

REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING, TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY, APRIL 3, 2013,  
SCHOOLHOUSE, TOWN CENTER, 765 PORTOLA ROAD, PORTOLA VALLEY, CA 94028

Chair Von Feldt called the Planning Commission regular meeting to order at 7:33 p.m. and asked Mr. Padovan to call the roll:

Present: Commissioner Nicholas Targ, Vice Chair Denise Gilbert, Chair Alexandra Von Feldt

Absent: Commissioners Arthur McIntosh and Nate McKitterick

Staff Present: Tom Vlastic, Town Planner  
Steve Padovan, Interim Planning Manager  
Jeff Aalfs, Town Council Liaison

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None

REGULAR AGENDA

- (1) Public Hearing: Site Development Permit X9H-650, for New Residential development, 6 Buck Meadow Drive (Lot 34), Roland and Anngi Strick

Mr. Vlastic said that on March 11, 2013, the Planning Commission and ASCC conducted a joint preliminary site review of a site development permit for approximately 2,700 cubic yards of grading related to the construction of a new single family dwelling. The ASCC completed its review on March 25, 2013, after refinements to the architectural plans and grading plan modifications based on input provided. According to Mr. Vlastic, the ASCC basically embraced the proposal as a positive response to the Town's Zoning Ordinance and the Blue Oaks Planned Unit Development (PUD) guidelines. The revisions include placing more fill onsite to create a balanced cut-and-fill operation, with additional fill to deal with artificial drainage elements that extend across the site.

He stated that the subject property was used to deposit grading spoils resulting from the construction of the Blue Oaks Subdivision. Drainage swales and other erosion control elements were installed along with trenching for geologic surveys resulting in a property that was significantly disturbed. The consensus of those at the site meeting was to move roughly 700 cubic yards of topsoil on the site from where the house is to be built and to spread this material out over the lower portion of the property that was previously disturbed rather than hauling it off. It wouldn't dramatically change the contours, which aren't native in any case, Mr. Vlastic said, and it would allow more native materials to remain onsite as well as reducing truck trips.

There are fault traces and setbacks on either side of the property, he noted, but based on the Blue Oaks PUD provisions, the building envelope is more restricted than one would expect of a site comprising nearly three acres. The design team and project architect Bob Sieger had an arborist report completed and protected the trees along the southern and southeastern portions of the building envelope, which helps to provide separation from Lot 35. Trees and higher elevations on the west side of the property also provide separation.

Mr. Vlastic added that the grading plan would use retaining walls to cut and step the proposed improvements into the site. Grading at the top of the property would help create space for an outdoor patio and swimming pool, with a one to two-foot layer of fill spread on the lower portion of the property, plus some fill in the area of the existing drainage elements. In addition to the trees separating the properties, Mr. Vlastic explained that using retaining walls and cutting the building into the site nestles it into a quadrant of the building envelope that's further from the public road. In addition, the roof angles on the proposed home flow with the contours of the property. While more grading would be involved than

might be expected on a typical Town lot of this size, the proposal is to maintain the majority of the land area outside of the building envelope in a more native condition and maintain the Buck Meadow Preserve that's part of the private open-space easement on this property.

From a design standpoint, he said the ASCC felt that the cutting in was appropriate. There was some debate over the straight building line of the structure along the northwest elevation as it works its way down the slope, but the existing site topography, the changes in building elevations, the open garden over the accessory structure, and the various roof forms help break up that mass.

Mr. Vlasic said the combination of preserving trees (including a Madrone that the ASCC was concerned about), cutting the house into the site, and incorporating roof forms that are in harmony with the topography were viewed as positive responses to both PUD and Town design guidelines. Also, a minimal landscaping approach would help preserve the meadow character over most of the site. The driveway would go through the meadow area, but its crushed granite surface would minimize its presence within the grassy area.

Vlasic noted that Blue Oaks lots must have two covered and seven additional guest parking spaces. He clarified that this required parking is significantly more than the two covered and two guest parking spaces required in other areas of Town and is the result of the EIR provisions for the Blue Oaks project. He noted that this lot has a minimum of two covered spaces in a garage with seven uncovered spaces located along the driveway. Per ASCC's recommendation and to provide more of a meadow character than hardscape, the parking areas would have either a turf block or fiberglass grass mat surface which would allow the surface to appear as part of the meadow.

In addition to the ASCC, he said, the Town Geologist, Public Works Director and Conservation Committee all reviewed the proposal. Accordingly, he said the Planning Commission is asked to approve the actions set forth in the April 3, 2013 staff report (page 5), including a finding of CEQA compliance and for the site development permit, subject to Conditions A through F, which fundamentally require conformance with the conditions of the ASCC, Public Works Director, the Town Geologist, and the Fire Marshal. Other than ensuring the construction operation does not block the trail on a portion of the property – addressed by the Public Works Director's report – there are no trail impacts. A detailed construction staging plan would be submitted when the applicant requests a building permit, which is a normal part of the building permit process.

Chair Von Feldt asked whether the applicant had anything to add. Project Architect Bob Sieger said they've spent nearly a year making the design fit the site, meeting the codes and providing the living environment that property owners Roland and Anngi Strick desire. He said they're content with having incorporated all the revisions requested into the documents for Planning Commission approval.

Chair Von Feldt opened the item up for public comments. There were none. She then invited Commissioners' questions and comments.

In response to Vice Chair Gilbert, who didn't recall any official comments about the balanced grading coming from either the ASCC or the Planning Commission at the site meeting, Mr. Vlasic said that Commissioner McIntosh was very clear in recommending a balanced grading operation and that it was the general consensus of the group to leave the topsoil on-site.

Commissioner Targ asked whether the balancing is solely intended to put an extra foot of topsoil on the degraded portion of the site. Mr. Vlasic said that because the site was substantially disturbed from previous activities, Commissioner McIntosh thought it appropriate to consider placing the excess topsoil somewhere on the site. The issues related primarily to the impacts from off-hauling the soils – excess truck traffic, spillage of materials going back and forth on the site, the grading operation, the impact within the subdivision and on Los Trancos Road coming to Alpine Road, and where the dirt would ultimately be deposited. He said that placing dirt on the property isn't typically encouraged on sites with native contours, but the artificial drainage features and other circumstances seemed a better approach than the

off-haul alternative. Mr. Vlastic added that other areas in Town, particularly Westridge, encourage balanced fill regardless of site contours.

Vice Chair Gilbert said the Planning Commission normally hasn't supported that approach for two reasons, one of which is to avoid changing the natural contours of the land, which Mr. Vlastic addressed. The second reason relates to the risk of ending up with a field of invasive plants by tearing up the meadow, removing all of the plants and laying topsoil. She asked whether the applicant was aware of that problem.

Chair Von Feldt noted that the short-term pain of off-haul is worth it if you don't interfere with what's there, but also pointed out that because the site had been used to deposit excess grading spoils during the subdivision construction, the current plant palate is weak. In this case, she said proper weed-control techniques along with proper cleaning of any grading equipment could result in a net benefit for the site.

Commissioner Targ said the balanced approach would eliminate 90 truck trips or more, which would be positive in terms of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and would be more convenient, but it also has impacts with respect to vegetation.

Chair Von Feldt said this issue has been discussed in connection with several projects within Blue Oaks in the past, and applicants say they will definitely watch out for it. However, construction can bring in certain invasive species. She said dittrichia (stinkwort) is a common one. If they're eradicated within the first year, it isn't a problem, she said, but it is a problem if they go to seed.

Mr. Vlastic said that one of the biggest aspects of the Blue Oaks development was removal of invasives, particularly broom and thistle. He said an ongoing program there addresses those issues, particularly with respect to broom and thistle, even within some of the open-space easement areas on individual properties.

Commissioner Targ said the project as proposed looks very thoughtful. He noted that there was a discussion about the application of Grasscrete, but wasn't clear which direction the applicant had decided to go. Mr. Strick described a newer concept – fiberglass grass matting that is installed below the ground, meshes with the soil and grass and apparently accommodates the need for fire truck access. Although he's neither used nor researched this option yet, the preference would be to lean toward the newer technology. He said they would obtain samples and talk with their geotechnical engineer to make sure this material would work on this site. He is also open to opinions as to which approach to take.

Mr. Vlastic said he'd encourage consideration of the grass geocell product, which has a PVC base that supports vehicles, but basically disappears into the grass. Chair Von Feldt asked whether this is considered a pervious material. He said yes, the Planning Commission has already determined that the geocell is a pervious material. As well, he added, due to greater parking requirement at Blue Oaks, not all parking surfaces in the planned unit development count against the impervious-surfaces limits.

Chair Von Feldt said she was pleased that ASCC did not request screening bushes on the meadow side of the property. She noted Conservation Committee comments pertaining to plants on the other side that appeared to serve as screening between the properties. The location makes sense, she said, but since it seems to be shady and the species currently planted there like sunshine, she offered to provide the applicant with suggestions for shade-tolerant, deer-proof plants. The Stricks said they'd love her input.

Vice Chair Gilbert moved to find the site development permit project categorically exempt from the CEQA guidelines. Seconded by Commissioner Targ, the motion carried 3-0 (McIntosh and McKitterick absent).

Vice Chair Gilbert moved to approve the site development permit application as shown in the plans and materials referenced in this memo and subject to Conditions A through F in the staff report. Seconded by Commissioner Targ, the motion carried 3-0 (McIntosh and McKitterick absent).

COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mr. Vlastic said the Town Council has elected to review the Planning Commission action on the Priory, which is tentatively set for Council review at its April 24, 2013 meeting.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Mr. Vlastic said the minutes of the March 20, 2013 Commission meeting would be in the packet for the next Planning Commission meeting.

ADJOURNMENT [8:02 p.m.]

---

Alexandra Von Feldt, Chair

---

Tom Vlastic, Town Planner