Historic Preservation Commission shall evaluate the application for landmark status and decide by majority vote (written resolution) whether to approve the nomination application and forward it to the City Council with a recommendation for landmark designation. If so nominated by the Commission, the Commission resolution is sent to the City Clerk who then schedules a public hearing for the City Council to consider the Commission's recommendation.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission discuss the process for moving forward to the City Council a recommendation that the El Camino Real Bell be designated as a local historic landmark. Following discussion, the Commission may direct Staff to either: bring back to the Commission a resolution recommending to the City Council that the El Camino Real Bell be designated as City of Calabasas Local Historic Landmark number 8.

### **ATTACHMENTS:**

Exhibit A: El Camino Real Bell Photos

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