

Part 1 –
SETTING, ASSUMPTIONS
AND GENERAL POLICY

The Planning Area and the Region

- 1000 The planning area includes some 12,000 acres of mountainous and hilly land in the southern bayside portion of San Mateo County and northern Santa Clara County as shown on the following map. The Town of Portola Valley occupies approximately 5,785 acres of this area. The planning area consists largely of a naturally beautiful valley with steep, rugged tree-covered and open mountains on the west and lower more gently rolling hills on the east. Tree cover consists primarily of native oaks, with stands of coast redwoods in more shaded locations, especially on the western slopes. The San Andreas Rift Zone, an area of past and probable future earth movement, follows the floor of the valley. Much of the land southwest of the San Andreas Rift Zone consists of active or geologically recent landslides.
- 1001 The planning area includes considerable area outside the incorporated boundary of the Town of Portola Valley. This external area has been included because of its relevance to the planning for the town. Inclusion of this area does not imply that the town does or will ever have direct governmental control over all or any part of the area. It does imply, however, that existing and future land uses and circulation facilities in this area are of concern to the town. In some instances, the uses and facilities designated in the plan are a reflection of other jurisdictions' policies which the town recognizes as given and assumes will continue to exist. In other instances, the uses and facilities represent only the town's position as to their appropriateness.

1002 In addition to the Town of Portola Valley, the planning area includes the unincorporated communities of Ladera, Los Trancos Woods-Vista Verde and large undeveloped open and wooded areas in unincorporated

Insert map of planning area here.

portions of San Mateo County. Portions of the Town of Woodside, the City of Menlo Park, the City of Palo Alto and unincorporated areas in Santa Clara County have also been included because these areas are either functionally or visually related to Portola Valley and bear directly on its planning. On the map of the planning area, three categories of areas outside the town boundaries are indicated: spheres of influence, areas of direct concern, and areas of secondary concern. Each category is discussed below under a separate heading.

- 1003 ***Spheres of Influence.*** These are unincorporated areas designated by the San Mateo County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO) as being within the Sphere of Influence of Portola Valley. LAFCO will permit lands within these spheres to be annexed only to the Town of Portola Valley. The general plan expresses firm town policy for future development of these areas and provides the basis for rezoning and other effectuation measures required to carry out the general plan.
- 1004 ***Areas of Direct Concern.*** These are incorporated and unincorporated areas which are of direct concern to Portola Valley. For these areas, the general plan expresses town policy in order to provide a basis for collaborative programs or negotiations with the cities or counties having primary jurisdiction over these lands.
- 1005 ***Areas of Secondary Concern.*** These are incorporated and unincorporated areas of concern to Portola Valley, but to a lesser extent than "Areas of Direct Concern." Statements in the plan pertaining to these areas express Portola Valley's interests in them and indicate the town's desires regarding their general character and quality.
- 1006 The limits of the planning area largely conform to recognizable physical features such as major thoroughfares, large non-residential areas, and natural topographic features. The Skyline Boulevard ridge forms the western boundary of the planning area and divides it from western slopes leading down to the Pacific Ocean.
- 1007 Portola Valley is closely tied to other parts of the San Francisco Bay Area. Residents of Portola Valley draw on other parts of the Bay Area for a wide range of cultural, commercial, and recreation facilities. Employment centers throughout much of the Bay Area are within the reach of residents of the planning area. On the other hand, Portola Valley is a rather unique part of the Bay Area. It is an area of great natural beauty which is relatively close to major activity centers of the Bay Area. Hence it is attractive for those seeking a natural environment in which to make their home. Junipero Serra Freeway

(Interstate 280), Sand Hill Road and Skyline Boulevard provide the primary links to other parts of the Bay Area.

- 1008 Portola Valley is also part of a recognized sub-unit of the Bay Area, known as the Midpeninsula. Palo Alto serves as the hub of this area. Major shopping and service facilities in downtown Palo Alto and the Stanford Shopping Center, the Stanford-Palo Alto Hospital Center and Stanford University form an important cluster of district serving activities. Major employment centers in the Midpeninsula are accessible to Portola Valley by car and limited public transportation. As a part of the Midpeninsula, Portola Valley is important as a low-density residential area set in a natural environment, as a large natural scenic area to balance the intensively developed urban areas to the north and as a resource for residents of nearby areas seeking a brief outing. Within the planning area, opportunities exist for varied recreational activities.

Assumptions

- 1009 The general plan is based on certain general assumptions that recognize forces over which there is little or no local control. The assumptions include generally accepted forecasts; however, they are set forth here in the form of assumptions inasmuch as they cannot now be proven to be correct.
1. Population and employment growth in the Bay Area, while less than from 1960 to 1990, will be substantial from 1990 to 2020 and will result in increasing pressures for development which will be felt on the Peninsula, including Portola Valley.
 2. Residents of the Peninsula and Bay Area will continue to pursue healthy outdoor activities and will exert continuing and increasing pressure on the open space and recreational resources of the town.
 3. Portola Valley will continue to attract a population that can afford to live in a low density residential community that enjoys and supplies extensive open space.
 4. Population characteristics of the town will continue to change with older residents either seeking alternative housing within the community or moving out, and younger families moving in and thereby putting increasing pressure on the schools and local public facilities.
 5. The rising cost and scarcity of undeveloped land will result in increasing pressure by developers and property owners for maximum development of their properties, both in terms of the size of buildings and multiplicity of uses.

6. Water shortages will continue and increase in California and the Bay Area thereby putting increasing pressure on the town to limit its use of water.
7. Pressures will increase for reducing the waste stream, conserving air quality, reducing water pollution and preserving natural features such as streams and native tree cover.
8. The use of computers and electronic means of communication will greatly increase, resulting in changes in life style such as allowing more residents to work in and shop from their homes.
9. Major outlets and facilities will continue to be available in other parts of the Peninsula and the Bay Area to meet the special needs of town residents while convenience goods and services will continue to be available within the town.
10. The automobile will continue to be the primary means of transportation for residents of the town because of the town's relative isolation, low density of population, and travel patterns of residents.
11. Employers on the Peninsula will put increasing pressure on employees to reduce the use of the private automobile in traveling from home to work.

General Policy

Major Community Goals

1010 The goals included below are general in nature and basic to the entire general plan. Goals related to specific aspects of the plan are stated in other appropriate sections. The plan is designed and intended to assist in achieving these major local goals:

1. To preserve and enhance the natural features and open space of the planning area because they are unusual and valuable assets for the planning area, the Peninsula and the entire Bay Area.
2. To allow use of the planning area by residents and others but to limit that use so that the natural attributes of the planning area can be sustained over time.
3. To conserve the rural quality of Portola Valley and maintain the town as an attractive, tranquil, family-oriented residential community for all generations compatible with the many physical constraints and natural features of the area. Rural quality as used in this plan includes the following attributes:
 - a. Minimal lighting so that the presence of development at night is difficult to determine, so that the subtle changes between day and night are easily discernible and so that the stars may be readily seen at night.
 - b. Minimal man-made noise so that the prevailing sense tends to be one of quiet except for the sounds of nature.

- c. Man-made features which blend in with the natural environment in terms of scale, materials, form and color.
 - d. An overall impression of open space, natural terrain and vegetation, interrupted minimally by the works of people.
 - e. Narrow roads bordered by natural terrain and native vegetation.
 - f. Unobtrusive entrances to properties, primarily designed to identify addresses and provide safe access.
 - g. Minimal use of fencing except when necessary to control animals and children on properties and then of a design which is minimally visible from off-site.
 - h. The ability to maintain horses on private properties and to enjoy a trail system throughout the town.
 - i. Paths and trails that allow for easy access throughout the town.
 - j. Agricultural pursuits in appropriate locations.
4. To guide the location, design and construction of all development so as to:
- a. Minimize disturbances to natural surroundings and scenic vistas.
 - b. Reduce the exposure of people and improvements to physical hazards such as earthquakes, landslides, fire, floods, traffic accidents and to provide evacuation routes for emergencies.
 - c. Protect the watershed of the planning area.
 - d. Ensure that projects complement and are subordinate to their natural surroundings.
 - e. Minimize the use of non-renewable energy resources, conserve water, and encourage energy conservation and the use of renewable energy sources.
5. To protect, encourage and extend the use of native plant communities, grasses and trees, especially oak woodlands, because they reduce water usage and preserve the natural habitats and biodiversity.
6. To ensure that growth and development within the planning area is evaluated against required regional environmental standards.

7. To subject new developments with potential for adverse fiscal and other effects on the delivery of essential public services to an impact analysis to avoid unreasonable financial burdens on the town and other affected local governmental agencies and ensure the continued availability of essential public services.
8. To provide civic and recreation facilities and activities that are supported by the local citizenry and that encourage the interaction of residents in the pursuit of common interests and result in a strong sense of community identity.
9. To provide scenic roads, trails and paths to enhance enjoyment of the planning area and to increase convenience and safety.
10. To encourage the increased availability and use of public transportation and shared private transportation in connecting the town to regional shopping, employment and recreational areas and to the regional transportation network.
11. To provide for those commercial and institutional uses which are needed by the residents of Portola Valley and its spheres of influence on a frequently recurring basis and which are scaled to meeting primarily the needs of such residents. Commercial and institutional uses that meet the frequently recurring needs range from those that most residents of the town and its spheres of influence could be expected to use frequently, typically daily or weekly, to those that, while not frequented so often by most residents, still could be expected to be used primarily by residents of the town and its spheres of influence. Those uses that meet the more frequently recurring rather than occasional needs of the residents are preferred.
12. To limit growth in order to minimize the need for additional governmental services and thereby maintain and preserve the town's predominately volunteer local government, a government which fosters a sense of community.
13. To work with neighboring communities, when appropriate, to identify and develop solutions to interjurisdictional problems.
14. To ensure that development will produce a maximum of order, convenience and economy for local residents consistent with other stated goals and objectives.

15. To foster appreciation of the heritage of the planning area by encouraging the recognition and preservation of important historic resources.
16. To control the size, siting and design of buildings so that they, individually and collectively, tend to be subservient to the natural setting and serve to retain and enhance the rural qualities of the town.

Functional Organization of the Planning Area

- 1011 The major land use and circulation features of the general plan are briefly described in the following paragraphs to provide an overview of the plan. These and other features are graphically illustrated on the comprehensive plan diagram, found separately in this document.
- 1012 The land use and circulation system proposed in the general plan derive from and recognize the location and role of Portola Valley in the San Francisco Bay Area and the Midpeninsula. These proposals are also determined and conditioned by the shape of the valley, and the rugged topography and natural beauty of the area. Within the planning area, the proposals for land use and circulation recognize the existing development as setting the general framework for further development.
- 1013 The spectrum of land use and circulation proposals conforms to the concept of Portola Valley as a major open space within the larger urbanized region. Thus, the intensity of land uses, the distribution of land uses, and the standards for development all reflect the recognition that the natural beauty of the area is its prime asset, important both to local residents and to the Midpeninsula and Bay Area.
- 1014 Commercial and institutional uses serving all or most of Portola Valley are grouped in areas on the floor of the valley along Portola and Alpine roads. Residential land use intensities tend to be highest on the more level lands near commercial and institutional uses and decrease outward as terrain becomes more difficult for development and distances from community facilities and major thoroughfares increase. Ladera contains another concentration of commercial and institutional uses that serve the local population.
- 1015 Employment areas along Sand Hill Road in the northern portion of the planning area (areas of "secondary concern") are close to more intensively developed areas to the east and are well served by major thoroughfares.

- 1016 The important skyline ridge on the western side of the planning area is proposed to be developed as a scenic corridor in which the existing character of the terrain and natural vegetation would be retained. Elsewhere in the planning area, major creeks are to be retained and enhanced as important natural features. Major emphasis is placed on the retention of natural land forms and vegetation in all development proposals for the planning area.
- 1017 Two major thoroughfares provide for the primary movement into and out of the planning area: Sand Hill Road and Alpine Road. The Junipero Serra Freeway (Route 280) provides for movement by motor vehicle connecting the planning area with parts of the Bay Area to the north and south, and indirectly to the east.
- 1018 Skyline Boulevard, La Honda Road and Alpine Road west of Skyline Boulevard provide access from the area to the more western parts of San Mateo County, the recreation areas in Santa Cruz County, and the western part of Santa Clara County.
- 1019 Within the planning area, a system of arterials, major collectors and minor collectors link the various parts of the area and provide access to community facilities and services. A system of trails and paths provide for movement on foot, horseback or bicycle.

Use of the Plan

- 1020 The general plan is a complex document which has been carefully prepared to provide an internally consistent set of policy statements to guide the growth and development of Portola Valley. By and large, policy statements are not repeated in the plan, and in some cases the user may need to refer to several parts of the plan to find the range of policy statements relevant to a particular subject. In all instances, the more detailed policies with respect to a specific topic take precedence over more general policies.

