

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING, TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY, MAY 16, 2012, SCHOOLHOUSE, TOWN CENTER, 765 PORTOLA ROAD, PORTOLA VALLEY, CA 94028

Chair Von Feldt called the Planning Commission regular meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. Ms. Borck called the roll:

Present: Commissioners Denise Gilbert, Arthur McIntosh (arrived 7:32 p.m.) and Nate McKitterick (arrived 7:33 p.m.); Vice Chair Leah Zaffaroni; Chair Alexandra Von Feldt

Absent: None

Staff Present: Tom Vlastic, Town Planner  
Carol Borck, Planning Technician  
Ted Sayre, Town Geologist

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None.

REGULAR AGENDA

- (1) Public Hearing: Request for Modifications to Town's Geologic and Movement Potential Maps, Assessors Parcels 076-192-130 & 076-380-110, Wayside Road (Frenz)

Mr. Vlastic referenced the staff report of May 9, 2012 and the Town Geologist's report of May 3, 2012 that discuss the subject property and conditions thereon. Located off Wayside Road, the property consists of two parcels, one of about 0.25 acre and the other 5.9 acres, owned by John and Jana Frenz. All of it appears in the Md category, which designates "unstable ground characterized by seasonally active downslope movement" with "moving deep landslides." Mr. Vlastic said an extensive geologic investigation has been ongoing, with interaction between Mr. Sayre's office and Applied Earth Science Consultants, developing data in support of map modifications. He said the data, presented and evaluated consistent with Town resolutions for application of the maps, supports changes as depicted in the attachments provided.

Although no development has been proposed, Mr. Vlastic explained said that the changes would affect planning limitations applicable to the property, and possibly adjacent properties as well. He also explained that map modifications must go through the public hearing process because the maps themselves were adopted pursuant to that process.

Mr. Sayre provided additional geologic background of the site, noting that the Frenz property was among several he reviewed in 1985. At the time, there had been applications for changes to the maps by geologists Purcell Rhoades, Ray Pestrong and others. On this particular property, Mr. Sayre reported going about 30 feet down into a large boring, which proved too shallow to answer geologic questions at the site. He also pointed out that Tim Manzagol of Applied Earth Science Consultants has monitored groundwater levels for seven years from four deep borings he drilled. His data revealed that the water table was deep enough to prevent ground from being saturated to the extent that it's likely to move. Additionally, he said, borings to approximately 130 feet didn't expose a landslide shear surface that matched the maps that are now in effect, and the data indicate past failures are much deeper than the nearby creek bed. Mr. Manzagol found, too, an intact stratigraphic block of dry material several hundred feet long and more than 70 feet deep, which Mr. Sayre said is incompatible with a dormant landslide.

In response to Commissioner McIntosh, Mr. Sayre pointed out the area of the creek to which he referred, which merges with Bull Run Creek.

Mr. Sayre also indicated that the topographical data Mr. Manzagol compiled, much more comprehensive than any previous consultant's, outlines some of the larger landslide features much more clearly than the Town's existing maps. Mr. Sayre said he also walked this ground to look at the features for himself.

Mr. Frenz said that when the geologic work on his property began, he had no idea what the outcome would be, and if worse came to worse, the land would remain a place to camp out from time to time. He said it was nice to learn that Mr. Manzagol did such a thorough job in determining the property's geology.

In response to Commissioner McKitterick, Mr. Sayre said Professor Pestrong's studies didn't have sufficient subsurface exploration to address the potential for landslides deeper than a 30-foot excavation. Commissioner McKitterick also asked whether the groundwater monitoring data Mr. Sayre reported are consistent with his personal observations over the years. Mr. Sayre said yes, adding that he's seen other similar situations where drainages are nearby but groundwater has a place to exit.

Vice Chair Zaffaroni requested clarification about the DIs (dormant landslide) definition in one of the documents, which described it as "not presently active but probably active within the past 10 years." Mr. Sayre said the age estimates linked to landslide designations on the map need to be taken with a grain of salt. A recent landslide, he said, indicates activity within 50 to 100 years. Although Mr. Manzagol's map key shows 10 years for the DIs designation, Mr. Sayre said, 10 years would typically apply to an active landslide. Where an OIs (old landslide) category has been indicated, it's because over time drainages have eroded into a larger landslide mass deep beneath the surface.

Because the report submitted is more broad-reaching than the applicants' property, Vice Chair Zaffaroni also asked how other areas where there have been recent landslides would be affected by the proposed change. Commissioner McKitterick said the slide areas the Commissioners visited are fairly distant from this property, and Mr. Vlastic pointed out that the area visited also was considerably farther downslope. Commissioner McKitterick said a landslide occurred about 30 years ago in an area known as "The Sinkies." Mr. Vlastic pointed that area out on the map, noting that as a consequence of that landslide, the Town purchased some property there. He also indicated the locations of houses in the vicinity, several of which are outside the Town boundaries. Mr. Sayre also showed where other properties, uphill and adjacent to the Frenz parcels, would have map designations changed if the proposal is approved. He said it's geologically reasonable to change the map designations for the areas outside the applicants' property rather than using lot lines as parameters for geologic features.

Further to the question of the past periods of landslide activity, Mr. Sayre said some of the slicing was too thin when the categories "active," "recent," "dormant," "old" and "ancient" were selected. He said that geologists cannot tell the age of a landslide in all cases, and when he looks at features himself he isn't completely confident that he can differentiate between a mass that's 200 versus 500 years old. Certainly, though, he'd know it if a landslide had occurred within 10 years, and the depth of the groundwater makes it clear that such a short timeframe doesn't fit on this property.

In response to Commissioner Gilbert, Mr. Vlastic confirmed that Md and Pd designations wouldn't affect development potential. He noted that SIs and Ps designations provide more opportunity for development, but would still limit it to the gentler slopes close to Short Street, an unimproved, unsigned "paper" street that enters the Frenz property off Wayside Road. He said the majority of the smaller of the two Frenz parcels and the gentle slopes accessible via Short Street would be redesignated SIs (from Md), while most of the larger parcel would be designated Pd (from Md).

Mr. Vlastic indicated that revised map designations, coupled with the slope considerations and zoning regulations, leave the Frenzes with a couple of possibilities for future development.

Chair Von Feldt opened the public hearing, and with no one coming forward, closed the public hearing.

Vice Chair Zaffaroni said Mr. Manzagol has done a thorough, long-term job, and she'd defer to his findings and judgments and those of Mr. Sayre. She also said she's satisfied that the implications beyond the applicants' property are more limited than she thought they might be from reading the reports. Commissioner McKitterick said Mr. Sayre's concurrence carries a lot of weight with him.

Commissioner Gilbert moved approval of the request for modifications to the Town's Geologic and Movement Potential Maps as recommended in the Town Geologist's May 3, 2012 report. Seconded by Commissioner McKitterick, the motion carried 5-0.

## COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### (2) Report: First Portola Road Corridor Task Force meeting on May 15, 2012

Commissioner McKitterick, representing the Planning Commission on the Task Force, said the group's first meeting went well. Members identified three primary areas of focus:

- Trails along Portola Road.
- The roadway itself, particularly in terms of access for bicyclists and other road users.
- Foliage along the road and its effect on views.

The group agreed that it was desirable to have open, natural views from the road. Accordingly, in some stretches the view would be open for some distance so that those in vehicles can appreciate it. In other places, members agreed that the trail experience should be a little more isolated and some of the foliage – such as eucalyptus trees – serves as wildlife habitat. Other issues identified included the odor of the pump station and the presence of back gates.

Commissioner McKitterick reported that members also asked what the Planning Commission was looking for. Although he told them it's probably an aspirational vision for Portola Road to incorporate into the General Plan as well as some near-term practical ideas, he also said he'd bring that question back to the Planning Commission.

With regard to trails, Commissioner McKitterick said, the main issue is separation from the road, but another question concerns trail width. It also seems to make sense, he said, for at least part of the trail to be amenable to people pushing baby strollers.

Vice Chair Zaffaroni said that in terms of the future vision for the trail, moving it farther from the road would be desirable.

In response to Vice Chair Zaffaroni's question about trail surface, Mr. Vlasic said the Town has been using a multi-use surface in some locations, but there are questions about how well it serves its intended purpose – including accommodating people pushing strollers. Commissioner McKitterick said some of the committees are providing feedback about surfaces for the Task Force to consider. Mr. Vlasic also reported that Howard Young, Public Works Director, has a study underway to check out the width of the roadway and right-of-way (ROW) in the context of the ability to carve out more shoulder area. Although Task Force members agreed that paving isn't appropriate for the trail, a natural, gravelly surface may be an option for the parts that are most heavily used.

Even in areas where the ROW is too limited to allow for separation of uses, Commissioner McKitterick pointed out, there are options if the Town should choose to pursue them, and the Task Force may consider those options as it envisions the Portola Road Corridor in the future.

Chair Von Feldt agreed that Commissioner McKitterick informing the Task Force that the Planning Commission would want an aspirational plan was good guidance, because a forward-looking plan would help Commissioners determine priorities and a path to follow as projects come up. Mr. Vlasic said the plan also would serve Public Works well, because as it stands now, Mr. Young's never sure about the implications of cutting back vegetation in one place versus another along the corridor.

Commissioner McIntosh said he likes the idea of a wishlist that's also realistic. In response to his inquiry whether undergrounding of utility lines is part of the Task Force discussion, Commissioner McKitterick said it is, but right now the Town has prioritized Alpine Road over Portola Road for undergrounding. Another aspect the Task Force is likely to consider would involve relocating some of the utility poles that are on the trails.

In response to Vice Chair Zaffaroni, Commissioner McKitterick said one location where trail separation is an issue goes from near Valley Presbyterian Church, past the Morsehead and Christ Church properties up to the first turn-in to Town Center. Another area goes from just past Spring Down, along past the White property toward

Windy Hill. Mr. Vlastic said the Town's Master Trail Plan has a provision for a trail at the base of the western hillsides, and although it wouldn't be part of the Portola Road Corridor, it could link to it.

Commissioner McIntosh said he was glad to hear the Task Force considers opening up the views a major priority. Indicative of how the view has diminished by foliage growth over the years, Chair Von Feldt cited an old photo in Town Historian Nancy Lund's book taken near The Sequoias, which is barely recognizable because it was so open years ago. Mr. Vlastic said the Task Force members would go back to their committees and discuss specific areas where trimming is desirable and others where it's appropriate to preserve a sense of seclusion.

In response to a comment from Commissioner McIntosh about the thorniness of the parking issue along Portola Road, Commissioner McKitterick said the Task Force would develop some ideas, and that banning regular parking – either for churchgoers or visitors to the Midpeninsula Region Open Space District (MROSD) – would be a likely goal to strive for. Mr. Vlastic added that the Town has a good working relationship with The Sequoias' Facilities Director or Northern California, Yumi Westland, and reported that she's probably amenable to discussing parking there.

In response to Chair Von Feldt's observation about the hedge of broom across from the MROSD parking lot, Commissioner McKitterick reiterated the Task Force's focus on open and natural views. He said the Task Force may decide that all non-native plants should be removed.

Turning to another matter, Mr. Vlastic said The Priory filed its application for a CUP amendment, which may come to the Planning Commission in June 2012. Vice Chair Zaffaroni asked at what point circulation of new CEQA documents would be required. Mr. Vlastic explained that once the project is clearly defined, the initial study has to be revised accordingly. At the time of the preliminary review, comments would feed into the development of the document for environmental review purposes. In terms of drainage, he pointed out that a channel and retention basin were installed as part of the overall master storm drainage effort. Mr. Vlastic said that he has confidence in Ed Boscacci of BKF Engineers, who's been closely involved with the plan and is comfortable that it will work with The Priory's approved master plan for storm drainage.

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner McKitterick moved to approve the May 2, 2012 minutes of the Planning Commission meeting, as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Gilbert, the motion carried 5-0.

#### ADJOURNMENT [8:36 p.m.]

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Alexandra Von Feldt, Chair

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Leslie Lambert, Planning Manager