

Comments for the public-record – in advance of, for, and beyond the ...

TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY
Special Joint Meeting of the Conservation Committee; Bicycle, Pedestrian and Traffic
Safety Committee; and Trails and Paths Committee.
Tuesday, September 17, 2024
6:00 PM

The following entities might find these comments useful regarding (at least) evaluating possible benefits and possible risks of proceeding with the might-be (apparently renamed) “Portola Terrace” project.

- The three committees.
- The Portola Valley Town Council.
- Stanford University.
- Others.

Based on information in the “Notice of joint Special Meeting ...” regarding possible subsequent challenges to proposed actions, these comments address a variety of aspects. While relevant to the overall would-be project, some aspects might seem, at first glance, to be not much connected to the “proposed open space and trails plan component.” Beyond first glances, aspects of the would-be project interrelate with each other and with each “plan component.”

1. Views – including from a Town trail

For a pedestrian walking along the public trail on the east side of the “project,” views of the project would feature approximately 660 feet of essentially continuous multistory development, absent planting (or similar) to hide the housing. (There may be one place at which it would be possible to see hillside through a narrow gap.) What happened to the notion of a “scenic corridor?” Planting might lead to better optics, but seemingly appropriate planting may not be in plans and might increase fire risks.

2. Traffic safety – including regarding pedestrian trail users, pedestrians, bicyclists, and motorists

Possibly, plans overlook safety hazards regarding the two confluences of Alpine Road, a driveway into and out of the “project,” and a public trail. Similar (with respect to at least Alpine Road and roads that tee from Alpine Road) junctions exist (at Westridge Drive, at Arastradero Road, and in Ladera) for which Alpine Road includes extra lanes to support left turns. Uses of these extant intersections might seem somewhat problematic. Without left-turn lanes in Alpine Road and adequately unobstructed lines of sight from each driveway, risks of accidents might seem unacceptable.

Also, what about crosswalks for pedestrians (including school-aged children) crossing Alpine Road?

If current or future circumstances warrant improving Alpine Road, who will pay for the improvements?

3. Existence and location of trails

The following remarks pertain regarding (at least) [09-17-2024 Agenda Packet Special Joint Meeting of BPTS, Trails and Paths, Conservation](#); Figure 3: BLOWN UP GENERAL PLAN TRAILS MAP and related statements.

A statement (on page 8 of the “Agenda Packet”) states, “4. The blue segment is commonly referred to as the “Alpine Canyon” trail. Stanford notes this segment of the trail is not on the project site, but on the adjacent neighboring properties, and is also located within the riparian corridor.”

Regarding (at least) the three lots closest to Alpine Road that the trail would cross, ...

- a. Have there been actions by the Town that put such an alleged segment of the trail into plans? That established this alleged segment of the trail? That might lead toward establishing this alleged segment of the trail?
- b. If so, what were the actions? When did such occur and how did they occur? Were the would-be-affected property owners/residents notified of the possible establishment of such a segment? Were the would-be-affected property owners/residents specially invited to provide input regarding the possible establishment of such a segment? To what extent did the Town engage with the Westridge Architectural Supervising Committee?
- c. Would the alleged segment be desirable or feasible, given, for example, the placement of structures on at least one of the lots?

4. Fire risks – including to the Town, Stanford, Stanford families, and Woodside Fire Protection District personnel

“Project” buildings would be closer to each other than might be prudent or consistent with Town ordinances or with WFPD (Woodside Fire Protection District) recommendations or requirements. Seemingly, proximity might be so close that fire could spread – via just infrared heat – from building to building.

Also, risks of fire spread, from the “project” to other parts of the Town may be unacceptable.

Each of the Town, Stanford, and (assuming the “project” proceeds) would-be residents might want to evaluate such risks.

Seemingly, it would be possible that WFPD might deny certificates of occupancy or that insurance carriers would not offer fire-hazard-related policies.

5. Geology

A geologic study may have overlooked LIDAR data that might indicate a fault trace that might run through land on which the “project” would build residences.

6. Utilities

Neighborhood utilities – electric power, landline utilities, cellular service, over-the-air TV service – might seem to exhibit noticeable problems. Would there be enough capacity to accommodate – regarding those services, water, and fire hydrants – the “project?”

7. Architectural detail

During a public “show and tell” regarding “project” architecture, the Stanford-engaged architect indicated that it could reorient second-story windows so that none faced neighboring non-Stanford properties. Such would lessen, at night, light that (non-Stanford) neighbors would see. Do current plans reflect such reorientations?

To the extent that item 3 (above) associates with an actual or future trail, reorienting the second-story windows would lessen light seen from the trail.

8. Possible procedural concerns

- a. Have Town committees been appropriately involved throughout consideration of the “project?” (For example, to what extent has each of various committees been involved before the anticipated current set of meetings? To what extent should committees perform possibly final committee functions in meetings in which public input can be received within a few hours before the meetings or during the meetings?)
- b. The Agenda Packet for this meeting might not suggest that people can (or provide a way for people to) submit – before the meeting – comments for consideration before, during, or beyond the meeting. (A Stanford-sent email includes ...: “This email is being sent to clarify that the special public meeting will be held on Tuesday, September 17, and that comments can be directed to stanfordterrace@portolavalley.net.” The Stanford-sent email also states, “To submit a comment or question to the Town ahead of the meeting, please send an email to stanfordterrace@portolavalley.net by noon on September 17. Questions and comments will also be taken during the meeting, and all will be included in the Town’s public record.”)
- c. Did the walk-throughs – to see the site and the tent poles – meet Town standards for being a (seemingly required) Town function? (It is possible, for example, that the Town did not send notices to nearby residents. Stanford sent notices and required visitors to sign contracts to go onto the property. Did the requirement to sign contracts deter public participation? Did the tent poles meet Town standards or comport with normal Town practices? Did Town committees and staff participate in manners consistent with other walk-throughs?)
- d. Was the selection of EIR topics proper and was the process to select the topics proper?
- e. Have the Town and Stanford relied on the best available evidence regarding fire risks and geologic fault traces?
- f. Is there adequate understanding between the Town and Stanford regarding administration of the for-the-public aspects of the housing? (A basis for a possible concern might be that applicable law might forbid precluding Stanford’s offering the units to Stanford personnel.)