

TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY
Conservation Committee Meeting
September 26, 2023
7:00 PM

Catherine Magill, Chair
Judith Murphy, Vice Chair
Teresa Coleman, Secretary
Nona Chiariello, Member
Paul Heiple, Member
Marianne Plunder, Member
Megan Richards, Member
Dieter Walz, Member
Joerg Zimmerman, Member

Amended agenda- added Item 7 a.

REGULAR MEETING

HISTORIC SCHOOLHOUSE- 765 PORTOLA RD. – PORTOLA VALLEY, CA

REMOTE MEETING ADVISORY: On March 1, 2023, all committees in Portola Valley will return to conducting in-person meetings. A Zoom link will be provided for members of the public to participate remotely; however, the Town cannot guarantee there will be no technical issues with the software during the meeting. For best public participation results, attending the meeting in-person is advised.

ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact the Town Clerk at (650) 851-1700 or by email at towncenter@portolavalley.net. Notification 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the Town to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting.

VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION VIA ZOOM

To access the meeting by computer:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/88545377601?pwd=aXbOjC2lMGTCdmDOLbJmOjB4zSQJaa.1>

Webinar ID: 885 4537 7601

Passcode: 028812

To access the meeting by phone:

1-669-900-6833 or 1-888-788-0099 (toll free)

*Mute/Unmute – Press *6 / Raise Hand – Press *9*

- 1. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL**
- 2. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA**
Speakers' time is limited to three minutes.
- 3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**
 - a. August 22, 2023
- 4. SITE PERMITS:**
 - a. 127 Pinon (Appendix A)
- 5. TREE PERMITS:**
 - a. None
- 6. OLD BUSINESS:**
 - a. Discuss Dittrichia presence throughout Town and options to manage
 - b. Oversight of Town-owned properties - Updates (Committee)
 - i. Frog pond – (Zimmerman)
 - ii. Town Center (Richards)
 - c. Committee / Town Cooperation
 - i. Public Works (Magill)
 - ii. Open Space Committee (Chiariello)
 - iii. Wildfire Preparedness Committee (Chiariello)
 - iv. Trails and Paths (Coleman)
 - d. CC Routine Town Communications
 - i. Kudos (Plunder)

- ii. Backyard Habitat (Plunder)
- iii. Tip of the Month (Magill)
- iv. What's Blooming Now? (Magill)
- e. Review discussion in Committee of Committee meeting (9/20/23) (Magill)
- f. Review revised Conservation Committee Charter – Appendix B
- g. Review of CC Web-page for content - <https://www.portolavalley.net/government/town-committees/conservation-committee> - Appendix C and C1

7. NEW BUSINESS:

- a. Discuss Hawthorn's project and our role to ensure maximum impact on major aspects project

8. ADJOURNMENT

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is Tuesday, October 24, 2023 at 7:00 PM

Land Acknowledgement:

The Town of Portola Valley acknowledges the colonial history of this land we dwell upon—the unceded territory of the Ramaytush (rah-my-toosh) Ohlone, Tamien Nation, and Muwekma (mah-WEK-mah) Ohlone, who endured a human and cultural genocide that included removal from their lands and their sacred relationship to the land. Portola Valley recognizes that we profit from the commodification of land seized from indigenous peoples and now bear the ecological consequences. We seek to understand the impact of these legacies on all beings and to find ways to make repair.



TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY
Conservation Committee Meeting
August 22, 2023
7:00 PM
In-person Meeting

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT

1. Call to Order: The meeting was called to order at 7:08 PM

Roll Call:

Members present: N. Chiariello T. Coleman, P. Heiple, M. Plunder, J. Murphy, M. Richards, D. Walz, J. Zimmermann

Member absent: C. Magill

Also present: M. Hufty (Town Councilmember liaison)

Guest: N. Freire

2. Oral Communications:

M. Plunder suggested the Committee consider putting together a flyer in Spanish and English to be sent electronically to Town residents who could then print out and provide to their gardeners regarding removal of dittrichia in the fall and broom in the spring.

Action item: include on agenda for discussion at September meeting

N. Chiariello brought examples of the look-alike plants dittrichia and cordylanthus.

3. Approval of Minutes for July 25, 2023: The minutes were *approved unanimously*.

4. Site Permits

127 Pinon: (conceptual review) Site visit by ASCC will be on August 25th.

5. Tree Permits

a. 41 Los Charros. Nine significant oak trees are requested for removal; seven of these are to be removed to enhance the view. J. Murphy stated suggested the trees could possibly be limbed up or pruned thoughtfully to enhance the view (similar to language used previously for a tree removal request at the Frog Pond). N. Chiariello stated the team did agree to removal of two of the trees because of their close proximity to each other. The Committee agreed the draft report is appropriate and should be forwarded to the Town.

b. 35 Buckeye – trees requested for removal are either very close to the house or have been poorly trimmed, compromising structure (no arborists report was provided). Numerous oaks remain on the property. The Committee discussed and agreed with approval of the requested

removals. N. Chiariello asked what the Committee's role is when "butchered" trees are observed (such as in the right of way on Escobar). M. Hufty stated this would come under the Westridge Architectural Advisory Committee (WAAC). M. Plunder agreed to follow-up.

6. Old Business

a. Oversight of Town-owned properties

i. Frog Pond – J. Zimmermann stated the school project is nearing completion and a final punch list for cleanup is under development. There is no longer a fence where the new building is so students have direct access to the Frog Pond area. He will be following up with H. Young to determine how much remains in the budget for the biologist. The school is supportive of having interpretative signage that can explain what the Frog Pond is (could be used for educational classes).

M. Hufty asked about the status of the "road remnant" and said D. Breen has funds that can be released once the parcel has been secured. J. Murphy stated this is a tricky issue; it will need to be carved out as a separate parcel ("parcellized") so it could then be annexed to the Frog Pond.

ii. Springdown – no update.

iii. Town Center – no update.

b. Committee/Town Cooperation

i. Public Works

1. M. Plunder stated two portions of Shady Trail were been silted over during the winter storms and not been cleaned up. She asked that this be brought to the attention of the Trails and Paths Committee.

Action item: T. Coleman to discuss at upcoming Trails and Paths meeting.

iii. Open Space – (N. Chiariello) The Open Space/ Conservation joint subcommittee met and discussed priorities for this extreme budget year (N. Chiariello, M. Plunder, J. Murphy, G. Nielsen, B. Morgenthaler). They agreed Spring Down and the Frog Pond are the core priorities. She stated the Town Center gardens are core to what Conservation does but are not Open Space parcels so are not eligible for Open Space maintenance dollars. There remains a need to understand what was budgeted and what has been spent for maintenance; H. Young has agreed to get back to the subcommittee with this information.

It was asked where the interest on the Open Space endowment goes. M. Plunder suggested the Finance Committee be invited to talk with Conservation at a future meeting. M. Hufty stated Finance is trying to determine why such low interest is being realized on these funds. It was suggested B. Morgenthaler be requested to follow up (as a member of the joint subcommittee).

iv. Wildfire Preparedness – N. Chiariello stated Wildfire Preparedness would like to see the recommendations proposed by the Conservation subcommittee to D. Bullard several months ago regarding the draft fire ordinances that are currently out for public review. The Committee agreed to ask D. Bullard if the comments should go into the public comment process.

vi. Trails and Paths – no update (meeting postponed)

c. CC Routine Town Communications

i. Kudos (M. Plunder) – in progress

ii. Tip of the Month (C. Magill) – get started on fall pruning

iii. What's Blooming Now? (C. Magill) – cordylanthus, coast tarweed

iv. Backyard habitat – (M. Plunder) potential recipients have been identified

d. Potential revisions to Conservation Committee Charter

J. Murphy stated the proposed draft Charter revisions will be provided and discussed at the September meeting.

7. New Business

J. Murphy announced she will be stepping down from her role as vice-chair for the remainder of the year. T. Coleman will temporarily cover this position.

N. Chiariello stated it would be beneficial to have a representative sample of native plants (as applicable) at each Committee meeting.

Adjournment: 8:10 pm

Date & Time of Next Meeting: Tuesday September 26, 2023 at 7:00 pm

127 Pinon conceptual design review
Conservation Committee input
Draft, Aug 28, 202

On August 25, 2023 two members of the Conservation Committee (N. Chiariello and M. Plunder) attended the ASCC site visit to 127 Pinon for the conceptual design review of proposed work that includes landscape improvements, site development permit and review of trail work done without the benefit of a permit. The town's guidance was that the intent of the meeting was to provide feedback to the applicant as they prepare to submit for a building permit.

On August 28, 2023, N. Chiariello presented preliminary feedback at the regular meeting of the ASCC. The following summarizes the comments provided by N. Chiariello, focused on the trail work that was conducted without benefit of a permit. This draft is for review by the Conservation Committee. It includes 4 main recommendations regarding 127 Pinon.

It is the opinion of this subcommittee that design guidelines are needed for trail work on residential properties. We are surprised and concerned that a contractor would undertake trail work of this magnitude without consultation with the town.

Recommendation 1. Determine actual quantities of cut and fill due to trail work

The plans state that the grading for the trail work consisted of 450 cy cut, 400 cy fill. Those quantities were stated as planning estimates. Based on the trail work shown on the submitted plans and from what's visible in aerial photos (Figure 1), the trails include 16 switchbacks that essentially terrace the slopes above and to the northeast of the house. The trails were designed to accommodate two people walking side by side, and provide access to two knoll-top seating areas, more than a half mile of trails in all. Given the amount of trail work and grading, our first recommendation is to report the actual cut and fill.



Figure 1. Aerial photo dated April 2023 (source = Google Earth) showing most of 127 Pinon, with parcel boundary (source = San Mateo County) in white. The yellow outline indicates roughly the areas of trail work and vegetation clearing or pruning based on aerial photographs from 2021 and 2023.

Recommendation 2. Obtain an arborist report on trees in the area of trail work to address how changes in water movement might affect the trees.

The trail work spans much of the steep upper slopes of the northeastern part of the property, an area that includes three drainages (Figure 2). It appears that three factors ameliorated the risk of erosion of these steep slopes last winter—the geology of the area, the presence of roots still in the ground, and the presence of woody debris in drainages.

The majority of 127 Pinon, including the area with trail work, is underlain by greenstone, which weathers to form fractured angular rocks rather than smooth rounded pebbles, and therefore tends to be less susceptible to erosion than some of the highly erodible formations in Portola Valley. However, the slopes are steep (which is why the trail work includes 16 switchbacks), there was >800 cy of cut and fill according to the plans, and the northeast property line is perpendicular to the drainages and about halfway up the slope, so there is additional runoff from several other properties. These factors potentially exacerbate the risk of erosion.

Taken together, the grading and eventual decomposition of shrub roots and woody debris in drainages suggest there may be changes in hydrology and runoff that could affect the remaining vegetation, and we recommend that an arborist or other qualified expert evaluate risks to the trees. The question of whether the geology alone can hold these slopes in place in the future would require assessment by a geomorphologist/landscape engineer.



Figure 2. This figure shows the **topography** and **geology** for the same area depicted in Figure 1. Topography is indicated with topo lines and hillshading (source=San Mateo County); geologic parent materials are indicated by colors and abbreviations (source = Portola Valley geology map). Kfg = greenstone The map includes an overlay of current roads, structures, and property boundaries (source = San Mateo County).

Recommendations 3 and 4: Remove *Dittrichia* before it flowers. Prepare a landscaping plan for the area of trail work.

The steep slopes in the area of trail work face south-southwest, making them very hot, dry exposures in summer. In areas with this combination of geology, topography, and exposure, the natural vegetation is principally chaparral, which is characterized by drought-adapted shrubs. Chaparral roots can penetrate deeply in fractured greenstone, persisting and holding slopes without irrigation. An early record of vegetation at this site is a 1930 photograph (Figure 3) which shows chaparral dominating the upper slopes of 127 Pinon and adjoining properties, and oaks at the base of the slopes and in some canyons.

We are seeing removal of chaparral in many places as a way of reducing wildfire risk, which is a valid and significant concern. However, clearing vegetation to the degree evident at 127 Pinon generally leads to proliferation of invasive grasses and weeds, which are themselves a fire risk. Typically, after grasses are mowed, thistles and other weeds take off, such as *Dittrichia*. All of these are highly invasive and tend to be very flammable, and all of them were evident at 127 Pinon during the ASCC site visit. Therefore an immediate concern is to remove invasive and flammable stinkwort (*Dittrichia graveolens*) which is in patches across the trail work area and is almost flowering.

The plans for 127 Pinon state on C-5 that “permanent erosion control shall be provided by landscaping, such as shrubs, sod, or mulch.” That landscaping plan is necessary and should incorporate guidance by the Conservation Committee on hillside landscaping (<https://www.portolavalley.net/home/showpublisheddocument/15179>) and species to use (<https://www.portolavalley.net/home/showpublisheddocument/14083/637425259236670000>) to address fire risk, spread of invasive plants, erosion, and loss of habitat (<https://www.portolavalley.net/home/showpublisheddocument/15183/637728279341370000>).

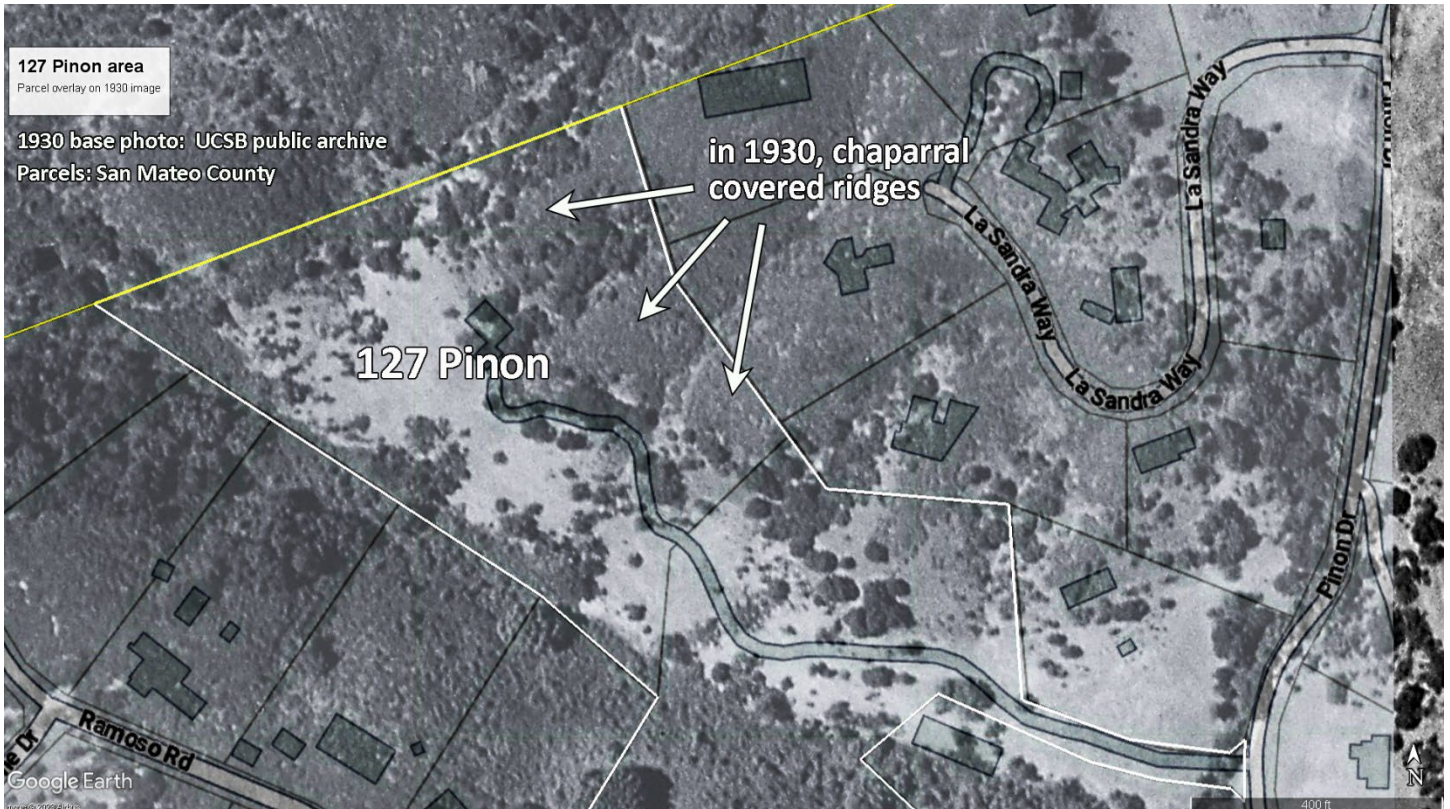


Figure 3. Aerial photograph from 1930 of the same area depicted in figures 1 and 2 (source = UCSB public archive of California aerial photography). The figure includes an overlay of current roads, structures, and property boundaries (source = San Mateo County).

Submitted by Nona Chiariello

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE CHARTER (DRAFT 1.1 REVISION 7/2023)

MISSION

The mission of the Conservation Committee is to conserve the rural quality of Portola Valley and to assist the Town in maintaining a natural, tranquil residential community for all generations, compatible with the many physical constraints and natural features of the area.

To meet the goals of the Conservation Element of the General Plan, the Committee works to protect our treasured native habitat and wildlife, to preserve, enhance and restore the valued unique natural condition of the area, and to educate and engage town residents on these issues.

As times change, this committee will vigilantly keep these values central to all Town development conversations

DUTIES AND FUNCTIONS

1. Advise the Town on protection and maintenance of Town owned Open Spaces and the Scenic corridor.
2. Advise the Town on matters regarding conservation and environmental issues.
3. Ongoing cooperation with public works to enhance and maintain town owned properties.
4. Review and evaluate applications for tree removal and approve as appropriate.
5. As advisory to ASCC, review the proposed landscaping plan, tree removals, and plant lists for new housing and major remodels, and other development.
6. Create educational initiatives on, and advocate for, conservation and ecological issues.
7. Coordinate community service projects to maintain and enhance habitat.
8. Maintain presence on town web site providing current relevant reference lists (including native plants, drought resistant plants, and balancing fire safety with habitat) to provide valuable resource service to residents and landscape design professionals working in town.
9. Prepare Annual Report to Town Council

RESPONSIBLE TO

The Town Council

COORDINATION

Architectural and Site Control Commission

Town staff and committees as appropriate

Local Agencies, such as Woodside Fire Protection District

MEMBERSHIP

Nine Members appointed by the Mayor with Council concurrence for one-year terms.

Chair, Vice-chair and Secretary selected by Committee.

Members may be appointed to act as liaison with other agencies.

Members to be appointed to subcommittees to study, recommend action and follow through on specific projects.

MEETINGS

Meets 4th Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m.

Consortium of Native Plant seed suppliers

The NativeSeed Group

<https://nativeseedgroup.com/>

Pacific Coast Seed/Hedgerow Farms/S&S Seeds

<https://www.naturesseed.com/california-seeds/>

California Native Grass Seed

Hedgerow Farms

<https://www.hedgerowfarms.com/>

Harmony Farms

<https://www.harmonyfarm.com/california-native-grass-mixes/>

Larner Seeds

<https://larnerseeds.com/collections/grasses>

S&S Seed

<https://www.ssseeds.com/>

Stover Seed

<https://shop.stoverseed.com/collections/native-grasses>

California Native Wildflower seeds

Larner seeds

<https://larnerseeds.com/collections/annual-wildflowers>

Klamath-Siskiyou Native seed

<https://klamathsiskiyouseeds.com/>

CalFlora Nursery

<https://www.calfloranursery.com/>

Sierra Seed Supply

http://sierraseedsupply.com/native_wildflower_seed.html

Pacific Coast Seed

<https://www.naturesseed.com/california-seeds/>

