



Community Development Committee STAFF REPORT

TO: Community Development Committee **DATE:** April 6, 2026

DEPARTMENT: Community Development

PREPARED BY: Marie Jones Consulting

PRESENTER: Marie Jones

AGENDA TITLE: Receive Report and Provide Recommendation to City Council Regarding Various Options to Improve Community Awareness of Larger Pending Development Projects in Fort Bragg

RECOMMENDED ACTION

Receive report and provide recommendation to City Council regarding various options to improve community awareness of larger pending development projects in Fort Bragg, including:

1. Require a project sign on sites proposed for new, larger development projects in both the coastal and inland zones; and or
 2. Revise the design review process to require story poles for new, larger development projects throughout the city (coastal and inland zone); and/or
 3. Revise Coastal General Plan Map CD-1 to include more areas within the coastal zone where a visual resources study is required as part of the Coastal Development Permit process.
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BACKGROUND

In 2024 and 2025, the City Council and Planning Commission held a total of five public hearings to consider approval of an 83-unit multifamily project with 1,000 sf of retail space and 2,450 sf of visitor-serving accommodations at 1151 South Main Street. The project was appealed twice to the Coastal Commission by neighbors and Paul Clark. As a consequence of the first appeal to the Coastal Commission, Coastal Commission staff recommended some modifications to the proposed project to include more visitor-serving uses and a public access route through the site. The project was modified to include additional visitor-serving uses and the public access route through the site. Subsequently, the Planning Commission recommended approval, and the City Council approved the project again. On the second appeal by the neighbors, the Coastal Commission denied the appeal and affirmed the approvals of all permits for the project.

The City complied with all statutory notice and procedural requirements for the project. A

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visual analysis was not required for the 83-unit mixed-use project because it is not required by either the Coastal General Plan , the CLUDC, or state law. However, some community members have requested that the City change its zoning code to include more methods to increase community awareness of a proposed development project prior to the public hearing.

At the March 2, 2026, CDC meeting, the Community Development Committee recommended that this item be returned to the CDC with more details about the following three approaches to increase awareness regarding pending large development projects.

1. Require a project sign on sites proposed for new, larger development projects in both the coastal and inland zones; and or
2. Revise the design review process to require story poles for new, larger development projects throughout the city (coastal and inland zone); and/or
3. Revise Coastal General Plan Map CD-1 to include more areas within the coastal zone where a visual resources study is required as part of the Coastal Development Permit process.

The above approaches can be adopted by the City Council and implemented individually or in a combination of one or more approaches.

During the CDC meeting, the Community Development Committee agreed that the City should not require a project sign or story poles for small projects which are ministerial (requiring only a building permit), as there is no public hearing for such projects and the City has no ability to deny them so long as they comply with the zoning ordinance. The CDC also requested that the consultant identify an appropriate height and size trigger for the story pole and project signage options; these have been included in the analysis below.

ANALYSIS

There are three different issues of concern, and each is analyzed separately below and includes: 1) providing adequate notice for larger development projects, 2) providing a visual representation on site of the height and bulk of a proposed project, and 3) protecting visual resources under the Coastal Act.

Issue 1. Provide Adequate Notice for Large Development Projects.

Currently, both zoning codes require the following notice process for projects that are scheduled for a public hearing for any of the following permits: Coastal Development Permit, Use Permit, Design Review Permit, Variance, Rezoning, and/or Subdivision.

1. The applicant must post an on-site 8X11 Notice of Pending Permit when an application is first submitted to the City. This notice happens at the very beginning application stage for a project.
2. At least ten days before the public hearing, the following notices are distributed:

- a. Public Hearing Notice is mailed to all property owners within 300 feet of a proposed project, and in the Coastal Zone, the notice is also mailed to all residents within 100 feet of a proposed project.
- b. A Public Hearing Notice is posted on site, on the City’s website, and at the Notice Kiosk by City Hall.
- c. A Public Hearing Notice is published in the paper.
- d. A Notice of the Public Hearing is emailed to all individuals who have requested such notification, as well as to all people who have signed up for the “notify me” option on the City’s website.

The CDC requested staff develop a recommendation to require a “Story Board” or “Project Sign/Banner” that is larger and describes the project in more detail with visual depictions of the project.

Options:

1. Continue utilizing current noticing requirements for all projects regardless of size.
2. For any project of more than 24 feet in height or a building of more than 5,000 sf of floor area, require placement of a 3’ by 4’ project sign or banner within four weeks of application submittal. The project sign/banner should
 - a. Include the project name, project description, and an elevation of the project (front view).
 - b. Be posted on temporary posts that do not require on-site digging, such that the top of the project sign is posted at 6 feet.
 - c. Be visible and adjacent to the sidewalk or road.
 - d. Be sighted so that it does not block traffic sightlines (e.g., not within 20 feet of a driveway, road, or street intersection), or otherwise result in any dangerous or unsafe condition.



Examples of development signs from other communities.

Issue 2. Provide an On-Site Visual Representation of a Proposed Project.

An on-site visual representation of a project could be achieved either as part of the project sign/banner described above or by providing on-site project story poles.

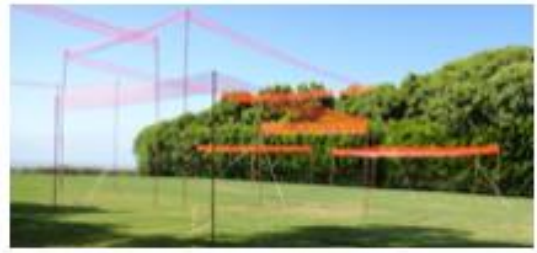
Currently, story poles are only required in Fort Bragg for a visual resource analysis under the Coastal Act. They are not required in the inland portion of the City or in the Coastal Zone, where visual resources are not a concern (as defined by the City's General Plan). Story poles are required to create an accurate visual representation of the project for the Visual Analysis of the project. However, technology has progressed such that an accurate visual representation of how a project would affect views to and along the coast can be created without story poles. The cost of constructing story poles is nominal and would typically not be more than \$2,000, depending on the size and complexity of the buildings.

Options:

1. For any project of more than 24 feet in height or a building of more than 5,000 sf of floor area, the City could require that the 3' X 4' sign/banner include accurate elevations photo-shopped into photos of the site from all public viewing locations, illustrating how the project will look.
2. For any project of more than 24 feet in height or a building of more than 5,000 sf, the City could require Story poles in both the inland and coastal zones. Story poles could be required as part of the Design Review process or as part of the noticing process. However, Story poles are of limited value for the design review process for multifamily projects because subjective opinions, such as that a project is "too tall" or "too large," are not permissible under State law for Design Review of multifamily projects. Story poles could be useful for commercial projects and the commercial component of a mixed-use residential/commercial project. Story pole requirements could include the following:
 - a. Story poles can illustrate the corners of each proposed structure.
 - b. Story poles can also illustrate the roof line of each proposed structure.
 - c. Story poles should not require digging or permanent placement of posts, due to conflicts with the Coastal Act.
 - d. Story poles should be placed a safe distance from power lines, other utilities, and hazards (driveways, existing trees, etc.). If such placement is not feasible than story poles should not be required for the areas of the site with safety concerns.
 - e. Story poles should not be required where they are infeasible or of limited value such as where subjective standards are impermissible. For example, if an existing building, which is slated for demolition, prohibits the installation of story poles or a multifamily residential project where only objective design standards are permissible.

- f. Story poles should be placed six weeks before the first public hearing and removed immediately after the public hearing.

If the City requires story poles as part of Design Review, such a change would be easier to implement in both the Inland and Coastal Zone. Design Review is a City process and does not implement the Coastal Act, so it does not involve the Coastal Commission. Therefore, it would be easier to process an LCP amendment that includes story pole requirements as part of Design Review, as the City would not have to prepare an overall visual resource analysis to add new locations to the Visual Resources map in the Coastal General Plan.



Issue 3: Expand Visual Resource Protections to New Areas

Visual resources are one of 5 coastal resources that are protected by the Coastal Act; other resources include: archaeological and cultural resources, biological and wetland resources, coastal dependent uses, and public access.

An expansion of the area for which a visual resource analysis is required would make the development of some areas more difficult and, in some cases, reduce the development potential of some parcels. If the City Council decides to amend Map CD-1, the City would need to prepare a comprehensive visual resource study of the added parcels as part of an LCP amendment to the Coastal Commission. The visual resource analysis would provide the legal basis to make changes to Map CD-1 and thereby eliminate some property rights that currently exist. The City will need to secure the services of an architectural or planning firm to complete a comprehensive visual analysis.

Currently, the Coastal General Plan includes the following key visual analysis policy:

Policy CD-1.3: Visual Analysis Required. A Visual Analysis shall be required for all development located in areas designated "Potential Scenic Views Toward the Ocean or the Noyo River" on Map CD-1, except development listed below.

Map CD-1 of the Coastal General Plan is the key determinant of whether or not a visual analysis is required by the Coastal General Plan. If a parcel is identified in Map CD-1 as having "potential scenic views to the ocean," a visual analysis is required.

Additionally, under the CDP application requirements (17.71.045 D) of the CLUDC, Visual Analysis is only required if a parcel is designated as potentially scenic in Map CD-1 as follows:

9. Visual Analysis. For applications for development located in areas designated "Potential Scenic Views Toward the Ocean or the Noyo River" on Map CD-1 of the Coastal General Plan (except development listed in subsection (B) of Policy CD-1.3 of the Coastal General Plan), a visual analysis as required by Chapter 17.50.070 of this Development Code.

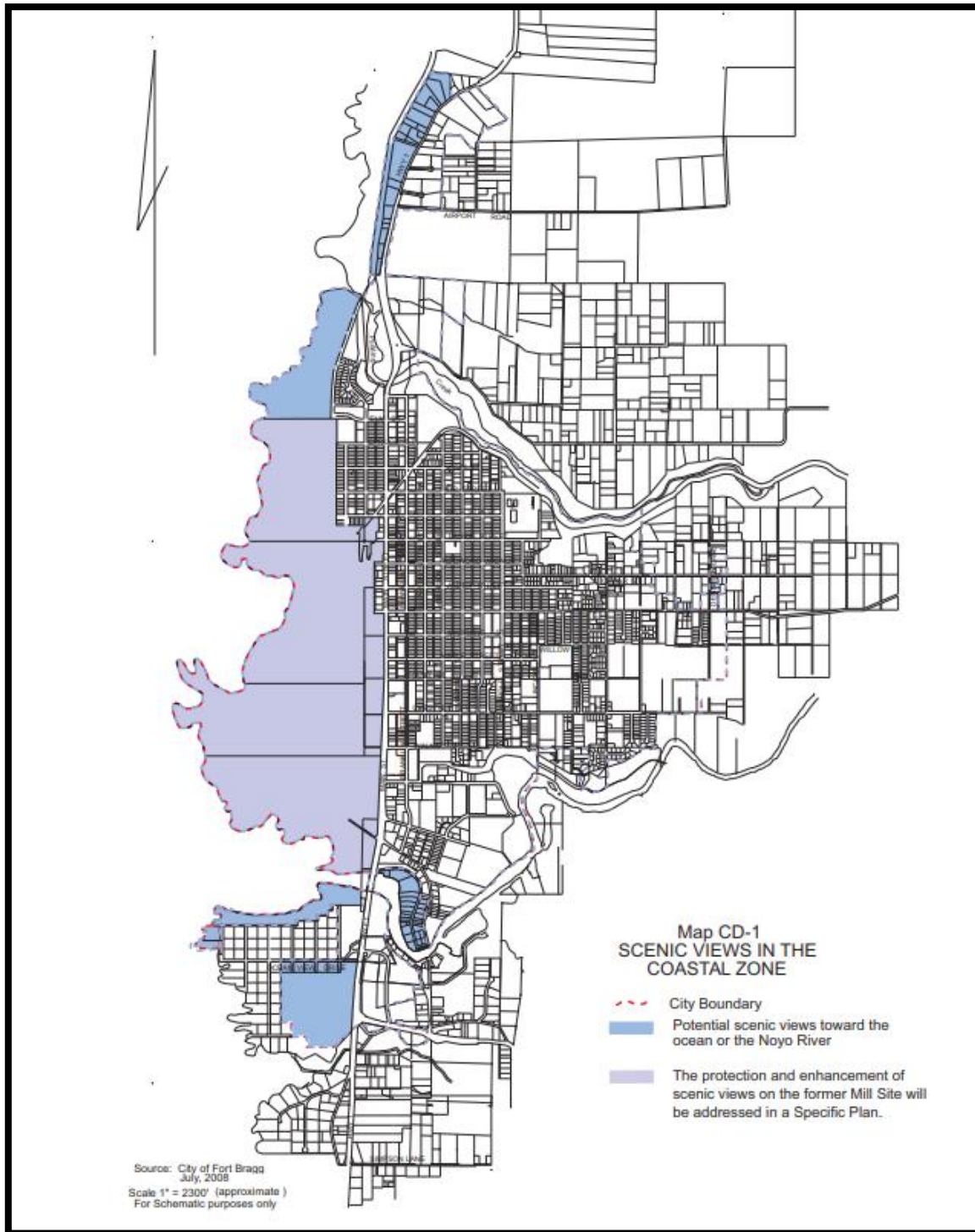
As illustrated in Map CD-1 below, Visual Resource Analysis and story poles are required for development on parcels:

- On the Noyo River flats (although weirdly most of the indicated parcels are not within City limits),
- South of Ocean Drive, west of Highway 1, and
- North of Pudding Creek, west of Highway 1.

The following locations are not included on Map CD-1:

- Parcels located east of Highway 1 and between the Noyo River and Highway 20,
- Parcels located to the west of Highway 1, south of the Noyo River Bridge, and north of Ocean Drive, and
- All parcels west of Highway 1 between Glass Beach Drive and Pudding Creek.

Therefore, if the City Council decides to provide direction to expand the number of parcels that require a visual resource analysis, adding some of the above locations to Map CD-1 would be one place to start.



The following visual resource policies apply to development north of Pudding Creek.

Policy CD-1.12 Maintain Unobstructed Views of the Ocean: Require new development north of Pudding Creek to leave unblocked views to the ocean from Highway One.

Policy CD-1.13: Retain Views North of Pudding Creek. New development north of Pudding Creek and west of Main Street on parcels with total frontage of more than 135 feet, on either the Haul Road or Main Street as determined by the Planning Commission, shall be required to leave a minimum of 30 percent of the project's total parcel frontage free of view-blocking development. The area free of view-blocking development shall not include narrow passageways between buildings on the site and shall be concentrated.

Policy CD-1.14 All new development (including decks and balconies) north of Pudding Creek shall be set back at least 30 feet from the edge of the Old Haul Road and shall be consistent with all other applicable LCP setback requirements.

It is noteworthy that the City Council did not choose to apply this level of visual resource protection to other areas of town. The City Council could decide to add specific policies to protect visual resources on the Mill Site and south of the Noyo River.

ENVIRONMENTAL ANALYSIS:

An LCP amendment is exempt from CEQA per State law. Any amendments to the City's Inland General Plan or Inland zoning code would require CEQA determination.

STRATEGIC PLAN/COUNCIL PRIORITIES/GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY

Not applicable.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

The CDC discussed this item at its meeting on March 2, 2026.

ALTERNATIVES:

Provide further direction.

Take no action.

ATTACHMENTS:

None

NOTIFICATION:

The following "Notify Me" lists:

- Economic Development Planning
- Fort Bragg Downtown Businesses
- Tourism and Marketing