



CITY of CALABASAS

PLANNING COMMISSION AGENDA REPORT
JULY 9, 2020

TO: Members of the Planning Commission

FROM: Maureen Tamuri, AIA, AICP
Community Development Director
Brenda Magaña, Associate Planner

PROPOSAL: Ridgeline Overview: Review of other Agency Policies and Practices

RECOMMENDATION: That the Planning Commission receives and files this background report regarding Significant Ridgelines.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

That the Planning Commission receives and files this background report regarding Significant Ridgelines.

REVIEW AUTHORITY:

The Planning Commission is reviewing this report because the City Council, at its meeting of September 28, 2016, asked the Planning Commission to study and make a recommendation to the Council on amending the current anomalies in the Significant Ridgeline mapping.

BACKGROUND

Planning Staff identified current abnormalities in the mapping of ridgelines as identified in our 2016 staff report to the City Council, and obtained authorization to work with the Planning Commission to develop a recommendation on how to proceed forward. Since then, Staff has made two background presentations to the Planning Commission, on the history of ridgeline documents throughout the City's history, and the second on mapping anomalies, which included a more accurate count of properties on ridgeline.

This report provides a brief overview of best and unique practices from other communities which the Commissioners may desire to explore in any future revision to the City's ridgeline efforts. The materials in this report derive from the County of Santa Clara, City of

Thousand Oaks, Town of Moraga, and the Town of Los Gatos.

STAFF ANALYSIS:

Exhibit B to this report contains a copy of the current Calabasas Municipal Code 17.20.150, Hillside and Ridgeline Protections. Staff, using this “baseline” of our development standards, contrasted it to the policy and code standards of selected communities who had similar protected and hillside conditions. Staff researched four topic areas in order to better contrast Calabasas against other agencies. The format of the report is organized as follows:

- 1) Definition of a Ridgeline
In Calabasas, a ridgeline is defined as a “watershed”.
- 2) Mapping Style
The ridgelines in Calabasas are mapped as continuous lines, and extend well beyond City borders.
- 3) Tools
Development of undeveloped ridgeline properties is limited to areas fifty feet below, and fifty feet away from the mapped ridgeline point. If this standard cannot be met, the code requires a study of alternative locations for development. Calabasas has no overlay zone, nor other unique development standards related to hillside and ridgeline development. The hillside and ridgeline development code requires only protections of ‘natural” ridgelines, and offers little guidance for developed areas. The code does acknowledge developed properties on ridgelines, permitting additions of up to 1,200 sq. ft.
- 4) View Lines
The protected views of ridgelines are evaluated from the designated Scenic Corridors of the City.

County of Santa Clara, California **Guidelines for Grading and Hillside Development, February 2013 (handbook)**

The majority of lands within this northern County’s jurisdiction are hillside properties, with slopes varying from ten to seventy-five percent. The County has developed both a code standard and guidelines for hillside and ridgeline protections. The following elements of the County of Santa Clara’s ridgeline protections are provided to the Commission for background and consideration:

- 1) Definition of a Ridgeline:
In the County of Santa Clara, a ridgeline is defined as a slope thirty percent or

steeper.

2) Mapping Style

The ridgelines of Santa Clara County are mapped similarly to the City of Calabasas, in that they begin in cities located within the County and continue throughout the County. The shift between cities, and unincorporated Santa Clara County, is similar to the shift in City of Calabasas and unincorporated Los Angeles County.

3) Tools

In addition to the code development standards found in Attachment D, there is an extensive “handbook” to be utilized by staff and applicants looking to develop on ridgeline and hillside properties. The document provides guidelines with graphics to illustrate the intent of the General Plan policies related to hillside development and grading. These guidelines are intended to be interpreted with flexibility by staff and are not intended to be strict standards, such as setbacks found within a zoning ordinance. All projects are encouraged to meet the objectives of the guidelines to the greatest extent possible.

Staff notes that the provisions of the Santa Clara County guidelines are similar to the Calabasas Scenic Corridor Guidelines with respect to many development provisions. Our guidelines are provided as part of Exhibit C to this report.

4) View Lines

Visual evaluations of development siting is accomplished through the Design Review Guidelines, which apply to a) primary view shed areas most immediately and directly visible from the valley floor, b) lands up to and including the first ridge, or c) those within approximately one to two miles distance from the edge of the valley floor.

City of Thousand Oaks

Thousand Oaks Municipal Code, Article 35. Protected Ridgeline Overlay Zone Regulations

The City of Thousand Oaks is bounded by significant and prominent natural land forms and dotted with prominent knolls including, but not limited to, the Santa Monica Mountains, the Conejo Mountain, the Mt. Clef Ridge, and the Conejo Ridge. The visitors to and residents of the City and benefitted by the preservation of these scenic vistas and their natural features. The following elements of the City of Thousand Oaks ridgeline protections are provided to the Commission for background and consideration:

1) Definition of a Ridgeline

A ridgeline is defined as the crest of a range of hills or mountains. Visually, it is the profile formed where the terrain meets the skyline. The terrain must be elevated

above surrounding areas to be perceived as a ridgeline.

2) Mapping Style

The ridgelines in Thousand Oaks are not lines, but identified as part of a zoning map with color coordinates for each zone; the mapped areas are broken up, and not continuous. Unfortunately, the City of Thousand Oaks no longer produces printable maps, but utilizes an online GIS portal, therefore this map is not attached as part of this packet.

3) Tools

The City of Thousand Oaks has a Protected Ridgeline Overlay Zone, Exhibit E, where no new structure or addition to an existing structure shall be placed or constructed, no grading shall occur and, except as to meet fire clearance requirements, no native vegetation shall be removed within three hundred feet horizontally or one hundred feet vertically of the crest of a protected ridgeline unless, authorized by the Planning Commission.

The City's code incorporates protection of view sheds and limits the size of development to be compatible to structures in the vicinity. The code establishes a height limit of seventeen feet, and two thousand square foot cumulative for all structures on-site.

Applications for any development within a protected Ridgeline Overlay Zone shall include a site plan depicting the existing topography, a view shed analysis, and plans of the proposed project and access.

Staff notes that the use of a broader hillside overlay zone is in contrast to the mapped ridgeline approach used in Calabasas.

4) View Lines

The protected view lines are from any roadway that is depicted on the City's Circulation Element of the General Plan, Exhibit F.

Town of Moraga

Moraga Municipal Code, Chapter 8.128 Ridgeline Protection, Chapter 8.52 - MOSO and NON-MOSO Open Space Districts and Chapter 8.136 - Hillside Development

Moraga is a small rural town in Contra Costa County, California, in the San Francisco Bay Area. The Town consists of about fifty percent Residential, Single Family and thirty-three percent Open Space. The town of Moraga incorporated in 1974, when the communities of Moraga Town, Rheem, and Rheem Valley, united into one town. The following elements of the Town of Moraga's ridgeline protections are provided to the Commission for background and consideration:

1) Definition of a Ridgeline

The Town of Moraga defines a ridgeline as anything above the centerline or crest where the crest is above eight hundred feet above mean sea level. A “Major Ridgeline” is located in designated open space zones and “Minor Ridgelines” are located outside of the designated open space zones.

1) Mapping Style

The Town of Moraga has two designated zones that are two different colors on the zoning map and all lie within the Town’s boundaries. The ridgelines are irregular and broken up into different sections of the Town.

2) Tools

The Town of Moraga has three different ordinances in place that regulate ridgeline and hillside development; the three chapters include Ridgeline Protection, Hillside Development Standards and two different zoning designations with a set of standards for the Moraga Open Space and Non- Moraga Open Space District. The Town of Moraga also requires that utilities be undergrounded.

Moraga has developed a unique Hillside Development Permit which requires review from a design review body, along with six findings that need to be met for approval. The provisions are found in Exhibit H, Moraga Municipal Code Section 8.136.050, Hillside Development Standards.

3) View Lines

There is no measured distance for development from a ridgeline which is required by the code; rather, Moraga created flexibility in its view line standards to optimize siting. Structures in hillside areas are required to be located and designed such that a minimum of thirty-five percent of the vertical distance from the crest of the affected ridgeline to the "toe of slope elevation" for that affected ridgeline remains visible as undeveloped open space when viewed from the full length of the affected scenic view corridor.

The Town of Moraga has specified “affected view corridors,” and established specific points along the corridors for view evaluation. The code also requires visual simulations as part of their submittal requirements.

Town of Los Gatos, California
Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines, 2004

The Town of Los Gatos is an unincorporated town nestled at the base of the Santa Cruz Mountains. It is located in the San Francisco Bay Area, at the southwest corner of San Jose, in the foothills of the Santa Cruz Mountains. It has a population of 30,222 as of

2019. The mountains provide an exceptional backdrop, providing the Town with a beautiful, natural environment. The following elements of the Town of Los Gatos ridgeline protections are provided to the Commission for background and consideration:

1) Definition of a Ridgeline

The Town of Los Gatos defines a ridgeline as a line connecting the highest points along a ridge and separating drainage basins or small-scale drainage systems from one another. Similar to Calabasas, the Town of Los Gatos uses a watershed to define ridgelines.

2) Mapping Style

The Town of Los Gatos has a Hillside Area Map (Exhibit K) that uses one color to identify where they are located. There are two small areas on the Town's Hillside map that include County property. However, a majority of the parcels belong in the Town and are mostly continuous. In addition, the Town of Los Gatos also provides a viewing area map that identifies where views shall be evaluated from in relation to the proposed development.

3) Tools

The Town of Los Gatos utilizes a set of Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines to guide development in hillside areas (Exhibit J). This document is unique in that it requires development of a site constraints analysis, consultation with neighbors, and pre-application meeting with the City to encourage interaction of all parties in the early stages of design. Additionally, there are grading limits, size limitations and story pole installation requirements along with extensive visual simulations.

On page five of the Guidelines, it is interesting to note that the Town provides a list of items to consider before preparing a development plan. The emphasis of the document is on the hillside and not necessarily focused on the ridgeline aspect. However, focusing on bullet point number seven, it points out that a site plan and design program should be developed only after the "Least Restrictive Development Area" has been identified based on a site specific constraints analysis.

4) View Lines

The Town of Los Gatos has a Viewing Area Map (Exhibit L) identifies four specific areas from which the view analysis is evaluated from.

STAFF NOTES:

Within the data presented, staff brings the Commission's attention to the following overview of concepts presented:

Definition of a Ridgeline:

While the City has a watershed definition, the practices of other cities include:

- 1) Use of an all-encompassing "hillside" definition;
- 2) Use of a visual feature.

Mapping Style

While Calabasas has continuous line, the practices of other cities include:

- 1) A broken line, determined by elevation above sea level
- 2) A larger hillside/ridgeline "zone"

Tools:

Numerous ideas are found within other cities practices for the Commissions consideration:

- 1) Development of a Hillside Overlay Zone;
- 2) Limits on development height and size;
- 3) Development of a hillside/ridgeline "guidelines";
- 4) Expanded pre-application efforts:
 - A. Site constraints analysis meetings;
 - B. Neighbor consultations;
 - C. View line simulations;
- 5) Expanded code standards, such as utility undergrounding;
- 6) Expansion of protected zones, either by distance or overlay zone.

View Lines

The Commission may consider other approaches to evaluating views, including:

- 1) Expanding City view areas beyond that of the scenic corridors;
- 2) Establishing specific locations for view evaluations;
- 3) Flexibility using a "view percentage" evaluation technique.

ATTACHMENTS:

- Exhibit A: Ridgeline Review of Other Agencies and Policies and Practices - Power Point Presentation dated July 9, 2020
- Exhibit B: City of Calabasas Municipal Code Section 17.20.150 – Hillside and Ridgeline Development
- Exhibit C: City of Calabasas Municipal Code Section 17.16.050- Scenic Corridor Permits

- Exhibit D: County of Santa Clara Guidelines for Grading and Hillside Development, February 2013
- Exhibit E: City of Thousand Oaks Municipal Code, Article 35. Protected Ridgeline Overlay Zone Regulations
- Exhibit F: Circulation Element of the General Plan Map
- Exhibit G: Town of Moraga, California Municipal Code, Chapter 8.128 Ridgeline Protection
- Exhibit H: Town of Moraga, Chapter 8.136 Hillside Development Standards
- Exhibit I: Town of Moraga Zoning Map
- Exhibit J: Town of Los Gatos, California Hillside Development Standards and Guidelines, 2004
- Exhibit K: Los Gatos Hillside Area Map
- Exhibit L: Los Gatos Viewing Area Map