

TO: Mayor Weintraub  
Mayor Pro tem Kraut  
Councilmember Bozajian  
Councilmember Shapiro  
Councilmember Albrecht

Re: Public Hearing, Agenda Item 9

Date: October 9, 2024

I apologize for the late submission, but we have had an illness in the family.

Let me state unequivocally I am in favor of affordable housing in our City. Any time I have voiced an opinion it has been regarding public safety. Living in a VHFSZ as identified by CalFire, we face issues of emergency evacuation just to name one consideration.

I will keep this brief. I strongly object to the misstatement that there is a “lack of community support for new housing and calling the community a “significant barrier to the production of affordable housing units within the City...” This is simply not true. In my opinion it begins with the City’s poor community outreach. Simply posting notices in various places and on the City’s website is just the bare minimum of box ticking. Why not, for example, include an email to the Coalition members in order to have the West Side well represented, send emails to all HOAs, sitting Commissioners and Committee members. In other words, create an effective outreach.

This change could be accomplished in the DRAFT document by changing Item 3 on page 16 to: Develop strong community support by developing an inclusive outreach. This statement would allow staff to create a new vision for this grant.

I also strongly disagree with many statements staff made characterizing citizens as wanting to keep “the idea of their quiet reprieve” as that concept ended quite some time ago. I doubt that there are many that would agree with that statement when it comes to affordable housing. The statement of “tall residential buildings” fails to recognize there are building codes that dictate the height of all buildings not just residential buildings and the citizens, to my knowledge have only questioned 5 or 6 story hotels.

As one example of recent citizen involvement, I point to the March 22, 2024, General Plan Section V, Page V-12 where one of the properties mentioned is a private parking lot that was described as “overflow” parking. As we all know now, that is the primary lot for the Civic Center which includes the Library and the Senior Center. As a side note, it was thought there was an MOU that was in place as of 2014; however, a FOIA search revealed it was never codified. This particular property development was not well met by the public once the problem was realized. Concern had absolutely nothing to do with affordable housing.

In closing, HUD has created a “Toolkit” for cities to follow with regard to “Strong Communication Strategies” which HUD highly recommends as it is felt “regular communications are critical for driving participation in your engagement and ensuring strong, relevant community feedback.” HUD does not minimize the need for cities (Planning Departments) to keep communities engaged to build trust and goodwill. HUD goes further to state (paraphrased) that keeping community stakeholders informed during the planning process is valuable for future development. Finding ways to deepen those relationships beyond the formal engagement phases is critical and brings value to the process.

In my opinion, to create a ministerial hierarchy that only requests citizens to participate at the beginning of the creation of the ministerial framework, is not progress but an attempt to prevent or stifle community input.

Respectfully submitted,  
Norma Citron  
24668 via Tecolote

October 6, 2024

Calabasas City Council  
100 Civic Center Way  
Calabasas, CA. 91302

Dear Mayor Weintraub, Mayor pro-Tem Kraut and City Councilmembers:

I read the City's grant application. I wholeheartedly support the conversion of vacant commercial space to multi-family residential in parts of our city. I personally think we should have a moratorium on mixed-use development because we shouldn't be adding more commercial space if we have a glut of commercial vacancies. However, I have to take issue with some things in the application.

Characterizing the community as being opposed to affordable housing is just incorrect and misleading. Does anyone at City Hall remember any resident ever saying "I would wholeheartedly approve a 4- or 5-story building in my neighborhood – but only if they get rid of the handful of affordable housing units"? No one has ever said that because affordable housing has never been the issue. Past community objections have been about environmental damage and traffic as it impacts safety.

I truly understand that the grant application is written from a point of view of getting grant dollars. It's easier to say a community opposes affordable housing rather than delving deeper.

The application cites community objections as being traffic and parking. The core reason for objections to development in some parts of our city is *safety and evacuation*. I've been actively involved in our civic issues for about ten years. I remember residents bringing up concerns about fire even back then. This isn't a new concern that just popped up. We're coming up on the six-year anniversary of the Woolsey fire. The Camp fire in Paradise and the Woolsey fire here were eye-openers for Calabasas residents. We looked at our own neighborhoods and realized that many of us had limited egress. We saw gridlock with even small fires. We've seen our main escape route – the 101 – closed. And we realized that adding a few hundred more residents in parts of the city could be more just an inconvenience because of additional traffic – it could be dangerous because it could slow an already bottlenecked evacuation process. The City had a study conducted that showed that a citywide evacuation could be done quickly and easily. And yet, some residents felt that was inaccurate because they've had very different first-hand experiences.

We all know the issue of housing in California is complex. Affordable housing is absolutely needed. By requiring a mere handful of "affordable" units in exchange for outsized bonuses and concessions for developers, the State is paying lip service to the issue; City guidelines follow the State's. The City inadvertently let the affordable units at Malibu Canyon Apartments lapse. There are no incentives for Real Estate Investment Trusts that own apartment complexes (like Malibu Canyon Apartments) to retain or convert units to affordable housing. Cities could lobby the State for financial incentives for that. Yes, it would be a long process, but that's an additional action that would help the problem by incentivizing keeping or converting existing units.

Experts talk about the need to be smarter about where we put development in high fire zones. Are any cities working on effecting meaningful State legislation to that end? That should go hand in hand with

discussions on housing. The bills that I've read just pertain to fire-resistant materials for developers rather than saying, "It's not safe to add more people in certain places." We're being given conflicting directives. The application notes that a General Plan update would "discourage new development in areas that do not have adequate infrastructure/resources (paved roads, water pressure, communication lines) in order to minimize fire hazards, and to instead concentrate development within infill areas, along the City's existing commercial corridors and in developed areas." General statements like this can be problematic; it doesn't deal with the issue that some commercial corridors are in areas that become gridlocked in an emergency. Additionally, as someone who's pointed out our General Plan policies in the past many, many times when commenting on projects, this is little reassurance. I've watched as similar, vague policies have been "worked around" by the City in order to say a project is in compliance.

I was disturbed to see some of the things that were proposed in the application. Public forums were hard-fought for by residents. The need for these stemmed from residents feeling like they had no voice, or were ignored, in a process in which City Hall decisions affected our daily lives and safety. The fact that the grant application characterizes the community as being opposed to affordable housing really illustrates that what residents have been saying is truly unheard by some at City Hall.

The proposed Objective Design Standards will make any project with affordable housing a ministerial decision. The City currently mandates that any housing project with five or more units must include affordable housing. This means that the only projects in which residents will have a voice are commercial development. Discretionary review attempts to maintain a level of trust between our City government and its residents. Ministerial decisions should be left for projects that are smaller, less impactful to the community. Decisions about multi-story buildings (with potentially hundreds of additional residents) that could impact the safety of the surrounding community should have the option for public input. Those decisions should be made by our elected officials who represent residents.

The application states that the Objective Design Standards will be written after engagement with the community. I know the City has tried to make improvements in its outreach, but historically, it's been spotty. If the City moves forward on this, residents must be made aware that they'll be shut out of the process after the Objective Design Standards are passed. While you may get only a few letters from the usual activists regarding the proposed concept of Objective Design Standards, I suspect that if you were to poll all Calabasas voters and ask if they'd want all multi-family projects to be under the sole authority of the CDD, with no opportunity for community input, I think you know what the response would be.

The application notes that "Staff has regularly received feedback from developers that the discretionary permit process and subject review is prohibitive to the development of both market-rate and affordable housing". It may be an inconvenience when people affected by City Hall decisions want input on those decisions, but it's the right thing to do. I understand that the City probably thinks that the Objective Design Standards will all be fine. But the kind of change that's being considered requires that residents trust that their interests will be protected by City Hall once their voice is eliminated. There can't be a "disconnect" between the two. Can the argument honestly be made that residents' concerns have been on the same footing as developers in the past? Residents' voices have been ignored or mischaracterized (as shown by the language in the grant application) even when we've had input. If you weren't working at City Hall, would you trust this process to protect your interests and safety?

Sincerely,  
Frances Alet  
Calabasas, CA.

**From:** [Joe Chilco](#)  
**To:** [info](#)  
**Cc:** [Lisa Pope](#)  
**Subject:** City Council 10-9-24 meeting - agenda item # 9 - Public comments  
**Date:** Friday, October 4, 2024 5:18:12 PM

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Mayor Weintraub and City Councilmembers,

With regard to agenda item # 9, please consider the following comments.

I support affordable housing.

I do not support the proposed ministerial review and approval of residential development projects by City Planning staff. They are not elected representatives of the Calabasas voters. City Planning staff is not accountable to the voters or City Council, only the City Manager. The voters have no means to remove City Planning staff from the position.

State laws have already usurped a certain amount of local control over development by our elected City Council. Asking the residents to also give up any local control over development by ceding their involvement and allowing City Planning staff to act on their behalf is unreasonable and not in the residents' best interests.

The Pathways to Removing Obstacles to Affordable Housing Competitive Grant application for the City of Calabasas makes statements regarding main barriers to creating affordable housing units in Calabasas that do not represent the reality of the situation, specifically, "Lack of community support for affordable housing".

First, let's look at the reality of the issue as it impacts residents.

Developers are not the only ones with a financial interest when residential projects are proposed. Residents have made significant monetary investment in the purchase, maintenance and upkeep of their homes.

Insurance companies have determined that the fire risk to Calabasas residents is so significant that it requires huge increases in premiums but more often has resulted in the cancellation of home insurance policies, leaving residents unprotected against this very real natural disaster.

The RHNA numbers allotted to the City of Calabasas for the 6<sup>th</sup> cycle are arbitrary, based on arithmetic and are not held to the same proof of objective standards that state laws currently dictate cities must meet. Residents have no control over this or any input into the matter.

The Affordability Housing Act requires cities to provide proof of objective standards. Currently, residents have no control over this or input into the matter, other than writing to their state representative.

The Cal Fire designation of Calabasas as a Very High Fire Hazard Severity Zone is based on the fire fuels and conditions that exist in the area. It does not address emergency evacuation capabilities or their effectiveness. Residents have no control over this and no means to dispute it.

The Los Angeles County Fire Department is enforcing defensible space standards for homes that have yet to be set by the state Forestry agency responsible for doing so, per existing state laws.

In the "Need" section of the grant document, item #3, it states "Two primary concerns voiced by the community are traffic and parking, and these main concerns have historically been utilized as tools to prevent the development of new housing projects."

This is a gross misrepresentation of the reality. It is an oversimplification that gives the impression that these concerns are frivolous and easily surmountable.

Traffic, as it impacts emergency evacuation routes, which is impacted by increased fire risk, is a major concern to existing residents. Many communities have limited egress/ingress. There is no opportunity for new roadway construction. The main evacuation route, the 101 Freeway, is also the main evacuation route for all our neighboring cities in all directions, and is not dedicated to use by only Calabasas residents. The same is applicable to Las Virgenes Road.

The insufficient availability of public transit that operates on routes and with frequency schedules that meet the needs of the community, resulting in private transportation as the primary means of travel, requires sufficient onsite parking spaces.

Both of these areas of concern are impacted by the availability of viable locations for affordable housing that provide solutions for the community.

There is resistance from the community due to the City's fire risk designation and the very real threat to life and property, as evidenced by actual losses during fire emergency events within the past 6 years, particularly the Woolsey Fire.

The recent court ruling in the lawsuit brought by the New Home Company stated a lack of objective standards to support the contention that increasing the population, which increases the amount of traffic, does increase the fire risk and can be provably quantified.

If the insurance companies' modeling can't quantify fire risk, as no objective standards are stated when premiums are increased or policies cancelled, and the state laws don't provide any objective standards, and the courts require proof of objective standards, then how are the residents expected to provide those objective standards when these government and private company stakeholders provide no guidance and our reality is based on actual experiences during the fire events that have occurred?

The entire burden is put on the residents, financially, as investors in property that is held by mortgage, which requires home insurance, and in assuming the risk to their property and lives due to the threat of fire, occurrences of which are now more frequent and devastating than they were even twenty years ago.

To add insult to injury by stating that one of the main barriers to affordable housing in Calabasas is due to a lack of community support for it, ignores the reality of the situation for residents and is an unfair characterization.

In fact, several approved projects that include some affordable housing units, such as the Raznick senior housing project, have been stalled for years due to the applicant's inability to obtain the funding necessary, and now The Commons and Park Apartments projects are also facing the same challenge. The annexation of Craftman's Corner, a prime location for affordable housing, has yet to be completed. Community opposition has not impeded these factors.

In addition, existing affordable housing units have not been tracked or the requirements applicable to the affordable housing units have not been enforced. The City staff is aware of this, and discovers these infractions "after the fact", when rents have been raised or properties have been sold for amounts that exceed the legal allowance. Community opposition has not impeded these factors.

Providing affordable housing for those who provide necessary services to residents, such as fire, police, medical first-responders and teachers, is a worthwhile goal. Income thresholds to qualify for affordable housing units may exclude some of them. Community opposition has not impeded this factor. Residents have no control over this.

It might be reasonable to make the statement that "Misperceptions are impeding greater community support for affordable housing."

Effective outreach and education on the subject is lacking. The term "affordable housing" means "Section 8" housing to some.

The draft grant application contends that “uncertainty” is preventing developers from proposing viable affordable housing development projects and that “By removing the discretionary component to projects that comply with a specified set of criteria, and establishing a set of objective design standards, this could address this barrier by improving timing for an approval and adding predictability for an approval, since clear design standards could effectively be communicated to developers.”

Again, let’s look at some reality. The West Village at Calabasas project includes no affordable housing units. The developer will build single-family residences that will rent or sell at market rates. The Avanti project includes some affordable housing units but the developer raised the rental rates above the legal allowance in some cases. The Avalon apartments project did include 120 affordable housing units. The developer paid off the bond early and returned those units to market rates. The Malibu Canyon apartments project did include affordable housing units. The bond expired but its imminent expiration and loss of these units was not brought to the attention of City Council by City Planning staff in a timely manner that might have preserved some units. In each case, incentives were provided to the developer to build affordable housing units. The developers would not have included them without these incentives.

It’s not a lack of uncertainty that’s preventing developers from building more affordable housing units in Calabasas. It’s the developer’s intention to maximize profits. Money...the obtaining of adequate financing and the desire to maximize profits are factors preventing developers. There is nothing altruistic in their intent or approach.

However, what incentives are the residents provided to build more affordable housing? There appear to be none.

We are expected to be altruistic and to take on the burden of risk to our property investment and our safety.

Instead of incentives, residents are threatened with reprisals. State funding will be cut. State laws will allow “by right” development approvals.

Very little is offered to residents. This is a real factor in community support of affordable housing.

However, the draft grant application does not address this, nor does it offer any viable solutions.

The provisions of the draft grant application as currently proposed will not increase community support if the reality of the residents’ concerns are not adequately addressed or given consideration.

Specifically, the removal of public forums and the transfer to a ministerial review application process are not in the best interests of residents. If the public forums are not being utilized or providing the certainty that developers would prefer, is that more a result of ineffective outreach and engagement than a reason to dispense with opportunities for public input in the approval process? I believe it is, and I have my past eight years of experience of being very involved in local development to support my contention.

This is a complex problem. There are no easy, obvious solutions.

I encourage the City Council to thoroughly re-examine the statements made in the draft grant application, and to make changes that reflect the reality of the main barriers and propose viable means to address those factors.

I am ready and willing to participate in the effort.

Thank you for your consideration of all of the above.

Joe Chilco  
Calabasas resident  
(address on file)

**From:** [Kindon Meik](#)  
**To:** [Lisa Pope](#)  
**Subject:** Fw: Public Hearing on October 9 City Council meeting  
**Date:** Monday, October 7, 2024 1:54:36 PM

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For the record on the agenda item

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**From:** Alicia Weintraub <aweintraub@cityofcalabasas.com>  
**Sent:** Sunday, October 6, 2024 5:13:30 PM  
**To:** Michael Klein <mklein@cityofcalabasas.com>; Kindon Meik <kmeik@cityofcalabasas.com>  
**Subject:** Fwd: Public Hearing on October 9 City Council meeting

FYI  
Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Joanne Suwara <joasuw42@yahoo.com>  
**Date:** October 5, 2024 at 3:04:27 PM PDT  
**To:** Alicia Weintraub <aweintraub@cityofcalabasas.com>, Peter Kraut <pkraut@cityofcalabasas.com>, James Bozajian - External <jrbozajian@earthlink.net>, David Shapiro <dshapiro@cityofcalabasas.com>, Edward Albrecht <ealbrecht@cityofcalabasas.com>  
**Cc:** info <info@cityofcalabasas.com>  
**Subject: Public Hearing on October 9 City Council meeting**

To: The Calabasas City Council

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the grant application.

Regarding the proposed Objective Design Standards, the goal to approve any project that has affordable housing (and that would be any project with 5 units or more) be a ministerial decision gives way too much power to the Community Development Director.

Almost 10 years ago I spoke before the City Council regarding the CDD making unilateral decisions regarding story poles at the then Canyon Oaks site. There was a complete lack of transparency as to what was going on. When the community became informed they spoke up. The Council Chambers were packed at both Planning Commission meetings and City Council meetings. Efforts were made by the city to be more open and transparent about the process.

Now it seems like we are going back to the old ways of doing things behind closed doors. Very disappointing!

The chart in the staff report says that a key barrier is community opposition to new and/or affordable housing. This is a complete misrepresentation. When the community banded together and spoke out about proposed projects concerns were brought up about the lack of protection of the environment. The call was for responsible development. Affordable housing was never the issue!

The chart also states that key barriers include capacity to conduct meaningful community engagement and procedural delays associated with soliciting engagement or community review. Meaningful community engagement is already in place (2 public forums before Planning Commission hearings). As for procedural delays in soliciting engagement.....not exactly what that is referring to.

As for the Eligible Activities, written on that same chart, for that third barrier, I cannot see any connection or remedy for the stated barriers. It's just a "word salad" of zoning, land use policies, overlays, floating zones, flood plain management, climate resilience plans, etc. What does this all have to do with community engagement?

The sentiments in the community have not changed over the years. People want to know what is being planned to be built where they live. It is the impact of development on the hillside and the environment that is concerning. It is increased in traffic on already overburdened roadways that is concerning. It packing more and more residential units in a Very High Fire Severity Zone that is concerning. It is NOT the small percentage of affordable housing units that the community concerned about.

You must continue the process of letting the people who live here have a say about what's going on. We should not have decisions being made about the future of our city by employees who do not live in Calabasas.

Joanne Suwara

1. I'm concerned that fire risk, deemed mitigated by virtue of adhering to building material codes, and evacuation traffic studies, based on a model that cannot accurately predict actual emergency conditions because not all emergencies are the same, are not going to offer Calabasas residents much protection.

Are there objective design standards that can be applied to mitigate fire risk to the level that insurance companies will make the determination that the risk is significantly lower? In what other cities in LA County or California has this occurred?

2. I'm concerned that public participation is being sacrificed.

There is another way to expedite the approval process and eliminate two meetings from it.

This also pre-supposes there are Objective Design Standards in place.

The Architectural Review Panel recommendations are not binding on the applicant. The members can review the design elements the applicant has submitted and all the ARP members' comments would be forwarded with arguments for or against to the Planning Commission.

Then, the Planning Commission can review the application based on the Objective Design Standards. All the Planning Commissioners' comments would be forwarded with arguments for or against to the City Council.

This would leave the City Council as the deciding body with a public hearing for public input.

Like the public, the ARP members and Planning Commissioners have the opportunity to comment at the public hearing.

3. I'm concerned that the objective design standards will lead to "box ticking". There is a lack of trust that City Planning staff will make determinations that are in the residents' best interests.

The Montessori daycare project proposed to be built within 50 feet of a freeway was approved by the Planning Commission because City Planning staff deemed it met all requirements. This is an example of the perils of "box ticking".

The "ready-made" building plans offered to residents who lost homes in the Woolsey Fire by City Planning staff resulted in the construction of homes out of character with the architectural style of the community. In doing so, the City Planning staff ignored one of the policies in the General Plan.

The dome on the Cambria hotel is completely out of character with the architectural style of the area. It was approved by the CDD at the time. Then the developer lit the dome at night in violation of the Dark Skies Ordinance. This was remedied only because it was brought to the attention of Councilmember Bozajian.

Joe Chilco  
Calabasas resident (address on file)