

PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING, TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY, SEPTEMBER 19, 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; Chair Alexandra Von Feldt

Absent: Commissioner Arthur McIntosh; Vice Chair Leah Zaffaroni

Staff Present: Tom Vlastic, Town Planner
Carol Borck, Planning Technician
Steve Padovan, Interim Planning Manager
John Richards, Town Council Liaison

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None.

REGULAR AGENDA

(1) Continued Preliminary Discussion: Conditional Use Permit (CUP) Amendment X7D-30, 302 Portola Road, Priory School

Mr. Vlastic indicated that this item is on the agenda as a follow-up to the September 10, 2012 joint site meeting with the ASCC, and another field meeting will be held on September 24, 2012 at the Woodside School.

As Mr. Vlastic explained, the first site visit provided an opportunity:

- To review the physical changes at The Priory to help establish a context for evaluating the CUP amendment in general.
- To understand the physical context for considering artificial versus natural turf.
- To envision the property in terms of removing the berm and some trees, and in terms of the effect of the track and field improvements on the Portola Road Corridor view.

Planning Commissioner comments at the conclusion of the site meeting covered two areas, Mr. Vlastic said. Commissioner Gilbert shared concerns about the grading impacts of the proposed work, particularly along the Portola Road frontage, where the trail comes close to the edge of the track and field. Chair Von Feldt wanted to be sure the Conservation and Trails and Paths Committees would be asked for early input to help guide the process as it moves ahead.

Mr. Vlastic also reported that ASCC members and resident Jon Silver offered comments about not separating the turf question from the physical changes. In addition, ASCC members:

- Agreed that berm removal would be appropriate, but landscaping and other changes would need to be done carefully to minimize the potential for visual impacts, particularly as regards the use of the track and expanded playfields.
- Concurred that more grading data details would be needed, particularly where the southeast corner of the track would likely extend into the public right-of-way and affect grades for the public trail.
- Observed that the proposal is vague in terms of the softball field and needs more clarity. They also indicated that the softball field may be a viable place to relocate the shed.

- Questioned the need for 2,000 square feet in the storage shed.
- Noted that if the shed remains where it is, its visual impact on the Portola Road Corridor would be negligible.
- Found the landscape plan generally acceptable, pending input from the Conservation Committee, but recommended further consideration to additional thinning of redwood trees and more screening along the north side of the track.
- Suggested additional grading and removal of some pine trees to get the track farther away from the Portola Road frontage.
- Wanted more details about the drainage channel along Portola Road.
- Requested information about the location of the bleachers.
- Asked that The Priory take advantage of the opportunity and consider undergrounding the wires that now extend along the berm, because they'll probably have to be relocated anyway.
- Pointed out that irrigation should be minimal, especially for the new landscaping, and said irrigation plans should be spelled out clearly in the proposal.

Also, the ASCC indicated a need for further discussion about antenna proposals at The Priory, where the condition of the Monterey pines is an issue. Members continue to encourage a long-term management plan that anticipates the loss of pine tree screening over time, with a phased addition of native plant materials.

Mr. Vlasic said next steps after the meeting at Woodside School would involve The Priory submitting a proposal reflecting any revisions resulting from input, completing environmental document revisions and preparing materials for a public hearing before the Planning Commission.

Commissioner McKittrick asked whether the proposal has changed any since the Planning Commission's first preliminary review. Mr. Vlasic said that The Priory has clarified some details, but the fundamental proposal remains the same.

Tim Molak, Head of School for The Priory, indicated that the Environmental Impact Report will contain a great deal of additional information, including results of objective research that should address some of the Commissioners' questions. In the meantime, he said:

- The proposed 2,000-square-foot shed is needed to consolidate in one place the cross-country and track and field equipment and supplies now stored in various places across the campus, and the more sporting events The Priory hosts, the greater the need for additional storage space.
- The Priory doesn't anticipate having a softball team for some time, and the middle school team probably could use a somewhat smaller field. Another possibility using the baseball field for softball as well.
- Although the issue of the wires did not come up until the first site meeting, undergrounding seems to be the smartest solution in this case.

Chair Von Feldt invited audience comments.

Jon Silver, Portola Road, addressing the turf issue, said that in addition to the visual impact and considerations of the project as a whole, it will be important to distinguish between "what is unreal and toxic" versus "what is real and relatively natural." Mr. Silver also said it would be beneficial for the Town to go beyond formal noticing and reach out to the community to seek more input on the issue.

Chair Von Feldt asked whether it would be feasible to notify people who have attended previous meetings. Ms. Borck said she sent notices to several residents who have spoken on the subject, based on speaker names included in Planning Commission meeting minutes since February 2011.

When Mr. Silver inquired if anyone from the Woodside School District would attend the upcoming site meeting, Mr. Vlastic replied that although Woodside School's administrative staff cannot attend due to a conflict with a site council, they have provided information for the staff report for that meeting, and the person who oversees field maintenance will be there to answer questions.

Commissioner McKitterick said that at this point, he:

- Doesn't take issue with the size of the proposed storage shed.
- Has no strong opinions about either the shed location or the softball field use.
- Is concerned about the trail's proximity to the track only to the extent that it would affect trail usability.
- Would rather see less screening, not more, to open up the campus. He said a view of athletic fields on a campus is preferable to the "tree tunnel" that Portola Road is becoming.

Commissioner McKitterick asked whether Woodside School's artificial turf field uses the same materials The Priory is proposing. Mr. Vlastic said The Priory proposal includes a newer version that doesn't contain rubber pellets from recycled tires. He added that Principal Planner Karen Kristiansson is working with The Priory's architectural team to obtain updated information on other facilities that have installed the surface being proposed.

(2) Staff Report: Fence Permit Applications

Mr. Vlastic indicated that Commissioner McKitterick had questioned a new fence on Wayside Road (for which a fence permit was issued) and said another fence issue came up recently with the rare instance of the ASCC denying an application to build a fence.

The fence at 346 Wayside Road was installed subject to an application approved by now-retired Planning Manager Leslie Lambert in March 2012. Mr. Vlastic showed the Commission a site plan, indicating the location of the fence on the one-acre parcel on upper Wayside. The perimeter fence is consistent with the Fence Ordinance, Mr. Vlastic explained, and the front fence is set back five feet deeper than the 25-foot requirement. The unbroken length, especially along the parcel frontage, plus the slats in the deer-style fencing – which consists of open-wire mesh with a frame – make the fence appear less transparent than the Town encourages, Mr. Vlastic said.

Commissioner McKitterick, pointing out that neighbors originally brought the fence to his attention, said that the fence doesn't have the rural look designated in the Fence Ordinance. He suggested that staff needs guidance in terms of what "rural" means in this context. Commissioner McKitterick also indicated that the fence has been stained darker than it was, reducing its visual impact.

Mr. Vlastic said that post-and-rail fencing with wire mesh has a more transparent appearance. He also noted that the property's zoning would allow solid-board fencing.

Commissioner McKitterick said staff should not be reluctant to request ASCC review of any proposals they question.

The second example Mr. Vlastic mentioned concerned a fence proposed for a home at 25 Kiowa Court. Although this situation involved differences between adjoining neighbors, the property's steep slope (well over the 20% limit) triggered the ASCC review. Ultimately, Mr. Vlastic said, the ASCC could not make the finding that the fence met any of the purposes laid out in the Fence Ordinance and denied the permit.

Chair Von Feldt said she understands a fence has been proposed to demarcate the property line at 555 Portola Road (the Neely/Myers property). Mr. Vlasic said a proposal went to the ASCC, which determined a 3.5-foot post-and-rail fence would be acceptable provided that the trees that were planted to set the boundary and the posts bearing “no trespassing” signs would be removed. He said the Conservation Committee supported the ASCC decision, indicating no issues with the fence.

Commissioner McKitterick said that he thought part of the approved CUP approved required the property owners to remove the fence posts and leave the field open.

Mr. Vlasic said the CUP did not specifically state that the posts had to be removed, but that plantings installed had to be.

Commissioner McKitterick said, “Why would I want the fence posts removed if I had wanted a fence there? What happened to this ‘largely open’ issue we spent days debating?” He said he was very frustrated.

Commissioner Gilbert, who attended the ASCC meeting, confirmed what Mr. Vlasic said about the CUP. “We talked about it, but it wasn’t in the CUP itself. For some reason, I think the issue got dropped.”

Chair Von Feldt recalled the discussion, adding that one point involved protecting the wildlife corridor.

From the audience, Conservation Committee Chair Judith Murphy said she thought the whole concept was to get the meadow open.

Mr. Vlasic indicated that he’d raised the issue of conformity with the Planning Commission’s intent at the ASCC meeting, but the CUP provided allowances for fencing associated with the approved agricultural uses. The ASCC apparently felt the proposed fence was consistent with setting the boundary for the haying operation, and that the fence was acceptable if the vegetation planted to visually mark that boundary and the posts with the “no trespassing” signs were removed.

Ms. Murphy, recalling Conservation Committee discussions about fencing for an orchard and row crops, said the Committee members didn’t like it but decided it was needed for those parts of the proposal. She said she didn’t remember anything about approving a fence extending down the whole meadow.

Mr. Vlasic said the CUP didn’t include a “signed, sealed, delivered fencing plan” because at the time, there were uncertainties about whether the plots shown on the map would be the final plots. That’s why the application went to the ASCC, he explained, which concluded that the fence proposed was acceptable for a haying operation.

Commissioner McKitterick reiterated, “We made them take the fence posts out because we didn’t want a fence there.” Chair Von Feldt, noting that the ASCC is less familiar with the meadow issue because it didn’t spend the time focused on it that the Planning Commission did, said she’d rather leave the trees than have a fence put in. Commissioner Gilbert asked whether there’s anything that can be done now about the fact that the Planning Commission’s intent didn’t make it into the written CUP.

Mr. Vlasic observed that the ASCC decision was not a “formal, final approval,” that this item is not on the Planning Commission agenda tonight, and that the issue of the General Plan language will be discussed by the Town Council at its meeting on September 26, 2012. Given the situation, he said he’d evaluate it and get back to the Planning Commission.

(3) Staff Report: Schedule for Planning Commission Project Reviews during October and November 2012

Mr. Vlasic summarized items coming up over the next two months:

- A preliminary review for a variance at 169 Wayside Road. Extensive geologic investigations have been undertaken on the property, which is located above Our Lady of the Wayside Church, to support an engineered solution, but a variance would be needed in any case for two reasons: 1) the existing house

and improvements along the frontage of the property encroach on the required setback areas, and 2) the property slope creates height-limit issues.

- The matter of the Blue Oaks lots, which the Town wants to sell to facilitate buying the 900 Portola Road property. A lot-line adjustment would be needed to accommodate the Town's lots going from four to two, and the Blue Oaks Planned Unit Development (PUD) will require an amendment. That process will begin with preliminary review at the October 3, 2012 Planning Commission meeting, then on to use permit review by Town staff and committees, and then back to the Planning Commission for a public hearing, probably in November.
- The Portola Road Corridor Task Force report.

Because the Task Force had reached consensus on the issue of opening views that might be helpful for ASCC, Commissioner McKitterick asked whether the ASCC subcommittee dealing with the Neely/Myers frontage issues should see the report.

- The Priority application as it continues to move ahead.
- The Zoning Ordinance work discussed in previous meetings.

COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

ASCC – Neely/Myers: Commissioner Gilbert provided an update from the ASCC meeting of September 17, 2012. In addition to the discussion of the fence proposed for the Neely/Myers property, the applicants are in the process of seeking building permits for the cabaña and the agricultural building. The cabaña design is more modern than originally proposed, Ms. Gilbert said, and the agricultural building is now planned to accommodate only haying operations. The applicant may revisit that plan, depending on the Town Council's discussion of the Meadow Preserve on September 26, 2012. An ASCC subcommittee will look at the plan for removing trees and thinning foliage along Portola Road and the property line.

Mr. Vlastic said the applicant must meet a number of CUP conditions and make plan corrections before any building permits will be issued.

Portola Road Corridor Task Force: Commissioner McKitterick reported that the Task Force has completed its report and met today for the third and last time. Ms. Kristiansson is putting the report together to present to the Planning Commission within the next month or so. In response to Chair Von Feldt, Commissioner McKitterick said that the report has been modified to reflect feedback from the Trails and Paths Committee.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Gilbert moved to approve the July 18, 2012 minutes of the Planning Commission meeting. Seconded by Chair Von Feldt, the motion carried 2-0-1 (McKitterick abstained).

ADJOURNMENT [8:34 p.m.]

Alexandra Von Feldt, Chair

Tom Vlastic, Town Planner