



**TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY**  
**Conservation Committee Meeting**  
**August 27, 2024**  
**7:00 PM**

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

**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:**

Zoom link: <https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87321185355?pwd=o5zwuu6HBFmQcTvtz9ifadYm7pufUp.1>

Meet ID: 87321185355

Passcode: 173662

**To access the meeting by phone:**

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

**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. June 25, 2024

**4. SITE PERMITS:**

- a. 2 Hayfields

**5. TREE PERMITS:**

- a. None

**6. OLD BUSINESS:**

- a. Oversight of Town-owned properties - Updates (Committee)
  - i. Shady Trail – herbicide use by unknown party
  - ii. Ford Field and Open Space – Conservation values (Chiariello)

- iii. Springdown – Vision and Review Action Plan from 1/23/21 CC meeting (Appendix A)
- iv. Frog Pond -
- b. Committee / Town Cooperation
  - i. Public Works (Magill)
  - ii. Trails and Paths (Coleman)
  - iii. Wildfire Preparedness Committee (Chiariello) -
  - iv. Advice to ASCC on *Dittrichia* (Plunder) - Review edited language (Appendix B)
  - v. Table at Town Picnic 9/21/24 – 11:00-2:00
- c. Hawthorn’s – initial discussion about plans/thoughts for Historic Buildings (Magill)
- d. Fencing Guidelines / Wildlife corridors (Plunder)
- e. CC Routine Town Communications
  - i. Kudos (Plunder)
  - ii. Backyard Habitat (Plunder)
  - iii. Tip of the Month (Magill) – Rodenticide
  - iv. What’s Blooming Now? (Magill)

**7. NEW BUSINESS**

**8. ADJOURNMENT**

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is September 24, 2024, 7:00 PM.

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**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  
June 25, 2024  
7:00 PM  
In-person Meeting**

**CONSERVATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES**

**1. Call to Order:** The meeting was called to order at 7:07 PM

**Roll Call:**

Members present: T. Coleman, N. Freire, C. Magill, M. Richards, N. Chiariello, M. Plunder, D. Walz

Members absent: J. Murphy, J. Zimmermann

Also present: M. Hufty (Town Council member liaison)

Guests: K. Corley (in-person), C. Vertongen (via Zoom), D. Breen (via phone)

**2. Oral Communications:**

C. Magill stated D. Breen had sent an email suggesting the Committee invite Armand Nuckerman to speak (in a public presentation) about environmental changes. It was also suggested Leslie Field could be invited. It was suggested to put the topic on the agenda for a future meeting.

**3. Approval of Minutes for May 28, 2024:** The minutes were *approved unanimously*

**4. Site Permits**

none

**5. Tree Permits**

none

**6. Old Business**

a. Oversight of Town-owned properties

For all town owned properties, the Committee agreed it needs to rethink the approaches used for communicating priorities to the Town and Public Works, given recent personnel changes.

Recommendations need to focus on two ties:

- 1) Most minimal immediate needs and
- 2) Longer-range ultimate goals (such as capital improvements)

It was suggested this could best be accomplished by creating a "Committee roadmap of priorities" for these properties which will require the development of criteria for use by the

Committee. Subcommittee (C. Magill, T. Coleman, J. Zimmermann (to be confirmed)) was formed to help develop criteria.

**Action item:** C. Magill will attempt to locate any existing “5 year plans” for these properties  
M. Hufty stated there are funds available from outside sources for the restoration of wetlands and watershed areas (C. Magill to follow up).

i. Town Center – no additional update

ii. M. Plunder asked what the status of the FEMA repair funding for the Shady Trail parklet landslide repair.

b. Committee/Town Cooperation

i. Public Works – no update

ii Trails and Paths – Currently Trails and Paths are looking for three replacement committee members.

iii. Wildlife Preparedness – The proposal to have the Old Schoolhouse be subject to voluntary inspection for defensible space is not going forward (mandatory inspections are going slowly from North to South of the fire district). The guidelines for defensible space have been approved and are available on the fire department’s website.

iv. Advice to ASCC on adding dittrichia removal to condition of approval – review of proposed language postponed to July meeting

c. Hawthorns – Two new plans for parking areas were presented at the last meeting. Option 10 would use an entrance off Portola Road (POST agreed to allow easement use). This was approved as the preferred option at the meeting. K. Corley read the Committee a leer she has written and stated trees will be removed with any of the proposed parking options.

d. Fencing Guidelines/Wildlife corridors – subcommittee has not met.

e. CC Routine Town Communications

i. Kudos (M. Plunder) – none

ii. Backyard habitat (M. Plunder) – J. Murphy’s property at 8 Portola Green was visited by the subcommittee and recommended for approval. This recommendation was *approved unanimously*.

iii. Tip of the Month (C. Magill) – yellowstar thistle

iv. What’s Blooming Now? (C. Magill) – toyons (D. Breen suggested buckwheat be considered)

## **7. New Business**

a. Trail guidelines/temporary construction road guidelines on private lands – The Committee discussed if there are any specific Town guidelines on this topic and considered if there should be any recommendations to minimize disturbances to the soil/habitat during the construction process.

**Adjournment:** 8:10 pm

**Date & Time of Next Meeting:** Tuesday July 23, 2024 at 7:00 pm

## APPENDIX A

### Spring Down Open Space Vision and Priorities - 2019

Spring Down Open Space is one of the most accessible, prominent, and irreplaceable of the Town's Open Space properties. When acquired by the Town, the 6-acre property was envisioned as a tranquil natural area in very close proximity to parking, trails, and Town Center activities. It is more than fulfilling that promise. Its large, gently sloped meadow is shielded from Portola Road traffic and other activities by a wooded perimeter of primarily Coast Live Oaks and Coast Redwoods, many of them heritage trees. In the south corner of the property, there is a small pond with a protective stand of Red Willows on one side, and a meadow seeded with native grasses and wildflowers on the other. Inside the tree-lined perimeter, a meandering loop path provides open views across the property, as well as close-up views of the pond and associated wildlife, especially waterfowl. For passersby on Portola Road and adjoining trails, Spring Down is emblematic of the Town's rural aesthetic and is a gem of the scenic corridor.

The Town's goals for Spring Down were ambitious and visionary given the property's condition when purchased—the meadow was dominated by equestrian facilities, and the pond was anoxic, full of construction debris and a chain link fence, and surrounded by impenetrable willows. An Ad Hoc Spring Down Master Plan Committee recommended in 2011 a two-stage process of land and pond restoration. Transforming the pond was the biggest challenge. It took six years of planning and permitting before the most sensitive work—relocating dusky-footed woodrats, a State special-status species—could be carried out, which was necessary before heavy equipment could remove the construction debris from the pond, clear the willows on the west side of the pond, re-contour the pond, and grade the area north and west of the pond to channel overflow. All of this was accomplished in 2017. By January 2018, a meadow was establishing on the west side of the pond, with California poppies, Clarkias, yarrow, lupines, and other wildflowers, and a barn owl nest box was mounted in a Coast Redwood northeast of the pond, where it is ideally situated for barn owls to hunt in the open meadow. The nest box will be opened when use of rodenticide ceases on nearby Town properties. Since February 2018, mallards and Great Blue Herons have been seen regularly at the pond, an almost immediate illustration of the rich avifauna that the property can support.

It is the Conservation Committee's firm view that this idyllic property should continue to be protected as inviolate Town Open Space, and that its unique combination of pond habitat and peaceful meadow contribute to the Town Center complex by providing a space for reflection and nature appreciation.

Goals:

1. Engage the community
  - a. Integrate Spring Down with established trail networks by identifying and establishing connector paths with the Town Center campus and Portola Road trails.
  - b. Build awareness about Spring Down with Town messaging on Facebook, PV Forum, and other media.

- c. Utilize the educational value of Spring Down by encouraging local science classes and school groups to visit and observe.
  - d. Enhance appreciation of nature by installing a live trail camera, perhaps focused on the pond or on the barn owl nest box when it is opened.
2. Control negative impacts on Spring Down
  - a. Prevent damage from cars driving or parking on the property by installing suitable barriers where needed.
  - b. Discourage overuse by limiting amenities to those which protect wildlife and habitat, and by maintaining paths that concentrate foot traffic in the right places.
  - c. Protect sensitive areas such as the pond margin, which might need an all-season path or boardwalk.
3. Enhance the habitat value and rural character of Spring Down
  - a. Establish restoration priorities, policies, and schedules for introducing suitable native plants and removing invasive non-native plants, taking into account the habitat needs of wildlife.
  - b. Maintain ecological connectivity by limiting fencing; existing fencing is in keeping with the rural character and may be consistent with habitat needs, but no additional fencing should be permitted.
  - c. Provide adequate protection to wildlife by requiring that dogs stay on leash, and by periodically evaluating changes in vegetation that interfere with wildlife, such as overgrowth of the willow stand.
4. Enhance Spring Down's contribution as one of the loveliest views along the Scenic Corridor
  - a. Open pockets of view from Portola Road to the western hills.

## **APPENDIX B**

**From: 2/23/21 Agenda Package: SPRING DOWN**

### **RESULTS OF 3 YEAR PILOT PROGRAM**

2020-21 is Year 3 of a 3 year pilot program funded by the Town Council to restore a weedy and overgrown Spring Down Open Space. Results have been very positive; this Open Space is now a much improved environment enjoyed by residents and wildlife.

1. Selective pruning and thinning of long neglected oak trees and shrubbery reduced fire risk and improved views.
2. Repeated, timed mowings and focused removal of invasives weeds have increased the density of native wildflowers, most notably CA poppy and Yarrow. They are now self-seeding sustainably.
3. The Blue Heron Pond has become a valued focal point. Ducks nest there and a Blue Heron visits regularly.
4. Both habitat value and beauty have been enhanced by these improvements. The park has increased numbers of appreciative visitors.

### **ACTION PLAN for Springdown Open Space**

Conservation Committee will visit the site monthly to monitor. We work closely with and make recommendations to Public Works about the optimum timing of implementing the items in the maintenance plan and any necessary specific additional tasks.

#### **Remainder of fiscal year 2020-21 – already budgeted.**

1. Continue focus on weed control. Strategically scheduled mowing and weed whacking to decrease the prevalence of invasive weedy grasses and thistles and prevent any further seeding of invasives. This will encourage the natives that have survived there to grow and bloom.
2. Gradually remove the metal stake fencing uprights along Portola Road Trail. Leave the existing old wooden uprights which have historical esthetic value and are an aid to horses on the trail. As repairs needed, replace the metal stake fence with a simple wooden top crossbar fence of weathered wood.
3. Create a new fence opening adjacent to the large Eucalyptus on the White property line. Clear a simple curving trail from this opening to connect to the existing circular Spring Down path.
4. Continue the thinning of the overgrown shrubbery along the fence between Portola Road Trail and Spring Down path. Several large dead *Myrica* bushes need removal. Several small oaks growing up in the *Myrica* need removal. Several large old coyote brush should be coppiced down to 1foot.
5. Install a live trail camera focused on the pond with live feed to the Town's web site.

### **Fiscal year 2021-22**

**Requests for Public Works budget – Young to estimate costs**

1. Continued emphasis on increasing the beauty of the meadow and improving habitat conditions. Focus on weed control with strategic mowing, weed whacking and hand weeding. Maintain schedule of 4/year repeated mowing and hand weeding.
2. Remove a few redwood branches to open access to the barn owl box.
3. Remove the large multi-trunked Eucalyptus in the Portola Road ROW. It is an eyesore and a fire danger and the increasingly sizeable sucker stems are unstable and dangerous. Cut this as close to the ground as possible and take measures to prevent re-sprouting.
4. Identify with precision where property line is between Spring Down and White property. There is a large heritage oak along that line that would benefit from clearing underneath and arborist pruning.
5. Consider signage at each entrance re keep dogs on leash.

### **Going forward after 2021-2**

1. Continue a strategic yearly maintenance schedule that will minimize the re-emergence of weedy invasives and encourage wildflower meadow to thrive.
2. Consider building a boardwalk from the perimeter path to the pond if monitoring shows it would be useful.
3. Maintain the more generous view windows from the street to the western hills that has been created to enhance the Scenic Corridor. There is a tendency for brush, weeds and squirrel planted oaks to fill in open areas and obstruct this view.



## APPENDIX D

### *Dittrichia graveolens*, Stinkweed Control

*Dittrichia graveolens*, or Stinkweed, is an annual plant that germinates from seed and starts showing up locally in summer, particularly in disturbed soil. It quickly can grow to a height of 2 1/2 or even 3ft, and its symmetrical, cone-like shape is often compared to a little Christmas tree. Its color is a medium green, and both stems and leaves are hairy with glands that exude a sticky sap with a noxious, aromatic smell.

Plants flower from about August to late September, and each blossom can mature to seed release in just a few days. Each plant can produce vast amounts of seed, which spreads both by wind and by clinging to equipment, boots, clothes and fur. If left alone, the plant will crowd out all other vegetation and infest neighboring properties as well.

Removal of the plant before it goes to seed is essential. If the plants are pulled before they flower, they can just be left to dry out. Once they have started to bloom, they should be bagged and removed from the property. The seed bank is short lived, and most seeds germinate the following growing season, so diligent removal is an effective method of control. The sticky sap can cause contact dermatitis, so protective clothing is highly recommended.

All properties in Portola Valley are at risk of infestation, and at highest risk are sites with construction work that involves soil disturbance. We recommend that both the contractor and the home owner are alerted to this problem and of their responsibility for monitoring and controlling the spread of *Dittrichia* at time of approval of work: The contractor must take appropriate steps to minimize soil contamination, and the home owner must be alert for infestation, especially in the first few years after completion of construction.

*Dittrichia* can sometimes be confused with Tarweed, a summer-blooming native wildflower with aromatic sap. Flyers are available from the Conservation Committee to assist with distinguishing between desirable and noxious plants.

## Frog Pond Open Space: Vision Statement

This 6.4-acre property is named for a vernal pond and its cherished population of Pacific Tree Frogs, also called Pacific Chorus Frogs. Other defining attributes of Frog Pond Open Space (FPOS) are its uninterrupted natural viewshed extending to Windy Hill and the western hills, its proximity to Corte Madera School, its corridors for wildlife that travel to and from adjacent open space (Hawthorns, Coal Mine Ridge, Windy Hill, Coal Creek, and Foothills, among others), and its highly accessible and visible location on Alpine Road for residents and visitors via the well-traveled, sheltered multi-use trail on the property's west boundary. This combination of attributes is unique among Portola Valley open spaces and provides benefits to people of all ages.

The Planning Commission's initial language in designating FPOS, then called Corte Madera Park, was that it should be "maintained as a natural park with only minor unroofed structures necessary for such a use." A mandate to protect FPOS is even more crucial today. More than 90% of California's vernal pools have disappeared, drastically reducing the habitat needed by a distinctive assemblage of plants and animals, especially amphibians. FPOS is an increasingly rare biological treasure that warrants restoration and permanent protection.

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The ephemeral character of the FPOS wetland is essential to the frog population and should not be altered. The formation of Frog Pond may be related to the proximity of the San Andreas rift zone, which commonly is associated with unusual drainage patterns including isolated ponds. Each winter, after fall rains fill the pond, nights are filled with the distinctive chorus of frogs. The frogs flourish because the pond gradually dries up in spring or summer and thus cannot sustain fish that would consume amphibians or compete with them.

Habitat and viewshed protection should be priorities for management decisions. Owing to years of cattle grazing together with seasonal inundation, the parcel was almost treeless in 1973 when Portola Valley Ranch developer Joe Whelan donated the Frog Pond property. From Indian Crossing Road, the views are still open and stunning, but the termination of grazing has allowed some trees and shrubs to establish. The number of trees should remain small, and they should be deciduous, in order to benefit wildlife and preserve the viewshed, not diminish it.

Education and awareness about Frog Pond should be fostered. Corte Madera School is perfectly situated for students to use Frog Pond as a nature observatory, to experience the benefits of being in a natural environment, and to appreciate the Town's founding values of open space protection. Additional opportunities should be explored for students and the entire community to better experience and appreciate the frog chorus.

The adjacent open space (the road remnant parcel along Alpine Road from Hawthorns to Coal Mine Ridge and Windy Hill Open Space) should be protected and managed as an interdependent ecosystem with the FPOS. The wildlife of FPOS already inhabits and migrates through this area because it is connected to other open spaces. This is confirmed by common nests and dens and the spread of invasive species, and it necessitates an integrated vision and management plan.

## **Frog Pond Open Space: Current (Maintenance) Recommendations**

### Restoration

Even when vernal pools are protected, they are vulnerable to impacts from surrounding areas, such as altered drainage, polluted runoff, siltation, and invasive species. Restoration and protection of Frog Pond Open Space (FPOS) should:

1. Remove Harding grass (*Phalaris aquatica*), a non-native perennial grass that is commonly associated with former stock ponds and is very invasive, forming monoculture stands of tall plants that can contribute to fire risk.
2. Remove some non-native pines on the perimeter of the property; pines can also adversely impact native flora and fauna.
3. Allow some Valley Oaks (*Quercus lobata*) and Blue Oaks (*Quercus douglasii*) to remain, and remove most Coast Live Oaks (*Quercus agrifolia*). The leaves, limbs, bark, and acorns of the deciduous oaks will enrich the habitat for wildlife, and they develop an open branch architecture naturally, providing “windows” through the tree.
4. Assess siltation in the pond and the status of the overflow channel.

### Educational Amenities

1. Amenities such as a trail or boardwalk could be considered as a way to provide additional appropriate pond access for students and other visitors without contributing to overuse.
2. Live audio streaming of the frog chorus on selected winter nights might be considered as a means of expanding the experience and appreciation of the frogs beyond the immediate neighborhood.

## **Frog Pond Open Space: Current (Other) Recommendations**

### Adjacent properties

On the west boundary of FPOS is a Town-owned road remnant parcel along Alpine Road from Hawthorns to Coal Mine Ridge and Windy Hill Open Space. This parcel contains a narrow band of mature woodland that serves as a wildlife corridor, and then widens and opens up where it borders the school. The property includes a trail that is a heavily used link in the Town’s trail system, provides views of the open space, and shields people from the blind curves and narrow shoulders of Alpine Road. Local residents have reportedly raised more than \$100K already for a restricted gift for the Town to assist in restoring and maintaining this parcel. Because of the adjacency, similarities, and ecological and hydrological interdependencies, the opportunity to protect and expand FPOS and its flora, fauna, and trails could be achieved by designating this parcel as permanent open space. The road right of way must be preserved as the principal thoroughfare for vehicular and pedestrian traffic and emergency egress through this area. The existing Town ownership makes the cost to acquire effectively zero. [The Open Space Acquisition Advisory Committee has made this recommendation to designate and preserve as permanent open space this adjacent parcel to the Council in November 2019.]