



**TOWN OF LOS GATOS  
PLANNING COMMISSION  
REPORT**

MEETING DATE: 04/26/2023

ITEM NO: 3

ADDENDUM

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DATE: April 25, 2023  
TO: Planning Commission  
FROM: Joel Paulson, Community Development Director  
SUBJECT: Forward a Recommendation to the Town Council on Modifications to the Town Height Pole and Netting Policy for Additions and New Construction. The Proposed Amendments to Town Policy are Not Considered a Project Under the California Environmental Quality Act. **Project Location: Town Wide.** Applicant: Town of Los Gatos.

REMARKS:

Exhibit 3 includes public comment received between 11:01 a.m., Friday, April 21, 2023, and 11:00 a.m., Tuesday, April 25, 2023.

EXHIBITS:

Previously received with the April 26, 2023, Staff Report:

1. Current Story Pole Policy
2. Story Pole Installer Input

Received with this Addendum Report:

3. Public Comments received between 11:01 a.m., Friday, April 21, 2023, and 11:00 a.m., Tuesday, April 25, 2023

PREPARED BY: Jennifer Armer, AICP  
Planning Manager

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Reviewed by: Community Development Director

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**From:** Bess Wiersema

**Sent:** Friday, April 21, 2023 1:06 PM

**To:** Jennifer Armer; Joel Paulson

**Cc:** Gary Kohlsaas; Tony Jeans; Tom Sloan; Jennifer Kretschmer; Louie Leu; Noel Cross; JAY PLETT ARCHITECT

**Subject:** Feedback from Local Architects RE: Story Poles

**Importance:** High

[EXTERNAL SENDER]

Jennifer - thanks for reaching out to us, below you will find a summary of our thoughts and concerns. I believe you are sending over info in some sort of staff report today, and we hope this can be included. We are doing our best to get you feedback in a timely fashion- no small task for a group of busy folks - and I am sure you and your team feel the same! Via emails, calls, and some meetings, we (those attached to this email in the CC line) concur on the talking points below. There may also be individuals that have additionally reached out separately or met with Planning to air other concerns, or provide greater detail on certain topics. It is our intent to cull our professional experience and logic around matters Town reaches out on in a concise format so you are not bombarded with Individual notes, emails, and meetings. Hopefully this will help you from a timing standpoint - and we hope that PC understands that is a united and thoughtful response by all of us together.

Local architects have a concern about WHY the story pole plan is being revised, especially as we understand that Town is understaffed, and looking to streamline the permit process. While we all are resolved to producing and dealing with this portion of the Planning process, we agree that the policy should be revised - to simplify it, creating less work and cost for both our team and yours, not create more work and excessive costs to our mutual clients, the residents of our Town. It's odd to us that this is a focus over other, more pertinent and far-reaching items we summarize at the end.

We would argue that:

- story poles are more often hurtful rather than helpful, as they are unsightly, lacking character, and often do not accurately define the finished product as related to bulk and mass (nor grading, site retaining walls, other built elements that are architectural features such as stairs, raised planters, terraces, etc. are not represented - this is especially egregious in Hillside projects
- the current story pole process is an overreach: no other local township requires a drawn out process of having a pole plan reviewed and approved prior to install - why not trust the professionals that they are doing their jobs accurately - requiring certification of the poles is plenty to guarantee they are complete and accurate
- the requirement that pole plans and signage are reviewed and approved prior to being able to install creates further timeline issues - the industry is impacted, and pole plans are not reviewed by planners until the project is complete, from a planning process standpoint, therefore further delaying the overall process

- we estimate the creating pole plans and story poles install / certification often adds approximately \$20K (even more if they have to be adjusted, redone, etc. due to weather, modifications requested at PC, by planners, etc.) to the permit processing portion of the process, not to mention months of time
- story pole plans have too much detail in them, and become more confusing to the layperson when houses have more architectural detail in roof design such as nested hips, dormers, etc., further creating confusion about what the real, final design is all about
- ironically the orange netting has an LRV of approximately 44 (and higher with the neon construction orange color required), which is in direct conflict to Hillside requirements, creating even more issues related to actual visibility
- story poles can damage existing structures when placed for an addition over an existing home, especially with tiled roofs
- no single story new home should be story poled, regardless of location
- no single story addition should be story poled
- no story poles should be required if there are added roof elements to a single or two story home that sit within the overall massing the existing roof (such as new dormers)
- story pole plans should be simplified, showing the overall main ridges only
- there should be an option to not require story poles if immediate neighbors agree that they are not necessary - often neighbors do not what these unsightly poles flopping around, creating an ugly nuisance in their neighborhood - well designed and managed projects should have an opt-out
- an option to create accurate 3D images that are keyed to simple main ridgeline datum points should be available, and would more accurately represent the final product to all parties

We believe it is all of our goal to streamline the permit process and create well designed homes that enhance our community. Story poles only create an unsightly nuisance, that more often creates fear around a project than accurately represents it. They are time consuming and expensive. The current approval process, and the suggestion that almost every portion of the roof must be shown creates more confusing lines for everyone to look at.

There are far more important tasks we believe the Town needs to address related development, and we are happy to help mobilize as a group to provide support for this:

- Most importantly PRC 4290 continues to have a significant negative impact to residential housing and lots, and its interpretation is inconsistent with most of the rest of the state, creating extreme hardship and often destroying entire projects, even on lots deemed legal, buildable lots, that sit within normal neighborhoods that have been annexed into the Town from County not to mention the even more impacted Hillside neighborhoods
- the visibility discussion in Hillside remains unaddressed and is inconsistent with what we believe the intent is, also requiring an excessive amount of work and time like Story Poles

- the recent overturn of the gas ban in the 9<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, and the Town's unnecessary (and out of sync with other local jurisdictions, even SC County) full ban rather than a stepped process that allows for gas to remain for a limited number of appliances / use will only continue to create more unsafe and uninspected "after permit" work related to re-installing gas, or adding freestanding propane tanks; we also anticipate more appeals which will take more time and energy for all of us, creating further inconsistency and a culture of haves/ have-nots

Thank you!

**Bess Wiersema**  
principal + owner



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**From:** Adam Mayer [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** Sunday, April 23, 2023 10:18 PM  
**To:** Planning <Planning@losgatosca.gov>  
**Subject:** Public Comment Item #3 (4/26/23)

[EXTERNAL SENDER]

Dear Director Paulson, Planning Staff & Planning Commission,

As an architectural professional, I do not see the point of story poles, especially if a proposed development meets all the local zoning and height limit requirements. I agree with the assessment Los Altos made in recently removing their story pole requirement during their Housing Element process:

*"...they found that the story pole requirement added subjectivity, extended the review process of all development, and added additional cost for a project whereas their other requirements for renderings and 3D Modeling could effectively provide the relationship of the proposed building heights."*

Instead of story poles, I envision requiring a proposed development site to feature signage with 3D renderings within the context of neighboring buildings (perhaps with heights called out) so that the public can get a more accurate visual.

In the future, proposed developments could even offer the ability for curious neighbors to use augmented reality headsets to see what the actual building would look like on its site (as opposed to a collection of rods and netting, which don't do a great job of representing what a building will ultimately look like, and in some cases cause safety hazards as noted in the staff report).

At the very least, I suggest removing the story pole requirement for single-family residential projects within the height limit. However, if a project asks for a height variance, then story poles could be required to understand how tall the proposed home will be beyond the height limit.

On a professional level, story poles are generally an added burden to the design process. The time and financial resources developing story pole plans could be better used to design a better building and make more accurate 3D renderings for visual representation.

Thanks,  
Adam Mayer

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STUDIO—AMA

**Adam N. Mayer** AIA, LEED AP BD+C, WELL AP

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