

Story poles and the CDRC: A failure to act story

March 2020. My neighbors, my husband and I wake up on a Sunday morning surprised to find story poles erected on the other side of the street. Those were some of the last story poles to be seen Coastside.

May 2020. San Mateo County Planning Department discovered what they thought was a story pole Requirement was a mere Policy, thus somehow not legal and enforceable. They make a new policy claiming story poles were “standard”, but if you don’t feel like it, put up drawings on a poster instead.

August 2020. It is clear from the CDRC discussions that they want story poles back asap. I asked the County handler of the CDRC and senior planner Camille Leung why we don’t have story poles. The answer was:

Department management staff has not yet received the request from the CDRC to write an ordinance or to amend its existing ordinance (as the request is pending) and therefore the County has not yet determined its approach to the community members’ desire for the County to require story poles.

For the County to legally require applicants to put up story poles, as the CDRC wishes, that requires regulation to be written, go through a public process, and get adopted by the Board of Supervisors, which of course is a more complicated and longer term undertaking.

July 2022. The very last of the supposedly “regular” CDRC Chair person’s notes, also notes that story pole issue is put on hold.

OLD Business July 14 2022

DEMONSTRATION OF SCALE/STORY POLES

SMC long term Planning has shelved the outline for adopting a story pole ordinance as a requirement until further notice. 12may2022 C. Leung.

Continued follow up for new date of adoption request at each meeting.

Demonstration of scale will continue to follow the 5/8/2020 Doc referenced in link below.

NEW Business. September 8 2022

-¿Longterm Planner for SMC?

r-Long term planner under review X

Proposals

-Attention notice: to Applicant from Planner. It is highly recommended that story poles be installed especially when the mass exceeds the typical mass of the average neighboring homes.

-in the case of demonstration of scale where a pictorial rendering is used. It must include the structures on all three sides and or an actual depiction of surrounding area in the rendering.

This is the second item in the Demonstration of Scale but is not been enforced¿

-the preceding if approved could be a separate handout notice that is part of a pre-con meeting.

October 2022 (CDRC meeting 10/13/2022). The architect representative of the CDRC, Katie Kostiuik, expresses her frustration over the stalled story pole issue:

I just want to comment, point out that this is exactly why this has been a priority that we have been pushing for, for a really long time, to get this to be an actual requirement and not a policy and to go through all of the .. jumping through hoops that the County needs us to, as far as the protocols for public, you know, public noticing and outreach and all of that, the thing is even just in the projects today, there is a really wide range of demonstration of scale and you'll be able to see very easily that the ones that are digital demonstrations of scale, a lot of them are widely inaccurate, and it's so obvious and it doesn't really matter to me ultimately if it's lack of ability to create a good demonstration of scale or if the intention to make a project look more to scale than it actually is, but the reality is that my concern with the digital demonstrations of scale is that you have the ability to make it look how you want it you know, we've had ones that have shown aerial view, which is not helpful at all, because you don't ever view the project that way. We've had projects that they don't tell you the heights of adjacent buildings at all, or there's no method of measurement, a perspective is not scalable, so ultimately that's a really big concern for me, and I don't really want to necessarily to create more cost and complication and delay for applications by saying you all have to do story poles through all of our discussions I've think we've made it clear that we don't think that all projects need story poles, but I do think this really needs to get addressed, this keeps coming up, we're hearing from people in their comments, the community correspondents that there is concern that they don't see story poles, they don't know the scale of the project they don't think it is being accurately represented and it shouldn't really be on the committee to have to collect all of these examples that we see every month to show 'Look this digital example isn't really helpful', 'look this community member is asking for story poles', and you know, not to mention in the past we've also seen projects where people that the only reason they knew there was going to be a hearing, was because story poles went up for a while there was a lot inconsistency with people actually not receiving the notices in the mail. So I think the story poles they bring attention to the fact that there is going to be a project even for for people that are outside of the noticing radius, and again, this isn't the place for that discussion, but I think that what I'm trying saying this is really important and I'm really getting frustrated that it is put on the back burner and then all this effort went into updating a policy when we were all concerned that it was only a policy to begin with. And we are the ones who this is supposed to be serving and we're supposed to have this authority to use this as a tool, and the community is supposed to use this as a tool to you know understand how these projects are in the context of the Neighborhood, and we are not giving the ability to really ask for that. OK, rant over.

At present time, Katie Kostiuk is no longer a CDRC member, she is “on the other side” with a a client whose project is not using story poles to illustrate scale, due for a hearing this week. The neighborhood has asked for story poles to no avail.

May 2024. (CDRC hearing 05/09/2024). The YouTube video of the hearing is a black screen with white print “Glen Jia”. The audio is bad. You don’t know who is speaking. Meeting starts with someone talking of the push for getting the story poles back. Someone talks of a petition that wants to make story poles a Requirement. Someone talks of how important it is for the community to have story poles. Someone wants to know how the County functioned for a 100 years with story poles and then they could just disappear. Someone wonders why the CDRC shelved the push for story poles 2 years ago. The County representative, I’m assuming Camille Leung, says that they are working on it in their internal meetings. Revised rules are coming, the CDRC will see them before they go to planners...

The same discussion is repeated year after year without action.

July 2024. The CDRC has, after 4 years of ongoing discussions, and several members coming and going, not a **Requirement**, but a “new and improved” **Policy** for demonstration of scale on the Coastside:

“An applicant may choose their preferred method to demonstrate that the standards are satisfied. The County and community prefer the use of story poles as they would demonstrate scale and height in a 3-dimensional manner in the subject location, where neighbors can experience the proposed mass from their respective properties. For smaller scale projects, such as small homes or ground-floor additions, or less visible projects, alternative methods to demonstrate scale, as discussed in this policy, may be used.”

I am sure County lawyers looked at the text. Could they tell me if it is not ‘implied’ in the last sentence that a logical reading would mean that buildings adding a second story or houses building two or more stories “should” demonstrate size with story poles?

Half Moon Bay has story poles, the unincorporated Coastsides doesn't. Clearly, someone doesn't want story poles and they are winning. But if it is not the CDRC, not the County, not the Community, who is it?

The Half Moon Bay Policy can require story poles, they just put in a “shall” in the wording.

Resolution C-11
Adopted September 6, 2011

CITY OF HALF MOON BAY
STORY POLE POLICY

1. Story Poles shall be installed prior to the approval of a Coastal Development Permit for any proposed development that:
 - a) requires either an exception or variance; or
 - b) is located in an area that is substantially undeveloped; or
 - c) is located in an area designated as any of the Visual Resources Areas defined in Chapter 18.37 of the Zoning Code.
2. The applicant shall have Story Poles installed on the site of the proposed development no less than six days prior to the initial public hearing for the project and they shall remain in place until the designated appeal period has expired.
3. The applicant shall ensure that the Story Poles accurately depict the full extent of the proposed structure. The total height of the proposed structure delineated by the Story Poles shall be measured from the existing grade and shall include both the height of the building pad (if possible) and the height of the structure proposed to be constructed on the pad. Netting shall be placed around the perimeter of the proposed building footprint at the elevation of the proposed building pad and shall simulate the proposed roofline as shown in Attachment A.
4. The applicant or an authorized representative shall submit to the Planning Department an affidavit certifying that the Story Poles' depiction of the height, foundation, footprint and location of the proposed structure on the site are true and accurate, together with photographs of the Story Poles once installed.
5. The Planning Director may waive or modify these requirements where the installation of Story Poles would unduly interfere with the use of the property or where other circumstances would render the installation of Story Poles impractical.

David Alumbaugh started a petition in April 2023: <https://www.change.org/p/story-poles-requirement-change-to-smc-coastside-demonstration-of-project-scale-policy-b636408f-9ef1-4de2-8050-fac51c3fc7f2>

I made an ipetion in August: <https://www.ipetitions.com/petition/bring-back-the-story-poles>

If the County Planning Department and the CDRC are in agreement that story poles are preferred, they need to start the public outreach that they say is required for a Requirement of Story Poles. Camille Leung needs to assist the CDRC outlining what it is they have to do if they really want a story pole requirement. If this is ignored you are not respecting the Coastsides Community. The last 4 years are just a frustrating example of failure to act.

The September, 2024 CDRC hearing has 3 projects with their demonstrations of scale. None of them “small” or “ground floor addition”. So how is the July Policy working?



779 San Carlos, EG. New 3 story.



167 Avenue Portola, EG. New garage, addition to first floor, new second story. Architect Katie Kostiuk. Non conforming use permit required for 7' front setback, instead of 20'.



1900 East St, Montara. New 3 story single family residence with detached ADU.

(The previous 2024 agendas and projects can not be found on the website. Also the rooster of members isn't up to date, Rebecca Kaitlin is supposedly not on the CDRC any longer, but it says she's serving till 2026.)