

DISCUSSION CALENDAR

Agenda Item # 6

AGENDA REPORT SUMMARY

Meeting Date: March 26, 2019

Subject: Story Pole Policy Exception Request for 425 First Street Development

Prepared by: Zachary Dahl, Planning Services ManagerReviewed by: Jon Biggs, Community Development Director

Approved by: Chris Jordan, City Manager

Attachments:

- 1. Resolution No. 2019-08
- 2. Resolution No. 2019-03 (Exception Request Denial on January 8, 2019)
- 3. Story Pole Policy Exemption Request Letter
- 4. Alternative Story Pole Placement Plan

Initiated by:

Applicant

Previous Council Consideration:

January 8, 2019

Fiscal Impact:

None

Environmental Review:

Not applicable

Policy Question(s) for Council Consideration:

• Does the installation of story poles in close proximity to public streets, sidewalks and overhead utility lines constitute a public health and safety concern that justifies an exception from installing story poles as required by the City's Story Pole Policy?

Summary:

• The Applicant for the development proposal at 425 First Street has submitted a second request to receive an exception from installing story poles per the City's Story Pole Policy due to: 1) public health and safety concerns related to placing story poles in close proximity to public streets, sidewalks and overhead utility lines; 2) concern that he cannot find a company willing to install story poles per the Policy; and 3) concern that installation of story poles in an urban setting could constitute a public nuisance under the City's Municipal Code.

К	leviewe	d I	By:



• The Applicant's original story pole exception request was denied by the City Council on January 8, 2019 per Resolution No. 2019-03.

Staff Recommendation:

Per the findings specified in Resolution No. 2019-08, staff recommends approval of this request



Purpose

Consider a request from the Applicant of the development proposal at 425 First Street for an exception from the City's Story Pole Policy due to public health and safety concerns.

Background

The Applicant has submitted a design review and subdivision application for a three-story multiple-family residential building with 20 units located at 425 First Street. The application was deemed completed in January 2019 and was reviewed by the Complete Streets Commission in February 2019. As discussed below, the Applicant is currently seeking an exception from the City's Story Pole Policy to meet the notification requirements established under the City Council's Open Government Policy as necessary to enable the application to proceed for consideration by the Planning Commission and the City Council.

The City Council's Open Government Policy, which was adopted on March 24, 2015, and subsequently updated on August 22, 2017 and May 22, 2018, includes a requirement that all development projects subject to Planning Commission and City Council review must install story poles as part of the public review process. A copy of the Story Pole Policy is included as Attachment 4. Story poles must be installed at least 20 days before the Planning Commission's first public hearing and any exceptions to the Policy must be approved by the Council. The criteria for reviewing and approving an exception is as follows:

- 1. The City Council may grant exceptions to the Story Pole Policy due to: a) a public health and/or safety concern; or b) that such an installation would impair the use of existing structure(s) or the site to the extent it would not be able to be occupied and the existing business and/or residential use would be infeasible. Some form of poles and netting and/or on-site physical representation of the project may be required, even if an exception is granted.
- 2. The Story Pole Plan may be limited in scope at the discretion of the City Council. In such cases such as where there are multiple detached structures proposed and where identifying the locations of key structures would suffice, the story poles may be limited to the outline(s) of key structures and/or showing a structure(s) greatest height and mass.
- 3. In granting an exception, the City Council may require additional digital imagery simulations, computer modeling, built to-scale models or other visual techniques in-Lieu of the story pole requirements.

On January 8, 2019, the City Council considered an exception request from the City's Story Pole Policy from the Applicant for the proposed development at 425 First Street. The request sought a partial exemption for the placement of story poles due to safety concerns and impairment of the use of the existing office building on the site, and a request to use of some alternative materials (pennant flags in



place of plastic mesh netting). Following a presentation by the Applicant and Council questions and deliberations, the Council voted unanimously to deny the exemption request due to a lack of sufficient evidence to demonstrate: 1) a public health and safety concern if the story poles and guy wires are set in compliance with the City's Story Pole Policy; and 2) that installation of story poles per the City's Story Pole Policy would impair the use of the existing office building on the site to the extent that it would not be able to be occupied by business tenants and use of the building would be infeasible. A copy of Resolution No. 2019-03, which denied the request, is included as Attachment 2.

Following the City Council's denial on January 8, 2019, the Applicant submitted a story pole plan that met the Policy's requirements and on January 22, 2019, the plan was approved by the Community Development Director. Following the approval, the Applicant retained a story pole installation company, Coastline Engineering and Development Group, to install story poles by the end of February 2019, so that the development application could be scheduled for review by the Planning Commission on March 21, 2019. On February 23, 2019, the Applicant communicated with the City that "the story pole installer started installing poles today but pulled off the job because once he started installing the poles, in his opinion, the proximity of the story poles to public areas of First Street, Lyell Street, and the alley was a public safety issue." Since the Applicant has indicated that he was unable to find another contractor willing to install story poles in accordance with the approved plan, a second story pole exception request was submitted to the City on February 27, 2019.

Discussion/Analysis

The Applicant is requesting an exception from installing story poles per the City's Story Pole Policy due to public health and safety concerns related to placing story poles in close proximity to public streets, sidewalks and overhead utility lines along the alley. Additional information to support this request is included in Attachment 3. As communicated by the Applicant, companies and contractors that install story poles are unwilling to install temporary poles of this height on this site since they would be in close proximity to public streets, public sidewalks or overhead utility lines due to the potential liability that would be incurred if there was a malfunction or failure that resulted in property damage or personal injury.

In addition, the Applicant has asserted that erecting the story poles is prohibited by the City's Nuisance Abatement Ordinance (LAMC Chapter 11.10) because it is unsafe to install the poles in an urban setting. Under the Nuisance Abatement Ordinance, a "Nuisance" is defined as "anything that is injurious to health, or is indecent or offensive to the senses, or an obstruction to the free use of property, so as to interfere with the comfortable enjoyment of life or property, or unlawfully obstructs the use in the customary manner of any public park, street or highway" (LAMC 11.10.010(F).

For purposes of this request, it is not clear whether the installation of story poles reasonably could be evaluated as a potential nuisance. Nonetheless, the story pole policy itself provides a sufficient



and appropriate mechanism for the Council to evaluate whether an exception to the policy is warranted on public health and safety grounds, thereby rendering any specific nuisance determination unnecessary. Here, the fundamental issue presented for Council's evaluation is whether there is a public health and/or safety concern associated with the potential failure of a story pole or guy wire, which could obstruct a public sidewalk or street, damage overhead utility lines or infrastructure, cause damage to personal property or result in personal injury to an individual using an adjacent public sidewalk or street, that justifies granting an exception from installing story poles per the Story Pole Policy. As noted by the Applicant, alternatives methods, including photo renderings on a development billboard and use of a 3D model set into the City's Downtown model, can provide the public with information to understand the project's height and massing, relationship to adjacent buildings and profile within the First Street context in-Lieu of physical story poles placed on the site.

This site is somewhat unique since it is bounded on three sides by public streets and sidewalks (First Street, Lyell Street and a public alley). Full compliance with the Story Pole Policy would result in poles of 30-38 feet in height being placed near pedestrians using City sidewalks, vehicles using the public streets and alley, and overhead utility lines (electrical and telecommunications) in the alley. Thus, due to the potential liability related to an incident that could occur if a story pole or guy wire were to fail, granting of a full exemption does appear to be justified.

However, the Applicant has included an alternative story pole placement plan (Attachment 4) with his exception request. This plan has been provided as an alternative if the Council is not willing to grant a full exception from installing story poles. The plan places story poles inside of the site's property lines with minimum clearance to allow for guy wires to be anchored on all sides. This plan is consistent with the partial exception that was granted to the development at 385-389 First Street.

Options

1) Approve the story pole exception request per Resolution No. 2019-08

Advantages: Ensures that there will not be a public health or safety issue due to the

placement of the story poles and guy wires near public streets, public sidewalks

and overhead utility wires

Disadvantages: There will not be any story poles installed that help show the development's

height, massing and profile in the context of the surrounding buildings and

streetscape



2) Approve a partial story pole exception request per the alternative story pole placement plan (Resolution No. 2019-08 can be updated with appropriate findings)

Advantages: Will require that some story poles be installed that will help show the

development's height, massing and profile in the context of the surrounding

buildings and streetscape

Disadvantages: Will delay the Planning Commission review of the proposed development and

could still result in the installation of story poles that create a public health or

safety issue

3) Deny the story pole exemption request due to a lack of sufficient evidence to demonstrate a public health and safety concern if the story poles and guy wires are set in compliance with the City's Story Pole Policy

Advantages: Will require that some story poles be installed that will help show the

development's height, massing and profile in the context of the surrounding

buildings and streetscape

Disadvantages: Will delay the Planning Commission and City Council review of the proposed

development and could result in the installation of story poles that create a

public health or safety issue

Recommendation

Staff believes the applicant has submitted sufficient information to meet the criteria for an exception from installing story poles and recommends approval of Option 1.

RESOLUTION NO. 2019-08

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LOS ALTOS TO APPROVE AN EXCEPTION FROM THE CITY'S STORY POLE POLICY FOR THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT 425 FIRST STREET

WHEREAS, on March 24, 2015, the City Council adopted, and on August 22, 2017 and May 22, 2018 amended, an Open Government Policy that included a requirement for all multistory commercial, multiple-family, mixed-use and public facility development projects subject to Planning Commission and City Council review to erect story poles as part of the application and public review process (the "Story Pole Policy"); and

WHEREAS, the purpose of the Story Pole Policy is to help demonstrate for the public and decision-makers a proposed project's height, massing and profile in the context of the actual environment and provide a "visual notice" of the same; and

WHEREAS, the Story Pole Policy establishes specific, minimum objective standards and requirements for installation and duration of such poles' erection; and

WHEREAS, the City Council may grant exceptions to the Story Pole Policy due to a public health or safety concern, or if such an installation would impair the use of existing structure(s) or the site to the extent it would not be able to be occupied and the existing business and/or residential use would be infeasible; and

WHEREAS, the applicant for the proposed development at 425 First Street previously submitted a request for an exception from the City's Story Pole Policy citing the presence of safety concerns and impairment of the use of existing structures on the site and requesting to be allowed the use of some alternative materials and methods; and

WHEREAS, on January 8, 2019, at a duly noticed public meeting, the City Council thoroughly and extensively evaluated and considered all information and evidence presented by the applicant in support of its previous request for exception, as documented in the record, including, without limitation, in the staff report presented to City Council, and based upon such review, found the applicant had failed to present sufficient evidence to warrant the granting of an exception as outlined in the Story Pole Policy and adopted Resolution No. 2019-03; denying the request for exception and making findings to support the denial; and

WHEREAS, by letter dated March 4, 2019, the applicant for the proposed development at 425 First Street submitted a second request for an exception from the City's Story Pole Policy due to public health and safety concerns related to placement of story poles in close proximity to public streets, public sidewalks and overhead utility lines; and further supported by his assertion that he cannot find a company willing to install story poles as required by the City's Story Pole Policy, and presented evidence to support the granting of such exemption; and

WHEREAS, this action is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Article 18, Section 15270, in that CEQA does not apply to projects a public agency disapproves.

Resolution No. 2019-08

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of Los Altos hereby approves the application's request for an exemption from the City's Story Pole Policy and, based upon substantial evidence, including without limitation, all staff reports, correspondence and other oral and documentary evidence submitted to the City, which comprises in the entire record before this Council finds that:

1. There is a public health and safety concern due to the placement of the story poles and guy wires in close proximity to public streets, public sidewalks and overhead utility wires located in the rear alley where they may pose a threat of physical harm to adjacent users and a safety concern if a story pole or guy wire were to come in contact with the overhead utility lines.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a Resolution passed and adopted by the City Council of the City of Los Altos at a meeting thereof on the 26th day of March, 2019 by the following vote:

AYES: NOES: ABSENT: ABSTAIN:	
	Lynette Lee Eng, MAYOR
Attest:	
Jon Maginot, CMC, CITY CLERK	

RESOLUTION NO. 2019-03

A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF LOS ALTOS TO DENY AN EXEMPTION FROM THE CITY'S STORY POLE POLICY FOR THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT AT 425 FIRST STREET

WHEREAS, the City Council adopted an Open Government Policy that included a requirement for all commercial, multiple-family and mixed-use development projects subject to Planning Commission and City Council review to erect story poles as part of the public review process; and

WHEREAS, the City Council may grant exceptions to the Story Pole Policy due to a public health or safety concern, or if such an installation would impair the use of existing structure(s) or the site to the extent it would not be able to be occupied and the existing business and/or residential use would be infeasible; and

WHEREAS, the applicant for the proposed development at 425 First Street submitted a request for an exemption from the City's Story Pole Policy due to safety concerns and impairment of the use of existing structures on the site and to allow for the use of some alternative materials and methods, and presented evidence intended to support the granting of such exemption; and

WHEREAS, at a duly noticed public meeting, the City Council thoroughly and extensively evaluated and considered all information and evidence presented by the applicant, as documented in the record, including, without limitation, in the staff report presented to City Council, and based upon such review, found the applicant had failed to present sufficient evidence to warrant the granting of an exception as outlined in the Story Pole Policy; and

WHEREAS, this action is exempt from CEQA pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Article 18, Section 15270, in that CEQA does not apply to projects a public agency disapproves.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City Council of the City of Los Altos hereby denies the applicant's request for an exemption from some of the City's Story Pole Policy based on the following findings:

- 1. Sufficient evidence was not provided to demonstrate a public health and safety concern if the story poles and guy wires are set in compliance with the City's Story Pole Policy; and
- Sufficient evidence was not provided to demonstrate that installation of story poles per the City's Story Pole Policy would impair the use of existing office building on the site to the extent that it would not be able to be occupied by business tenants and use of the building would be infeasible.

I HEREBY CERTIFY that the foregoing is a true and correct copy of a Resolution passed and adopted by the City Council of the City of Los Altos at a meeting thereof on the 12th day of February 2019 by the following vote:

AYES:

BRUINS, ENANDER, FLIGOR, LEE ENG, PEPPER

NOES:

NONE

ABSENT:

NONE

ABSTAIN:

NONE

Attest:

Jon Maginot, CMC, CITY CLERK

March 4, 2019

Zachary Dahl, AICP Planning Services Manager One North San Antonio Road Los Altos, CA 94022

Subject: 425 FIRST STREET (Story Pole Exception Request)

Dear Mr. Dahl,

As you are aware, I could not find a story pole installation contractor willing to build the previously approved story pole plan for 425 First Street. And, as you are aware, I believe that it is a public safety risk to install story poles in our downtown. I remain very concerned about the public safety risk to downtown pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobile drivers and passengers posed by the City's Story Pole Policy and Guidelines that requires the installation of story poles in order to proceed to Planning Commission and City Council review of a proposed project. In addition to pursuing obtaining approval of this story pole plan from the City Council as a "contingency plan," I will continue to pursue an overall public safety exemption from installing story poles for downtown properties.

The attached story pole plan incorporates the 8-foot setbacks approved by the City Council for our 389 First Street project, plus the installation of corner posts located on the building wall lines.

Unlike our property at 389 First Street, the story pole plan for 425 First Street has to avoid conflict with the front and rear entrances of a currently operating business.

Another challenge unique to the story pole plan for 425 First Street is that the front building wall of the Building (First Street frontage) is located <u>behind</u> the front building wall of the existing building and the existing building overhang.

Most importantly, unlike our property at 389 First Street, the 425 First Street property is lieterally <u>surrounded on three sides</u> by public sidewalks, public streets (First Street and Lyell Street), and the public alleyway. As a result, the public safety concerns for the 425 First Street building are <u>significantly greater than for our 389 First Street building</u>.

The following is an explanation of where the plan varies from the actual building wall of the building:

Along the South property line (Lyell Street frontage), the story poles are located 8-feet into the property. The plan adds corner posts to show the actual building wall of the future building.

Along the North property line (adjacent to 401 First Street), the story poles are located 8-feet into the property. The plan adds corner posts to show the actual building wall of the future building.

Along the East property line (alley frontage), the story poles are set at the actual building walls of the future building.

The rear parapet corners are set at the actual rear parapet corners of the future building.

The front parapet corners are offset from the actual front parapet corners of the future building. They cannot be located at the actual front parapet corners of the future building because that would require three roof penetrations into occupied portions of the existing building. However, the six poles (four corners, plus two spanning poles) will together accurately represent the height of the future building.

Along the West property line (First Street frontage), all of the front building wall of the future building is located behind the existing building / building overhang. Thus, the story poles for the First Street frontage will represent a significantly "worst case" scenario. Because of the existing building entry at the corner of First Street and Lyell Street, the story poles will need to "cut the corner"; however, the plan provides three corner posts to show the location of the actual building walls of the future building.

Two story poles are shown on the plan that may be difficult to actually construct; however, we will attempt to do so. Pole #4 will be difficult to construct for safety reasons because of the close proximity to the two occupied buildings. Pole #7 will be difficult to construct for safety reasons because of the close proximity to First Street as a result of the existing building overhang.

This plan proposes to use ropes and flags instead of 2' netting, as I am hopeful that the City Council will adopt the very reasoned approach recommended by a unanimous Planning Commission to allow ropes and flags and to only require that story poles remain in place for thirty days. If the City Council rejects the Planning Commission's recommendation to allow the use of ropes and flags, then I will install the attached plan with the 2' netting instead.

All of the above is with the caveat that I will ultimately need to be certain that the story poles, as installed, will not be a risk to public safety.

We will provide computer simulations / visualizations of the attached plan prior to the City Council meeting.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

425 First Los Altos, LLC

Jeff Warmoth Managing Member From: Jeff Warmoth jeffwarmoth@gmail.com @

Subject: Fwd: Coastline

Date: March 4, 2019 at 4:29 PM

To: Jeff Warmoth jeffwarmoth@gmail.com



Begin forwarded message:

From: Jeff Warmoth < jeffwarmoth@gmail.com >

Subject: Coastline

Date: March 4, 2019 at 2:17:19 PM PST

To: zdahl@losaltosca.gov

Zach -

Coastline brought a lift, all of their materials and four men. Dustin, the owner, called me extremely upset and told me that he was pulling off because it was unsafe to install poles with all of the public sidewalks/ streets/ alleyways surrounding the site and that he was unwilling to get sued when someone is injured or killed. Needless to say, he was quite angry with the loss of money that resulted from mobilizing on site, then having to pull off. Thus, he will not be cooperative in getting something to me in writing.

As a property owner, the fact that a professional story pole installer, who stood to make a lot of money from installing the story poles, pulled off the job makes me very concerned. I too, do not want to contribute to the responsibility for someone getting injured or killed.

Dustin also pulled off of 389 First even though he had a signed contract, AND even though he was to install the newly-approved plan for 389 First Street.

You are welcome to call Dustin directly, but I would not expect a warm reception.

See Coastline mobilized lift at 425 First Street.



Mayor Eng Vice Mayor Pepper Councilmember Bruins Councilmember Enander Councilmember Fligor City of Los Altos City Hall One North San Antonio Road Los Altos, California 94022

Re: Request to Modify Story Pole Policy

Dear Honorable Mayor and Councilmembers:

I write concerning the City's requirement to install story poles for the proposed residential development to be located at 425 First Street (the "Project"). On February 23rd, my contracted story-pole installer arrived at the Project site and refused to install the story poles, stating there was no way to do so safely (please see attached email to Zach Dahl, Planning Services Manager). As you may recall, the Project site is currently occupied by commercial businesses and a surface parking lot, with people passing through the Project site on a regular basis. In addition, in order to comply with the City's Story Pole Policy, almost all of the story poles would be immediately adjacent to either First Street, Lyell Street, the alley between First Street and Second Street, or to the occupied commercial neighbor at 401 First Street. In addition to vehicular traffic on the surrounding streets and alley, the Project site is surrounded on two sides by the sidewalks on First Street and Lyell Street that are heavily used by pedestrians.

It is well known that the City's past insistence on requiring story poles in unsafe conditions resulted in a pole from the Altos One project at 4846/4856 El Camino Real crashing through the roof of a neighboring business on December 1, 2018. It is only luck that no one was seriously injured or killed.

Because erecting the story poles would be unsafe, not only will no story pole installer erect them, but the City's Municipal Code *prohibits* me from erecting them. Story poles on the Project site would be a "nuisance," which the City defines as "anything that is injurious to health." (Muni. Code, § 11.10.020.F.) The City prohibits the establishment or maintenance of a nuisance (§ 11.10.030), and would immediately abate such a dangerous nuisance (§ 11.10.100), defeating the purpose of story poles, and subjecting me to the cost of abatement (§ 11.10.110), as well as potential civil liability (§ 11.10.040).

Under well-trod statutory interpretation principles, the prohibition on creating a nuisance must trump the requirement to erect story poles when the requirements are in conflict. Statues and rules must be interpreted "in harmony with legislative intent and with other apparently conflicting provisions." (*Planned Parenthood Affiliates v. Van De Kamp* (1986) 181 Cal.App.3d 245, 273.) But "even a statute's literal terms will not be given effect if to do so would yield an unreasonable or mischievous result."

(Id., citing Friends of Mammoth v. Board of Supervisors (1972) 8 Cal.3d 247, 259; In re Haines (1925) 195 Cal. 605, 613.)

Here, even though the Story Pole Policy lacks an express exception when strict compliance would cause a nuisance, the City Council could not have intended to put its citizens at risk of injury or death through requiring strict compliance. The City Council also could not have intended to force people to violate nuisance laws to comply with the Story Pole Policy. A contrary interpretation would yield an unreasonable and dangerous result.

Further, other than confirming that the Project complies with objective design standards, the City has no aesthetic discretion over the Project. This is based on the Housing Accountability Act, a state law that takes precedence over local laws and policies. Thus, compliance with the Story Pole Policy would not only create a nuisance, but serves no purpose with respect to the Project in light of the Housing Accountability Act.

In sum, the Project must be excused from complying with the Story Pole Policy, regardless of the City Council's previous denial of exceptions or an exemption. The City cannot force someone to break its laws or put others at risk.

Failure to excuse the Project from complying with the Story Pole Policy is tantamount to arbitrarily denying a housing project that complies with all objective development standards. It goes against the spirit of the Housing Accountability Act and other laws encouraging infill housing, as well as the Housing Element, to set up a prerequisite to obtaining a hearing for approval of higher-density housing that is impossible to satisfy.

We have provided very detailed computer simulations and architectural renderings of the Project from various perspectives to help the City and public visualize how it will look. In addition, we have put a sketch-up model into the City's downtown sketch-up model so that anyone can access how the Project will look from various perspectives. Finally, for context, the Project is one-third (1/3) of the length and three-quarters (3/4) of the height of the existing residential building previously constructed at 100 First Street.

Of course, I also remain open to other solutions that would accomplish the purpose of the Story Pole Policy without endangering the public or breaking the law.

Sincerely,

425 First Los Altos, LLC

Jeff Warmoth

City Manager Community Development Director Planning Services Manager City Attorney

