

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING, TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY, JUNE 6, 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 and Nate McKitterick; Vice Chair Leah Zaffaroni; Chair Alexandra Von Feldt

Absent: Commissioner Arthur McIntosh

Staff Present: Tom Vlastic, Town Planner  
Karen Kristiansson, Principal Planner  
Carol Borck, Planning Technician  
Jeff Aalfs, Town Council Liaison

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None.

REGULAR AGENDA

- (1) Preliminary Review: Application for an amendment to Conditional Use Permit (CUP) X7D-30 for a parcel merger, expanded athletic field and track with artificial turf infill at 302 Portola Road, The Priory School

As a neighbor of The Priory, Vice Chair Zaffaroni recused herself.

Ms. Kristiansson said no action would be taken tonight, and that staff is awaiting further information, including the project analysis under CEQA. The project is similar to one The Priory proposed last summer, but a key difference includes merging the Rutherford parcel with The Priory's main parcel, which would enable expanding the track to a regulation 400 meters. The track expansion would require removing the berm between the parcels and relocating the sewer line in that berm.

The project also includes a landscaping plan that proposes removing non-native vegetation. As with the initial proposal, this project includes artificial turf, but only in the track infield, for a total of 2.39 versus 2.54 acres. The applicant specifically requested Commission feedback on the artificial turf issue. Ms. Kristiansson also asked for Commissioner input about enlarging the track, removing the berm, relocating the sewer line and the landscaping plan. She noted that Commissioner packets included an email from Annaloy Nickum and letters from Bev Lipman and Amy Gurley, expressing concerns about drainage and seeing artificial turf from Portola Road.

A June 4, 2012 addendum to the staff report summarized issues and conclusions about artificial turf presented in the draft CEQA document, which was prepared in August 2011 but never finalized, Ms. Kristiansson explained. That document addressed issues of aesthetics, air quality, greenhouse gas emissions, hazards and hazardous materials, potential impacts on water quality, stormwater runoff and drainage.

As Ms. Kristiansson explained, PMC, the consultants who prepared the CEQA document, considered comments from the Planning Commission's February 16, 2011 preliminary review of The Priory's initial proposal for artificial turf refurbishment of its multipurpose field, as well as a February 15, 2011 letter from Jon Silver. The draft document found no significant environmental impacts from the artificial turf, but the CEQA analysis would now require updating to address revisions in The Priory's initial proposal. Ms. Kristiansson said the Planning Commission is free to ask for additional information and/or analysis as part of that process.

Mr. Vlastic indicated that Commissioner comments also will help guide staff in evaluating the CEQA documents, particularly the artificial turf aspects. As for the berm, he pointed out that it isn't a natural feature, and the incorporation of the Rutherford property provides an opportunity to restore a more native condition to the Portola Road Corridor and make some trail improvements.

Speaking for The Priory, Tim Molak said the outcome of last year's ASCC site meeting and preliminary review provided the focus for the PMC report on a 330-meter track proposal that didn't involve removing the berm. The potential for a larger track as a result of incorporating the Rutherford property caused The Priory to pursue the current proposal, he said. Mr. Molak also said if Commissioners don't want artificial turf used, he'd prefer knowing sooner rather than later, to avoid investing much more time and effort pursuing an option that will be rejected.

In response to Commissioner Gilbert, who noted the house on the Rutherford parcel would straddle the 50-foot setback line under the new configuration, Mr. Vlasic said the setback rules wouldn't apply to an existing building.

Chair Von Feldt asked about:

- The impervious surface calculation. Mr. Vlasic said a natural turf field with its drainage facilities isn't considered an impervious surface and meets existing CUP provisions. If water from artificial turf is directed in such a way that it behaves in a similar fashion on that site and in the context of The Priory's drainage master plan, the Planning Commission would have to decide whether it's an acceptable element of the overall plan.
- How often disinfectant chemicals would be sprayed. Ms. Kristiansson said this issue hasn't been discussed in terms of the current proposal, but the turf would have been sprayed every other month in the proposal the Planning Commission reviewed last year. In response to Commissioner Gilbert's asking about the amount of chemicals used, Mr. Molak said the PMC report spoke to the issue of chemical application and effects, but as Mr. Vlasic pointed out, staff had stopped reviewing the report when The Priory put its plan on hold.
- Whether the Woodside artificial turf fields are treated in the same way. Ms. Kristiansson said she wasn't sure.
- Trail upgrades. Mr. Molak said the trail is walkable but upgrades may be appropriate after removing some plantings. Mr. Vlasic said in addition to overgrowth that endangers walkers and runners, riders and horses, drainage is an issue on the trail, and staff will review Town standards for conformance. Commissioner McKitterick said the Portola Road Task Force report would include suggestions for trail upgrades.
- How many days a year temperatures typically exceed 85°F, when the field would be watered, and 90°F, when field use would be suspended. Mr. Molak said the field isn't used much during the summer, but when the temperatures are lower, and no situation has occurred at The Priory when heat prompted suspension of a game. Even if artificial turf gets hotter than a natural turf field, he said doctors, EMTs and/or athletic trainers are present at every game to determine whether it's too hot to play. He also pointed out that Woodside has never used the water vents that were installed as a mitigation measure on its artificial turf.
- Whether there would be peer and/or staff review when it's time for the full Mitigated Negative Declaration. Mr. Vlasic said the Planning Commission would have the opportunity for additional review and study.

Commissioner Gilbert asked whether rubber pellet debris from the artificial turf washing into the creek, a question that surfaced during The Priory's initial application review, remains an issue now. Ms. Kristiansson said the drainage system filtration would catch the vast majority, but a small amount may wash out from the edges.

In reviewing the landscape concept diagram, Commissioner Gilbert identified two regions between the field and Portola Road where redwood tree plantings are proposed. She asked whether this would be consistent with what the Town would want to do with the Portola Road Corridor. Commissioner McKitterick said input from the Portola Road Corridor Plan Task Force would be forthcoming, and Mr. Vlasic said the Conservation Committee and the ASCC would provide input on whether additional redwoods would be appropriate as well. Mr. Molak said the redwoods Commissioner Gilbert noticed on the diagram are existing trees.

Chair Von Feldt invited public comment and questions.

Sally Ann Reiss, Golden Oak Drive, said that change is a challenge in Portola Valley. She recalled reading about the uproar created when the Alpine Hills Tennis and Swimming Club proposed adding tennis courts, and how residents complained about changes to Windy Hill before The Sequoias built its new Alzheimer's wing. She cited other examples of unfounded worries about projects, noting that fear keeps people from envisioning

opportunities. The Priory offers its students and the Town a great asset, making its athletic fields available to all of our teams, she said, adding that many people who support the project couldn't come to this meeting because they were already committed to participate in school functions.

Jon Silver, Portola Road, said the word "fear" is inappropriate in describing objections to artificial turf and reiterated Mr. Molak's point about not wasting time debating artificial turf because he believes residents would be overwhelmingly opposed to it. He considers artificial turf fundamentally incompatible and contains toxic chemicals that would seep into the groundwater, into prime, sensitive habitats, and into the creek. He recalled when MTBE was added to California gasoline, and everyone said it was safe, but it was a terrible mistake, and hopes the Planning Commission won't make a mistake in approving artificial turf for The Priory.

In response to a question from Ms. Reiss, Ms. Borck confirmed that some private residences in Portola Valley have installed artificial grass. In the most recent instance she recalled, the grass counted as impervious surface. Ms. Reiss asked whether, aside from light-reflective surfaces, there are any materials that environmental health authorities allow but the Town bans. Ms. Borck said she didn't think so.

Tom Kelley, Franciscan Ridge, said one of the reasons his family moved to Portola Valley in 1972 was the blending in with nature, different from Palo Alto. He said the last time he came to a Planning Commission meeting was when artificial turf was proposed for Ford Field. He said that as he recalls, the proposal was rejected because "it ain't us" – a Town that receives awards for being green. He said he can't wrap his head around the idea that the Town would even consider "plastic grass and rubber dirt," and to do so would put the Town on a slippery slope in terms of future decisions. He encouraged the Commission to "be real."

Bev Lipman, Favonio Road, said previous speakers have addressed the points she considers important very well. Drainage has been a problem historically at the site, she said, and would be more of a problem if the berm is removed. Ms. Lipman referred Commissioners to a Stanford study sponsored by the Santa Clara Valley Water District ("Field, Pilot, and Laboratory Studies for the Assessment of Water Quality Impacts of Artificial Turf," prepared by Hefa Cheng and Martin Reinhard, Department of Civil and Environmental Engineering, June 2010).

Annaloy Nickum, Alpine Road, said she didn't remember why The Priory wanted artificial rather than natural turf, but imagines it includes reduced water usage. As a landscape professional, she said she knows the irrigation industry has made tremendous improvements in water-delivery efficiency. For instance, she said, transpiration meters enable replacing only the amount of water that's evaporated, and she mentioned articles about subsurface drip irrigation. She said Portola Valley should start using more of these state-of-the-art irrigation systems for playing fields. She also encouraged exploring the various types of natural turf and methods of installation to ensure deeper watering. With the new technologies available, she said, the fields can stay green with efficient watering and without the downside of artificial turf.

Mr. Silver said artificial turf is inappropriate for many reasons, including threats to public health and safety. He pointed out that Portola Valley has been in the forefront of establishing fault setbacks and developing zoning regulations governing development on slopes and areas of potential landslides, but the Town doesn't have to be "among the first to pioneer fake grass."

From the audience, Ms. Zaffaroni asked whether any more information is available relevant to the drainage issue. Mr. Vlastic said each project at The Priory – including the one now proposed and any others to come – must conform to its master drainage plan, which was prepared and accepted by the Public Works Director as a condition of the 2005 CUP amendment. The master drainage plan addresses collecting and directing water to the common field detention basin and then metering it to the creek system.

In response to Commissioner Gilbert, Mr. Vlastic clarified that the common field is the baseball field in back, surrounded by a berm (not the berm that would be removed) that was designed and installed to serve as a detention basin in heavy storm flows.

Mr. Molak said that prior to the drainage improvements, runoff from the Jelich orchard often flooded housing at The Priory. In hard rains, he said water from The Priory's current soccer field, across from the entry road, also flowed onto the Jelich property. He added that implementing the drainage plan also involved installing new four-foot-wide storm drains.

Mr. Silver said that if artificial turf element remains part of the proposal, he'd like future meeting notices to be more informative.

Chair Von Feldt brought the discussion back to the Commission, first requesting the Commissioners' initial reaction to what they've heard tonight.

On the basis of previous projects at The Priory and the annual review of its CUP, Commissioner McKitterick said he's generally been very supportive and considers The Priory a good neighbor whose requests well within reason. Commissioner McKitterick noted that he also serves on the Portola Road Corridor Task Force, which is developing ideas about the future vision for that corridor that the Planning Commission eventually will adopt as a General Plan element. He said the Task Force is likely to recommend more open views along Portola Road to minimize the "corridor" feel that has evolved over the past 50 years. If the Planning Commission goes in that direction, he said the field ultimately may be more visible than screened.

Commissioner McKitterick said he's read the staff reports and correspondence as well as conducting some research on his own, and he concurs that arguments can to be made on both sides of the artificial turf issue. While he said he wouldn't necessarily support artificial turf on public property, he said he was willing to support it as a sort of experiment on private, commercial land in Town. However, he indicated that some of Mr. Kelley's comments resonated with him. Setting aside issues of toxicity, infections, runoff and drainage related to artificial turf, he acknowledged that like Mr. Kelley, he moved to Portola Valley for its natural beauty. He also said he doesn't want to see the Town viewed as an example of why artificial turf is okay, because he isn't sure it is okay. In summary, Commissioner McKitterick said that at this time he's not inclined to support the artificial turf provision – and acknowledging that he could change his mind by the time the Planning Commission reaches a decision, he noted that Mr. Molak wanted a sense of how Commissioners felt about it sooner rather than later.

Commissioner Gilbert said she has no problems with the overall project, but at this time is undecided about the artificial turf. She said she needs more complete understanding of runoff and drainage issues to address her concerns.

Chair Von Feldt said she's enthusiastic about the prospect of taking out the berm, restoring the land to more natural contours, removing bushes along the road that have been pruned into little balls, and having a regulation-size track installed in the location proposed. As for the turf, she indicated wanting additional information to be able to evaluate:

- The Priory's master drainage plan.
- The impervious surface calculation. She said that in addition to the drainage issue, there's an ecosystem impact that involves the microorganisms and worms that live beneath the surface of the 2.5-acre field and the above-ground species that feed on them.
- Chemical use on the field and its potential effect on water quality.
- Environmental organizations' reports. Referring to the report Ms. Lipman mentioned, Chair Von Feldt noted that the Santa Clara Valley Water District excludes artificial turf installations from its rebate program that is designed to encourage residents to replace lawns with other plantings.
- Carbon footprint. This would reflect activities involved in installation and maintenance as well as disposal, because the material has a lifespan of only 10 years and would be a significant amount to put in a landfill after that time, Chair Von Feldt said.

If she were to provide guidance to The Priory at this time, Chair Von Feldt said she'd recommend against artificial turf because so much information is still needed. She said it would take not only time but also further investment on the part of The Priory to reach that point. Even then, the response to artificial turf may prove negative on the technical issues alone – and the Planning Commission also would take into account community feedback.

Pointing out that because The Priory is about 80% of the way through developing the CEQA documents – which respond to Chair Von Feldt’s questions – Mr. Molak said they’d complete those documents so the Planning Commission will be able to evaluate PMC’s analysis. Citing a number of reasons for preferring artificial to natural turf for this project, he said one of The Priory’s fields is planted with a type of heat-resistant grass that’s supposed to grow better with less water, but it’s still a problem in that it doesn’t provide a uniform playing field and isn’t always as good as they want it to be. In contrast, he said artificial turf fields at competing schools are ready to play all the time – which would be a great help to The Priory’s athletic programs. The Priory wants to be a good steward and to keep the campus as natural as it can, he said, pointing out that of its 50 acres, The Priory seeks to have only about 2.3 acres be artificial.

Mr. Molak said the track itself, for which an impervious surface is proposed, is another significant investment. Chair Von Feldt and Commissioner McKitterick said they have no problems with the track.

Commissioner McKitterick said that Commissioner McIntosh will have opinions of his own as well.

Chair Von Feldt asked whether Commissioners had any thoughts about the two-part CUP amendment process.

Commissioner McKitterick said he has no problems with the way The Priory wants to proceed with the application, and he understands its position in terms of funding sources and the need for The Priory to be able to reach consensus among various departments. Commissioner Gilbert said she’s trusting staff that the Commission is aware of any relevant issues on the second part that affect the first. Mr. Vlasic said that separate parts of the campus are involved, but everything has to mesh with the overall drainage plan. Mr. Molak said future buildings that already had been approved remain in the plan, with some tweaking of location and a possible proposal for one additional building.

Commissioner McKitterick asked Councilmember Aalfs to explore whether Town Council might want to address the broad issue of artificial turf from its perspective.

Mr. Molak asked if the dropping the request for artificial turf would expedite the process. Mr. Vlasic indicated that without the artificial turf component, it might be possible to have the application ready for a public hearing with the Planning Commission in September 2012. Mr. Vlasic explained that the change would decrease the scope of the environmental review and questions related to the field surface. In terms of the artificial turf component, he indicated that solutions to the scientific aspects may prove elusive due to differing opinions in terms of technicalities, and there may never be answers to emotionally charged questions, which are significant. The artificial turf also would create a bigger burden for the Planning Commission in terms of CUP findings.

## (2) Zoning Ordinance Update Project: Approach and Request for Subcommittee

Commissioner Zaffaroni returned to the dais.

As stated in the staff report of April 30, 2012, Ms. Kristiansson said, the Planning Department has undertaken the task of reorganizing the Zoning Ordinance and clarifying some of the language to make it easier to use. To expedite the process, staff is requesting the support of a two-person Planning Commission subcommittee. The subcommittee could help provide direction on organizational and language changes and review drafts before they come to the full Planning Commission. Mr. Vlasic added that staff’s biggest concern involves rewording to minimize the various interpretations of the current language, and a subcommittee’s input would help minimize bogging down the full Planning Commission in wordsmithing during a meeting.

Commissioners Gilbert and McKitterick said the approach makes sense. Vice Chair Zaffaroni said she understands the concept of streamlining the process, but disagreed because she’s reluctant to delegate something as critical as language to two other people. Mr. Vlasic said the hope is that the subcommittee’s work would provide enough clarification so that by the time proposed revisions come to the Planning Commission, questions about meaning and interpretation would already have been addressed to a large extent.

Vice Chair Zaffaroni said the review process would be more manageable if handled by the entire Planning Commission as opposed to a subcommittee. Mr. Vlasic said the Planning Commission could begin with the full body involved in the review, and then if it proves too cumbersome, a subcommittee could form later rather than

now. Ms. Kristiansson said September 2012 would probably be the soonest a draft would be ready for Planning Commission review. She said that because the Zoning Ordinance is too big to tackle as a single document, it likely would be broken into segments – for example, starting with regulations related to residential projects.

### COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### (3) Update: Portola Road Corridor Task Force

Commissioner McKitterick said that at its second and last meeting, held (June 6, 2012, the Task Force came up with more refined recommendations, both in terms of overarching policies on critical aspects such as trails, road use and foliage/views and smaller issues and specific suggestions. The recommendations would come to the Planning Commission at its meeting on July 18, 2012.

As for whether Portola Road should have bike lanes versus wider shoulders, he reported that different members of the Task Force expressed different views – paralleling the differences within the Bicycle, Pedestrian and Traffic Safety Committee. Ultimately, the Planning Commission may choose an “either/or” approach to address this issue in the Portola Road Element of the General Plan, Commissioner McKitterick said.

Mr. Vlastic said the Task Force focused very much on the major issues, and the input from the various committees represented was helpful. Even though the Task Force will not be having further meetings, Ms. Kristiansson added that staff will keep members involved throughout the process, ensuring that they see plan drafts as they are developed and are advised when the Planning Commission is scheduled to review proposals so they can come and provide input again at that time.

#### Other Topics

In response to Chair Von Feldt, Mr. Vlastic said that basically, Dr. Kirk Neely and Holly Myers won't move ahead with anything other than possibly haying in the meadow area of their property (CUP Application X7D-169, 555 Portola Road, Spring Ridge LLC) until the Town Council clarifies the language pertaining to the Meadow Preserve in the General Plan. At its September 12, 2012 meeting, the Town Council may discuss the matter and provide direction to staff and the Planning Commission, but at this time the date is tentative.

Commissioner McKitterick expressed concern over recently installed fencing at a property on upper Wayside Road that he described as an eyesore that doesn't fit the “rural” definition. He asked if staff could provide information on how it was approved and photos for the Commission to see. Chair Von Feldt agreed that it's important to determine whether the process was followed appropriately, whether ASCC approval was involved, and whether the fence ordinance is clear.

### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner McKitterick moved to approve the May 16, 2012 minutes of the Planning Commission meeting, as amended. Seconded by Commissioner Gilbert, the motion carried 4-0.

### ADJOURNMENT [9:02 p.m.]

---

Alexandra Von Feldt, Chair

---

Tom Vlastic, Town Planner