

Town of Portola Valley General Plan

Trails and Paths Element

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Trails and Paths Element

Introduction

3200 Many activities may be provided for by a network of trails and paths in the planning area. Children reach schools, shops and after-school play areas by bicycle and on foot, and they walk to bus stops. Strollers take short neighborhood walks, especially when the way is safe and pleasant. Horseback riders, hikers and runners take longer recreational trips and seek out the more remote areas. An occasional organized group sets off for out-of-town destinations. The hiker escapes to the most undeveloped and rugged places as do children. A nearby coach sends a track team to Skyline for training. Bicycle enthusiasts and runners from nearby and within the town travel along flat shoulders and paths for health and sport. Some Portola Valley residents bicycle to work. Increasingly, riders of mountain bikes seek dirt trails for travel to local destinations as well as for strenuous exercise in steep terrain. A school class walks to a select site for a nature lesson. A rider or a hiker stops at a scenic spot, a destination that has spurred the person on, to rest. People who pass one another at a leisurely pace, stop and chat. And those who use and appreciate the open spaces of the town should take on a protective attitude and seek to protect these areas against all manner of destruction—from fire to inappropriate development or use.

3200a The trails and paths element serves as a general guide for the development of a comprehensive system of trails and paths for the town. Standards for the construction of trails and paths are found in the “Trail and Path Construction & Maintenance Standards” adopted by the Town Council. Limitations on the use of trails and paths are found in the “Portola Valley Trail Usage” matrix adopted by the Town Council.

3201 The trails and paths element includes objectives, principles, and standards; a description; and plan diagrams. The trails and paths element provides a guide to

establishing a free and unimpeded network that will allow and promote trail and path use.

- 3202 The gradual development of the trail and path system will be accomplished through the subdivision process, through the application of regulations included in the town's subdivision ordinance at the time land is subdivided, through public programs of acquisition and development, and through cooperative private efforts.
- 3203 The trails and paths shown on the trails and paths plan diagrams (located in a pocket at the end of this general plan) include those presently developed and those proposed on public rights-of-way or easements, together with new trails in locations where no right-of-way or easement exists at present. Some trail and path routes are indicated as being on or adjacent to public streets or easements or following property lines, and such locations are intended to be controlling. Where proposed trails or paths traverse unsubdivided lands, routes are intended to indicate general location and could be secured even with considerable variation in location and alignment.
- 3204 Upon adoption of this plan, no trail or path shall be opened or developed on an existing trail or path easement, except in the normal subdivision process or conditional use permit process, without first: 1) determining if the proposal is in conformity with the general plan, and 2) holding a public hearing after giving notice to the owners of land abutting on such proposed trail, or path, or easement. Town council action on such matters will be taken only after giving due consideration to the facts and opinions presented at the public hearing.
- 3204 a Trail and path easements shall not be established on developed properties without the property owners' consent except in association with an application for a conditional use permit or a subdivision.
- 3204 b Development of trails and paths should be in accordance with the construction standards and inspection procedures previously adopted by the town. The town should give consideration to formulating maintenance standards and rules for trail and path users to provide additional guidance to the maintenance and use of the trails and paths system. Plantings in the public right of way shall not interfere with existing or planned public rails, paths or streets and shall be selected from the Town's Native Plant List.
- 3204 c It is recognized that from time to time trails and paths not shown on the trails and paths element diagram will be appropriate as a part of a subdivision or conditional use permit approval process in order to meet the needs of persons traveling by foot, horse or bike within the town in locations that are safe. These trails will normally be expected to provide connections to the trail system shown on the trails

and paths element plan diagram. Any such trail or path shall be in keeping with the objectives, goals and principles of this element.

- 3204 d In the event the town desires to develop a trail within an existing public road right of way, the town council shall, after having received a recommendation from the trails committee, hold a public hearing before designating the trail for development.
- 3205 The trails and paths element proposes a comprehensive system of trails and paths. This system provides for horseback riding, hiking for pleasure, walking to schools and other community facilities, and bicycling for pleasure as well as to and from local destinations. The more major trails and paths also provide for travel through the planning area, and for residents to travel from the town to nearby destinations. The character and quality of the trail and path system is intended to have high scenic value throughout because of the low density rural character of the community and the town's dedication to furthering the concept of Portola Valley as an open space preserve in the Midpeninsula.
- 3206 A portion of the trail system lies within the boundaries of land owned by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District. The trails are designed, built and maintained by the district. Nonetheless, the district consults with the town as it develops its trail system. The plan diagram shows some trails the town has added as suggestions to the district.
- 3207 An extensive trail system is shown on the Stanford lands in the town's sphere of influence but within Santa Clara County. The diagram shows the major components of a suggested trail system, most of which is in existence. Should this area be further developed, appropriate modifications and additions to the system should be made. For instance, a recreational trail would be desirable around Felt Lake. It is recognized, however, that the land is privately owned and controlled and public use is dependent on the permission of Stanford University.

Definitions

- 3208
1. **Hiking Trail** – A way suitable for hiking not generally used by horses. Generally unsurfaced.
 2. **Equestrian/Hiking Trail** – A way suitable for horseback riding also used by hikers. Generally unsurfaced. Equestrian/hiking trails or segments may be used for off-road bicycles upon determination of the town council.
 3. **Pedestrian Path** – A way suitable for pedestrians and minor bicycling. Has an all-weather surface. Not open to horses.

4. **Bicycle Path** – A way suitable for bicycling and for pedestrians. Has an all-weather surface. Not open to horses.
5. **Multiuse Corridor** – A major link within the trails and paths system within which is located a facility(ies) suitable for horseback riding, hiking, bicycling, pedestrians and similar users. At a minimum, the corridor shall include an all-weather surface suitable for bicycling, pedestrians and similar users.
6. **Bicycle Route** – A street where special attention is given to providing safety for bicyclists.
7. **Bicycle Lane** – A paved border of a road separated by a stripe or other means from the motor vehicle lanes. For use by bicycles with auto parking prohibited except for emergencies.
8. **Through Trail or Path** – A facility passing through Portola Valley, but which can also be used by residents for shorter trips within the town.
9. **Local Trail or Path** – A facility for trips within Portola Valley or affording connections to through trails or paths.
10. **Trailside Preserves** – Small areas generally near or on trails or paths accessible to users where unique, attractive, or valuable views, groves, or other natural features may be enjoyed or conserved.

Objectives

- 3209
1. To provide a system of trails, paths and bicycle routes and lanes to:
 - a. provide recreation, particularly scenic, quiet, leisurely neighborhood walks and rides;
 - b. furnish easy access to trails from individual properties;
 - c. permit safe, pleasant travel between parts of the community;
 - d. connect local areas within the town to through trails and paths within and adjoining the town;
 - e. create opportunities for nature and conservation education;
 - f. provide for solitary activities such as meditation and contemplation;

- g. recognize the wide range of users including hikers, equestrians, road and mountain bikers, in-line skaters, those in wheelchairs and those using other suitable non-motorized vehicles;
 - h. provide safe and convenient facilities for use by children in reaching local schools, the library and playing fields; and
 - i. ensure that such facilities are designed and used so as to avoid habitat degradation.
2. To create a tradition of access to and use of open space so that citizens will not willingly relinquish these rights under the pressure of urbanization. Access to and use of open space should be circumscribed to the extent necessary to prevent undue interference with use and enjoyment of private property.

Principles

- 3210
- 1. General
 - a. Whenever possible, trails and paths should be separated from auto parking areas and roads, particularly those carrying heavy traffic.
 - b. Plantings in public trail easements or public road rights of way shall be of native plants and trees and shall not interfere with the use of the easements for public purposes such as equestrians, hikers, pedestrians, bicyclists and runners.
 - c. When the town determines that an existing public trail easement or a public road right of way is to be used for public purposes such as equestrians, hikers, pedestrians, bicyclists and runners, such use(s) shall take precedence over private plantings and improvements in said easement or right of way.
 - d. Whenever possible, trails and paths should follow creeks and canyons, scenic ridges, and other routes of natural beauty and avoid developed properties.
 - e. The system should provide a variety of local recreational loop trips convenient to residents.
 - f. High usage may require separate alignment of facilities, but where use is moderate and other conditions allow, facilities may be combined.

- g. Routing, construction and use of trails and paths should be done with great care so that they:
 - 1) are designed to adapt to the existing conditions to the extent possible while still adhering to the intent, if not the detail, of engineering standards;
 - 2) disturb the natural conditions of terrain and vegetation as little as possible;
 - 3) provide a variety of experiences for users;
 - 4) provide convenient, safe passage;
 - 5) minimize intrusion on privacy in residential areas;
 - 6) encourage use without incurring excessive maintenance costs.
- h. The number of road crossings, particularly along thoroughfares, should be at a minimum, and where necessary, crossings should be located, designed and marked to provide maximum safety.
- i. The junctions of trails and paths with roads should be limited in number and designed and located to minimize over use by people arriving in motor vehicles.
- j. Through trails, paths and bicycle routes should connect to those in adjoining jurisdictions, and within the town special care should be taken to minimize intrusion into residential areas.
- k. Through routes should be marked so that they can be easily followed and so that deviation onto local trails will be minimal. Markers should be unobtrusive.
- l. Fences, warning signs and gates to discourage wandering off trails and paths onto nearby properties should be used only where absolutely necessary. The emphasis should be put instead on routing trails and paths to avoid such problems with reliance on vegetation barriers and well-built, well-maintained and well-marked facilities to keep users on trails.
- m. The trails and paths of the town are not to be used by motor vehicles. Design should discourage or prevent such use where feasible even if it creates some inconvenience to legitimate users.

- n. Stopping places should be provided at scenic spots (trailside preserves) that can easily be reached on foot.
- o. Trails and paths should skirt rather than traverse grasslands to avoid scarring and creating erosion problems.
- p. Trails shall be designed and constructed so as to minimize changes in the natural flow of water across the land.
- q. Residents are encouraged to assist in maintaining trails
- r. In locating and designing trail heads, attention should be given to minimizing the need for automobile access. Where such access is necessary, the location and design should minimize the impact of traffic and parking on nearby residences.
- s. Dogs, when permitted by town council policy on public trails, shall be on leashes.
- t. In general, the trail and path system has been designed and should be developed so as to minimize the use of non-permeable surfaces.
- u. Controls on the use of trails that may be established by town council policy should seek to prevent undue interference with use and enjoyment by users of the trails.
- v. Where culs-de-sac are served by trails or paths, the ends of the culs-de-sac should be connected by the same type of facility when feasible.

2. Hiking Trails

- a. Because hiking trails and equestrian trails may require different grades and alignments, separate hiking and equestrian trails, especially in steep, unstable terrain, may be warranted.
- b. Part of the hiking trail system should be constructed so as to provide for short, easy neighborhood strolling.

3. Equestrian/Hiking Trails

- a. Equestrian/hiking trails should be routed to serve community stables and residential areas where horsekeeping on lots is permitted.
- b. Trail design should be such that horses are encouraged to remain on or near trails in developed parts of parks, shopping areas, school yards, and other such places where they could interfere with pedestrians and

other users. Hitching racks should be provided at the limits of such areas to discourage passage through the areas.

- c. Where equestrian/hiking trails cross driveways, non-slip surfaces shall be required.
 - d. Bicycles should only be allowed on equestrian/hiking trails where width, grade and sight distance provide sufficient safety and the town council, after considering concerns of habitat and erosion, has designated by policy that the specific segment of trail may be used by bicycles.
 - e. In the vicinity of schools, where children typically ride bikes to school, segments of trails should be studied with the objective of allowing bicycle use. The town council may make this decision. Such segments may have a suitable all-weather surface applied.
4. Multiuse Corridors
- a. Because corridors are intended to serve a wide variety of users, care must be taken in the design of facilities to recognize the special needs of each user group.
 - b. The exact location and design of the facility(ies) in the corridor should be tailored to respect conditions of the natural setting, including slopes, trees and drainages.
5. Pedestrian Paths, Bicycle Paths, Bicycle Routes, and Bicycle Lanes
- a. In the less precipitous parts of the town, multiuse corridors, pedestrian paths and bicycle paths, routes and lanes should provide convenient and safe access to community facilities, particularly to schools.
 - b. Pedestrian paths should be provided where needed along busy streets to serve school bus stops.
 - c. The pavement of short culs-de-sac may be used in lieu of paths and bicycle lanes if they provide safe bicycling and walking, but equestrian/hiking trails should not be on the pavement.
 - d. Bicycle routes should be provided within town limits on the paved shoulders of most, if not all, arterials where high speed bicycling is anticipated, and provided elsewhere as necessary for more local use, especially to serve children going to school. Outside the town limits, bicycle lanes and bicycle routes should be provided.

- e. Bicycle routes, to the extent possible, should have striped shoulders to indicate the area preferred for bicycle use and receive scheduled maintenance.

Standards

- 3211 1. Safe facilities should provide access for children to schools within at least the following distances from schools as measured by the shortest traveled route:

	<i>Pedestrian Facility</i>	<i>Bicycle Facility</i>
Kindergarten - Grade 3	3/4 mile	1-1/4 miles
Grades 4 to 8	1 mile	2 miles

Description

- 3212 The facilities intended to meet the needs of hikers, pedestrians, equestrians and bicyclists are shown on the trails and paths plan diagram. This diagram shows a system of through trails for the entire planning area and a system of local trails and paths in the valley floor developed portion. In the large undeveloped hillside part of the town, it is recommended that as development plans are prepared the routes shown should be refined and a more extensive local trail and path system developed. Street shoulders should be indicated as potential trails in lieu of a comprehensive sidewalk system.
- 3213 The connections of through trails to bordering jurisdictions are indicated. Hikers, pedestrians and equestrians from outside the town are expected to be relatively few – largely residents from near the town limits. Bicyclists, because they can travel further and faster than walkers and riders, are expected to be the principal visitors. To discourage use of local trails by motorists leaving their cars, no auto parking facilities should be provided adjacent to any trail, except as may be required to serve a local facility or as may be necessary to permit reasonable use and enjoyment of lands of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.
- 3214 The diagram does not indicate through routes as distinct from the local routes, nor does it distinguish what can be called main routes. Main routes would include the through trails and paths and most heavily used and essential parts of the local routes, and would be the routes most clearly a public responsibility. The designation of the main routes and a study of maintenance cost for them is needed.
- 3215 While the trails and paths element plan diagram shows a system of trails and paths in the town, as proposed subdivisions or conditional use permits are reviewed by

the town it may be appropriate to add trails and paths to provide safety for pedestrians, equestrians and bicyclists. Such additions are consistent with the trails and paths element as long as they meet the objectives, principles and standards of this element and are approved pursuant to public hearings for which affected property owners have been given notice.

Hiking Trails

- 3216 Equestrian/hiking trails will be used by hikers in all parts of the town but the hiking trails are limited to several areas where environments are particularly conducive to hiking and where hikers can generally find a “hiking only” experience.

Equestrian/Hiking Trails

- 3217 An extensive system of equestrian/hiking trails exists in the developed part of the town. It is primarily a roadside system on the road rights-of-way and adjacent private easements. The plan proposes only minor changes and additions to these existing trails to improve hazardous situations and secure the few opportunities that remain for good off-road riding and hiking in natural surroundings. In Westridge, all trails except in Unit #10 (Escobar Road area) are private and are not maintained by the Town.
- 3218 Some of the best equestrian and hiking opportunities in the eastern portion of the town are outside the town limits but largely within the planning area – along the floor of Portola Valley to Searsville Lake, along San Francisquito Creek to Los Trancos Creek, and along Los Trancos Creek. Further development of a permanent riding system in these valley-bottom areas will be dependent upon cooperation with other jurisdictions and the major property owner, Stanford University. The integrity of Jasper Ridge and the Searsville Lake marsh needs to be protected in order to preserve these areas for research and wildlife; therefore, no trails or paths should penetrate these areas.
- 3219 In the western undeveloped part of the town, two major traversing equestrian/hiking trails are proposed. The upper trail would be an integral part of Skyline Scenic Corridor. A mid-level trail is proposed, but the final location will be dependent on future negotiations with land owners. Also, connections from the valley floor to the Skyline are proposed.

Multiuse Corridors

- 3220 These facilities are intended for a wide variety of users and have been likened by some to a “country lane.” With this design, separate facilities are not needed for different types of users. A major route is proposed along Portola Road from Alpine Road to the crosswalk opposite Wyndham Way. In addition to other users, this connection would serve as a principal source of equestrian traffic since it is directly

accessible to the Springdown Farm Boarding Stable and close to the intersection of Westridge Drive with a trail connection serving Westridge. A second route is proposed at the base of the western hills starting north of the town center and extending south to Alpine Road. This second route is intended to provide an all-weather level route for use by residents to enjoy open spaces and bypass the more heavily travelled facilities along Portola Road. A third route is along Arastradero Road.

Pedestrian Paths, Bicycle Paths, Bicycle Routes and Bicycle Lanes

- 3221 The pedestrian path system is limited in extent. It provides permanent, safe, reasonably direct access to schools for children living nearby – the prime function of the paths. The system is limited because of the difficulty of providing paths in already developed areas, the desire to avoid the more urban aspects and costs of a complete walkway system. Improved bus loading areas and shelters as supported by the school district are recommended. Equestrian/hiking trails, upon approval by the town council, may be used for bicycle use, and when necessary to allow year-round use, an all-weather surface may be added.
- 3222 While it is the intention to minimize the use of asphalt in the trail and path system, the use of asphalt for the heavily used path along Alpine Road is warranted to serve the needs of bikes, pedestrians, strollers, wheelchairs and similar uses. An alternate all-weather surface may be used instead of asphalt if such surface has been adopted by the town as a standard suitable for the users cited.
- 3223 Bicycle paths and bicycle routes provide for local trips to school and community facilities and for recreational loop trips. Most facilities proposed are restricted to the valley floor.
- 3224 In addition to the bicycle paths, the plan shows bicycle routes on Alpine Road and Portola Road inside the town and bicycle lanes outside the town. These two roads form two sides of the heavily used “triangle” which also includes Sandhill Road. The “triangle” accommodates bicycle groups or clubs as well as individuals. It is well known to those in the bicycling world. Also indicated are bicycle lanes along Skyline Scenic Boulevard where they can form part of a major regional facility.
- 3225-3230 (Not used.)

Plan Diagrams

- 3231 Plan Diagram A shows existing and proposed facilities within the town and is included separately in a pocket following this general plan.

3232 Plan Diagram B shows existing and proposed facilities outside of the town but within the town's sphere of influence and is enclosed separately in a pocket following this general plan.

Trails and Paths Element Appendix 1: Implementation of the Trails and Paths Element

Actions to date:

1. The town adopted trail and path dedication requirements in the subdivision ordinance.
2. The town adopted trail and path construction standards.
3. The town has a trails committee that oversees and undertakes trail designs and maintenance.
4. The town has developed some trails not otherwise developed by subdividers as a part of their subdivisions.
5. The federal government provided the funds for the paved path that extends along Alpine Road from Junipero Serra Boulevard to Portola Road.

Future actions:

1. The trails and paths diagram should be completely reviewed and revised as appropriate to reflect changes to the system that have taken place and that are anticipated.
2. The town should indicate the routes that are to constitute the public system and determine the construction costs where public construction is required and annual costs of maintenance. The analysis should help indicate whether the system is approximately in balance with reasonable public expenditures (town, county, state and federal). Methods of obtaining voluntary maintenance should continue to be pursued, such as having specific organizations (user groups) assume responsibility for routine maintenance under town supervision.
3. The town should set project priorities. Securing easements in critical places where they cannot be obtained by regulation is of first importance, especially where the chance of donation seems possible. In general, projects selected should try to serve the maximum number of residents while trying to balance the interests of walkers, riders and bicyclists. Worthy of first consideration is improving the pedestrian path system for school children, including attempting to eliminate hazardous road crossings.
4. The town should proceed project by project to implement the plan. Projects should be detailed on the 1 inch equals 200 feet town base maps and care should be taken to follow the construction, route selection and inspection procedures as adopted by the town in the trail and path standards.

5. The location of new trail and path easements should be added annually to a master set of trail and path maps on file at Portola Valley Town Hall.
6. A record of construction and maintenance costs incurred by private developers and the town should be kept to guide future work to build and maintain the system. A town trail inspector aided by volunteers may appropriately do this work.