



CITY of CALABASAS

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT

October 16, 2024

TO: Members of the Historic Preservation Commission

FROM: Tom Bartlett, City Planner

SUBJECT: Designation of the El Camino Real Bell marker in Old Town Calabasas as Local Historic Landmark #8

RECOMMENDATION: That the Historic Preservation Commission approve and adopt HPC Resolution Number 2024 – 014, recommending to the Calabasas City Council that the El Camino Real Bell marker in Old Town be designated as Local Historic Landmark Number 8.

BACKGROUND:

Located in Old Town Calabasas, the City's El Camino Real Bell is one of the original El Camino Real bell markers from more than 110 years ago. The Calabasas bell was installed in 1913; accordingly, the historic bell marker is among the oldest landmarks in the City.

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 17th and 18th 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 bell markers served to memorialize the historic El Camino Real route. The markers also assisted early motor vehicle travelers with navigating the earliest improved roadways. 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 and May 1, 2024 Historic Preservation Commission meetings, Staff informed 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. To further inform the analysis in this report, Staff referred to the *Historical Context for the City of Calabasas (2009)*, and the *Historical Resources Survey (2009)*.

ANALYSIS:

When recommending a 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 designation procedures..

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 because it memorializes the El Camino Real as a network of pathways used by indigenous peoples, and the principal (if not only) means of connecting twenty-one Spanish missions and presidios. The route later became an important stagecoach line used by Mexican and American settlers who formed towns along the corridor. 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 sections, and they do not represent true and accurate locations along the ancient travel route.

Bell markers from the original series of installations are typically found along older roadway segments which were components of the earliest network of California state highways. Surviving original El Camino Real Bell markers like the Calabasas example are rare, especially when the marker remains in the original location.

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 east along El Camino Real toward Los Angeles to sell his produce. Furthermore, The Leonis Adobe (an original 1840 adobe residence which was designated a local historic landmark by the City of Los Angeles) is located on the route -- directly across the street from the Calabasas El Camino Real bell marker. And, similarly, the Kramer Store building (circa 1890) occupies the

same property as the historic bell marker. Sometime between 1900 and 1910 the Kramer Store building was moved to this location from Brent's Junction (the west end of the City of Calabasas).

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. Although not installed until 1913, the Calabasas bell marker is considered to be a "first generation" installation because it embodies distinctive characteristics of the original cast iron bells, including the phrase "COPYRIGHTED 1906 BY MRS. A.S.C. FORBES." Also, based on historic photographs, the historic marker appears to remain in its 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

[Section 17.36.080](#) of the Calabasas Municipal Code 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 initiate designation of a local historic landmark via a proposal prepared by the City's Historic Preservation Officer. The Historic Preservation Commission shall evaluate the proposal 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.

Planning Staff contacted the property owner by telephone in early September to inquire about support for the proposal – the owner stated that he was not opposed. It is Staff's intent to secure written documentation to this effect prior to consideration by the City Council.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission adopt HPC Resolution Number 2024 – 014 recommending to the City Council that the El Camino Real Bell marker

located at 23508 Calabasas Road be designated as City of Calabasas Local Historic Landmark Number 8.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Exhibit A: Historic Preservation Commission Resolution No. 2024 - 014
- Exhibit B: PowerPoint Presentation