

Town of Portola Valley General Plan

# Alpine Scenic Corridor Plan

Last amended May 10, 2023

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# *Alpine Scenic Corridor Plan*

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## ***Introduction***

### **The Route**

6200 The Alpine Corridor extends from the base of the foothills at Santa Cruz Avenue up to the Skyline Boulevard summit, a distance of nearly ten miles. The integrating features for the entire length of the corridor are Alpine Road, trails and paths for walkers, equestrians and bicyclists, and the natural features of the corridor. Alpine Road changes greatly in character from an arterial road to a major collector and then to a minor collector and finally to an emergency road over its length. In addition, most of the corridor follows in succession portions of three creeks: San Francisquito, Los Trancos and Corte Madera. The route in part follows along the mutual boundary of San Mateo and Santa Clara counties and goes through sections of Menlo Park and Palo Alto in addition to Portola Valley.

### **Purpose**

6201 The Alpine Scenic Corridor is a schematic guide for the conservation and development of the corridor. The plan:

1. delineates the approximate outlines of the scenic corridor,
2. includes creeks, road, trail and path facilities in general locations,
3. proposes activities appropriate within the scenic corridor,
4. identifies particular problems and opportunities regarding the scenic corridor, and

5. suggests some of the values of the scenic corridor to the communities it touches and identifies its importance to the larger Midpeninsula community.

6202 In addition to longer range actions, the plan focuses public attention on the actions that can be taken at this time to create, maintain and protect the scenic corridor. It also lists measures that can be taken, both public and private, to prevent damage to the corridor by actions that could seriously affect its future value.

6202a The basic goal of this plan is the conservation and enhancement of the beauty of landscape and the rich variety of plants and wildlife of the scenic corridor so as to maintain this band of pleasant open country for the enjoyment of all. A further goal is to carry local traffic and to provide recreational opportunities while preserving to the maximum extent possible the natural setting with improvements limited to trails, paths and features designed to protect and enhance the natural character and the public safety.

### **Character of the Scenic Corridor**

6203 The Alpine Scenic Corridor is of particular importance since it serves as the gateway from the more developed urban peninsula to the rural setting of Portola Valley. The roadsides and creeksides in the corridor remain in a natural state through much of the route, although the lower section of Alpine Road is a busy thoroughfare linking Portola Valley, Ladera and other foothill communities to Midpeninsula employment and shopping centers. Residential properties, shopping centers, and tennis and swim clubs touch the roadway, yet most of the land is still rural in appearance with grassland pastures, rolling grass-covered hills studded with oaks, and steeper wooded hill and mountain sides. Low density building, generous setbacks and the native woods have preserved much of the natural setting and rural feeling. Magnificent stands of trees border the San Francisquito and Los Trancos creeks—oaks, bays and alders, 75 to 100 feet tall, many of them hundreds of years old. Small open meadows remain in bends of the creeks.

6204 The upper reaches of the Corte Madera canyon and the ridges above where the road climbs to the summit are only occasionally touched by development and are still in the wild state. The narrow winding Alpine Road parallels Corte Madera Creek for several miles and overlooks the fern covered banks of this year-around stream. At Ciervos Road, Alpine Road changes to a dirt road intended for only emergency vehicles, hikers, equestrians and bicycles. It then leaves the tight canyon at the Vista Verde Subdivision entrance and climbs to the wooded ridge with views across the canyon to Skyline Ridge and occasional dramatic vistas of the Bay plain.

6205 (Not Used.)

## ***Objectives***

- 6206
1. To establish the San Francisquito Creek system as an important element in the Midpeninsula waterway system.
  2. To protect the Alpine Scenic Corridor, providing a natural link between the mountains and the Bay plain, to add to the sense of order and well-being of those who live in the Midpeninsula – with intimate views of the creeks, the sight of rolling hills, and striking vistas of the Santa Cruz Mountains.
  3. To retain the natural beauty of the scenic corridor, a route through which many people travel and will travel daily so that the corridor will continue to provide a welcome contrast with the nearby urban activity centers.
  4. To define a scenic corridor that preserves the intrinsic qualities of the creeks and creeksides of the San Francisquito Creek system.
  5. To provide for the use and enjoyment of the creeks, valleys and canyons in a manner consistent with preservation of their integrity as natural features.
  6. To utilize the opportunity for passive and active recreation at appropriate locations within the corridor.
  7. To provide a basis for interjurisdictional arrangements needed to protect and enhance the corridor.
  8. To exercise extreme care to preserve the Corte Madera Creek riparian corridor when undertaking maintenance or improvement of Alpine Road between Willowbrook Drive and Ciervos Road. Particular attention should be given to utilizing biotechnical slope protection techniques.

## ***Description***

- 6207 The watershed landscape is a major unifying element of the corridor. The creeks and creekside trees, the valleys through which they flow, the canyons, the confining ridges and the mountain tops all relate to the watershed of the San Francisquito and its tributaries, including the Corte Madera and Los Trancos Creeks.
- 6208 (Not Used).
- 6209 The corridor is in essence a linear park which includes scenic resources, creeks, routes of travel, natural preserves, recreation sites and vista points. Two existing public recreation areas are shown: Ford Park, an essentially open park with a little league baseball diamond, and the soccer field south of Arastradero Road. Also, two

existing developed recreation sites and one commercial recreation facility are recognized in the plan—the Ladera Oaks Swim and Tennis Club, the Alpine Hills Swim and Tennis Club, and Alpine Beer Gardens at the site of Rossotti's historic monument. No additional "developed" recreation areas are proposed. The scenic corridor includes vista corridors and roadside areas that are specifically identified in order to 1) establish the basis for the regulations appropriate to protect the natural setting of the corridor, and 2) suggest a framework for cooperative community actions that can enhance desirable features or correct undesirable conditions.

## **The Creeks**

6210 Although much of the scenic corridor is within the Town of Portola Valley, this scenic route is also of vital interest to the larger Midpeninsula community. Of prime concern are the creeks that form the common boundary of San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. These creeks are not "wild" throughout their length, in the sense of remaining free flowing and unaltered by people, but they are largely unspoiled and offer opportunities by trail and path for education and enjoyment. They are a resource of great value, of a kind that is fast disappearing in our urban area. Therefore, these creeks and their immediate banks, including the well-defined band of trees along the creeksides and a suitable minimum width (at least 200') on either side of the creek, comprise a natural resource area which should be protected through public acquisition, stringent regulation and other appropriate means.

## **The Scenic Corridor**

6211 The Alpine Scenic Corridor includes four areas of special concern: the creekside environment, the immediate roadside, the primary vista corridor and secondary vista corridor. All four of these areas contribute to the natural quality of the scenic corridor. Distant views seen from the road are identified in the element but are not included within the corridor. While all structures and modifications to the natural environment within the corridor are of concern, the degree of concern with details decreases with distance from the road. Unless otherwise noted, the following items are of concern within the four areas described in Sections 6212, 6213 and 6214, but the degree of concern should be tempered based on the visual impact when viewed from areas along the road.

1. Points of access to Alpine Road should be limited to the maximum extent possible.
2. All utilities along Alpine Road should be underground.
3. Building setbacks along Alpine Road should be increased as necessary to reduce the feeling of encroachment on the road.

4. In commercial areas, particular attention should be given to signs, lighting, parking and planting so as to provide the least possible intrusion on the natural feeling of the corridor.
5. Buildings and structures should be subservient to the natural landscape in design, materials and color.
6. Planting should be in keeping with the natural landscape, leaving native trees and open space grasslands where possible and using native plant materials or other drought resistant plants in keeping with the natural scene.
7. Removal of trees or other native vegetation cover should be stringently controlled.
8. On-street parking should be limited to the maximum extent possible.
9. The effects of any building near a riparian corridor or any alteration to the riparian corridor must be minimized in the planning and/or building process.

### **The Immediate Roadside**

6212 This band on either side of the roadway, generally 50 to 100 feet wide, extends to the nearby stands of trees at the edge of the roadside, or to fences, banks or other features tending to define the roadside area. No specific limits of this area are indicated on the plan diagram. This strip is of great importance to the scenic values of the corridor. Here buildings, grading, clearing, planting and access roads should be carefully regulated.

### **Primary Vista Corridor**

6213 The lands in view beyond the roadside determine the character of the scenic corridor and are thus designated as the "Primary Vista Corridor." This corridor takes in the nearby ridges viewed from the road and includes the foreground, up to an arbitrary 1000', where long vistas extend up valleys beyond the corridor. It is not practical to prohibit all building within this corridor, but in the development of individual properties, building construction and planting should be designed to be compatible with and retain the natural and rural appearance of the area.

### **Secondary Vista Corridor**

6214 In the secondary vista corridor, including hills in the middle distance and the land in view down open valleys, all major projects should be carefully reviewed and stringently regulated to prevent any significant alterations of the natural scene.

## Circulation

- 6215 The plan diagram establishes general routes for roads, trails and paths for local and through use. These routes will serve both general travel needs and provide recreation opportunities.
- 6216 **Roads.** The lower portion of Alpine Road, from Junipero Serra Boulevard to Willowbrook Drive, is an essential traffic carrier for Portola Valley, but this function should be subordinated to the natural features within the scenic corridor to the maximum extent feasible. Protection of the visual quality and mitigation of traffic impact in the corridor should be given highest priority.
- 6217 In the section of Alpine Road between Portola Road and the intersection of the Junipero Serra Freeway (Route 280) some improvements may be needed to increase safety and manage traffic.
- 6218 Between Portola Road and Willowbrook Road, the present facility should be adequate for anticipated future traffic with minor improvements.
- 6219 From Willowbrook Road south to Ciervos Road, Alpine Road is in the steep sided canyon of Corte Madera Creek. Because substantial widening or realignment in this narrow canyon is not possible without destructive cuts and fills, this portion should remain as a narrow, winding, low capacity route—a single lane road in some areas with turnouts for passing. Because of the limitations of this section of the road, it should be used for limited purposes, as follows: access for residents of the town to their homes; use by residents of Los Trancos Woods and Vista Verde, primarily in emergencies; and other public access, primarily by foot.
- 6220 Above Ciervos Road, Alpine Road should remain permanently closed to general public vehicular travel and maintained for only walking, riding, bicycling and emergency and service vehicles. Access to abutting properties should be provided from other roads connecting to Skyline Boulevard.
- 6221 **Trails and Paths.** Trails and paths along the corridor will serve both general travel and recreation needs for both local and through traffic, connecting with destinations outside of this corridor. The creekside is particularly suited to trail use because of the relatively few road crossings. The paths and trails shown are diagrammatic. Precise alignment will require more detailed studies giving more consideration to terrain and particular points of interest. The trails and paths element indicates general routes through the corridor. It further defines the standards and principles and the relationship of the trails and paths in the corridor to other local and through routes leading to destinations outside the corridor. The following types of trails and paths are shown on the corridor plan and are defined in the trails and paths element: hiking trail, riding trail, pedestrian path, bicycle



lane, bicycle path, through trail or path, local trail or path. Wherever possible, trails and paths should be separated from the traveled way to protect pedestrians, bicyclists and equestrians.

## Land Use

6222 A policy statement issued by the Town of Portola Valley, July 1969, indicates the nature of uses of land considered to be suitable for the corridor.

The policy of the Town of Portola Valley has always been to maintain a tranquil, rural atmosphere, and to preserve a maximum of green open space. The Alpine Corridor should be developed in accord with this policy. The natural look and feeling of the land between the road and the creek should be maintained. Trees and natural growth should be preserved and increased. Recreational uses should be in keeping with a peaceful and rural atmosphere.

We recognize that a scenic corridor along a public road should be for public use. The hiking and riding trail and the bicycle path will be open to everyone. The Little League field, the soccer field, the Alpine Beer tavern and the tennis clubs are existing public and semi-public uses. Aside from this, we envision opportunities for peaceful, uncrowded recreation for the benefit of the residents of the Town and others. In order not to attract crowds that would make this impossible, we feel that there should be no advertisement to the transient passer-by, such as picnic tables visible from the road or visible parking areas.

*(Note: In the foregoing, the term Alpine Corridor is used, but this term was subsequently changed to Alpine Scenic Corridor.)*

6223 The recreation uses proposed in this plan conform to this concept of a corridor.

1. The creeksides and adjacent meadows should be considered as a natural reserve—a wildlife conservation area to be protected from over use—with only such uses permitted as are consistent with conserving these still natural areas. Large areas of impervious surfaces are to be avoided.
2. The creeks themselves, with running water and the plants and creatures associated with the creeks, are features of principal interest for those using paths and trails.
3. Sufficient public access to creeks and creeksides is essential to the enjoyment of the corridor, and opportunities should be provided for public use of this tranquil and natural landscape.

4. Recreation sites should be small in scale and access chiefly limited to trails and paths.
5. Areas of special educational interest should be identified for nature study and conservation education programs.
6. Viewpoints, groves of trees and creek areas of special interest should be identified as destinations for paths and trails.
7. Sites appropriate for group use by children should be identified, such as small natural amphitheaters and clearings suitable for club activities and school excursions.
8. Near Skyline Boulevard, the corridor should be integrated with the open spaces and trails of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District.
9. Any residential or mixed use projects constructed along the corridor shall be designed to respect the scenic principles set forth in this plan.
10. Any residential or mixed use projects constructed along the corridor shall provide sufficient setbacks for the Town's use of Alpine Road as a major evacuation corridor.

## ***Plan Diagram***

6224 The plan diagram is hereby incorporated into this element of the General Plan.

### **Plan Diagram Notations**

6225 The Alpine corridor divides naturally into two sections. One is the lower rolling foothill section, which contains the meander of the San Francisquito and Los Trancos creeks and is characterized by the gentle grades and rounded contours of grassy oak-studded knolls contrasted with steep hillsides densely wooded with dark green live oaks and chaparral. The second is the upper section in the narrow canyon of the Corte Madera Creek, where the corridor closely follows the creek, climbs to the northern ridge and finally emerges from the forest to the open hilltops near the Skyline.

6226 Notations on the plan diagram mark specific features along the route such as vistas, recreation sites and problems where protective action is indicated. Some specific features have been noted to point up some of the important kinds of actions, programs and regulations that should be initiated at this time. Other notes indicate actions needed in the future. The following notations are keyed to the plan diagram and numbered, except for those in Sections 6231-6235 which concern

upper Alpine Road. This area is north of the region shown on Sheet #5 and is not included in the plan diagram.

### Sheet #1

- 6227 This portion of the scenic corridor is beyond the town limits and the primary actions will be needed by other jurisdictions.
1. View across golf course to East Bay hills; protect through regulations.
  2. Overhead wires on both sides of road from Junipero Serra Boulevard for at least 1/2 mile to south; needs undergrounding program.
  3. Small meadow with stand of buckeye trees; needs protection.
  4. Corridor along path is arbitrarily set at 200 feet although views may be more distant; preserve tree cover.
  5. Very harsh roadside; needs additional grading and low landscaping.
  6. First view (after starting from north end of scenic corridor) of Jasper Ridge and most importantly the Skyline; keep open, needs special control of structures and tree planting.
  7. View of freeway interchange, Ladera, Westridge, Skyline and boarding stable; needs additional planting of native trees and shrubs to soften roadside but not block distant view.
  8. –
  10. Left open.

### Sheet #2

- 6228
11. Bare freeway ramps to west, groves of trees to east; needs landscaping of bare portion of freeway interchange.
  12. Harsh bank on west side; needs to be planted in harmony with tree cover on east side of road.
  13. Tree canopy is valuable for sequence of views; protect trees.
  14. Shopping and professional centers of excellent design, buildings with good roof lines and planting to screen auto parking; maintain quality by attention to planting, signs, lighting and colors. Signs should be externally lighted.

15. Creek in this area has water through much of year; protect creekside through adequate setbacks and retention of riparian vegetation.
16. Band of very large oaks screens houses from Alpine Road; these trees need protection.
17. Large tree farm; operation needs to be controlled regarding runoff, traffic and creek pollution.
18. Vista to Skyline; keep view open.
19. (Not Used).
20. Antenna project on immediate creekside plain is a jarring visual element; urge removal when no longer being used.
21. Residential development; keep planting and buildings in view of Alpine Road compatible.
22. (Not Used).
23. Meadow and group of trees are creekside elements valuable to the scenic corridor, but Little League use detracts from visual aspects and creates traffic hazards; continued attention, such as through screen planting, is needed to enhance visual quality and minimize traffic hazards.
24. (Not Used).
25. Views of hills and oaks important to corridor; work with Stanford to retain open space quality.
26. Shallow creekside bowl bordered by trees; suggests possible opportunities for creekside study.
27. View of ridge behind Stanford; retain.
28. Vista to mountains; retain.
29. Steep wooded canyon and hillside (Stanford land); extreme care needed in design and construction if lands are developed in the future; maintain as permanent open space if possible.
30. Diversion ditch to Felt Lake; consider possible trailside point of interest.
31. Dam on Los Trancos Creek and fish ladder divert water to Felt Lake; possible trailside point of interest.

- 32. Rossotti's, an historic monument; enforce strict architectural and site development controls.
- 33. –
- 50. Left open

**Sheet #3**

- 6229 51. Vista to Skyline; keep open.
- 52. Tree covered, steep roadside (subdivided); control development since any change in this area would have significant impact on views from road.
- 53. This stretch of creek dominated by tall alders and bays; protect.
- 54. Residences; cooperative action needed in unifying planting and fencing and to decrease adverse visual impact because of unsympathetic use of materials and color.
- 55. (Not Used).
- 56. Portola Valley Garage; appropriate screen planting including trees needed to mitigate adverse visual qualities.
- 57. Open vistas of Skyline to north and west; preserve.
- 58. Residences, yards close to roadside.
- 59. Residential development close to roadway; increase planting.
- 60. Vista opens up of Skyline range to the north; protect view.
- 61. (Not Used).
- 62. Residential and commercial development near roadway; replace exotics with more compatible planting and add screen planting.
- 63. Commercial development, Nathhorst Triangle; needs continual attention re: planting, signs, lights, colors and traffic control.
- 64. Residential development near roadside; maintain screen planting.
- 65. Vista to hills; keep open.
- 66. Corte Madera School; maintain planting to soften school appearance.

- 67. Residential development fairly well screened by hillside planting; keep screen plantings.
- 68. Vista to Bay; keep open.
- 69. -
- 79. (Not Used).
- 80. Bottom portion of Windy Hill Open Space Preserve, a beautiful stretch of the creek and related uplands located at the junction of trails; keep largely in its natural state for the enjoyment of users of the trail and path system.

**Sheet #4 and Sheet #5**

- 6230 Occasional property access roads cross the creek, and there are scattered homes along the hill. Additional access roads, bridging and building would seriously threaten the wild quality of this part of the corridor. Trash dumped from the road now mars the creek. Continued control and maintenance are needed.
- 81. Strip of creekside dedicated to town for park purposes; preserve open space.
- 82. Steep hillsides on both sides of canyon; protect from development.
- 83. Narrow road along canyon above creek and very steep bank above road; do not widen road other than for occasional turnout.
- 84. Occasional flats along creek will allow for small study areas and trail stops.
- 85. A number of footpaths follow along the creek; care needed to minimize erosion on steep slopes.

**Upper Alpine Road (north of the area shown on Sheet #5)**

- 6231 The portion of Alpine Road above Ciervos Road is closed to general public vehicular travel and use is restricted to emergency vehicles, equestrians, bicyclists and hikers; retain these use restrictions.
- 6232 In the canyon woods are dense—maple, bays, oaks, and ferns on steep north banks—and at intervals, along the creek, there are a number of small flats for trail destinations; preserve this environment.
- 6233 Just above Ciervos Road, Alpine Road now crosses the creek and climbs by sharp switchbacks to a narrow ridge. Coal Mine Ridge comes into view across the canyon to the south, and from a few vista points along the road there are panoramic views across the Bay plain to the east. Preserve this area.

- 6234 Nearing the summit, the road goes under a canopy of trees in a dense oak forest, then emerges on the edge of small grassy meadows near the Page Mill intersection. In this part of the corridor are possible sites for picnic spots and loop trails that could be a part of the Skyline Scenic Regional Recreation Road.
- 6235 Fine vista points near the intersection of Page Mill and Alpine Roads overlook Montebello Ridge and the range of the Santa Cruz Mountains to the south.

## **Alpine Scenic Corridor Plan Appendix 1: Implementation of the Alpine Scenic Corridor Plan**

### **Actions to date:**

1. Special setbacks of 75 feet from the right-of-way have been adopted in the zoning regulations for Alpine Road from the town boundary at Ladera to Portola Road.
2. All new residences and major additions are subject to review by the architectural and site control commission. Such reviews require analysis with respect to the Alpine scenic corridor plan.
3. The town has adopted design guidelines that include lists of native plants that are to guide the ASCC in its actions. The use of native plants in the scenic corridor will help retain the natural beauty of the area.
4. Special planting requirements have been imposed on properties zoned C-C (community commercial) and A-P (administrative-professional).
5. Ford Field and the “Rossotti” soccer field, both of which have been acquired by the town, provide permanent open space within the corridor.
6. Striped road shoulders have been provided which are used by bicyclists although they do not meet state standards for bike lanes.
7. Some overhead lines have been installed underground through undergrounding district #1.

### **Future actions:**

1. Additional open space acquisitions of land within the corridor are set forth in Open Space Element Appendix 2: Implementation of the Open Space Element.
2. Where acquisitions of land to protect the corridor are not appropriate, easements should be obtained to protect the corridor.
3. In any new developments with frontage on Alpine Road, care should be taken to preserve natural land forms and vegetation in close proximity to the road to protect the corridor.
4. Consideration should be given to adding the design review combining district of the zoning regulations to land along Alpine Road.



5. From Los Trancos Road to the southern town boundary, easements or dedications in fee should be secured as undeveloped acreage is subdivided. To the west of the road, implementation will be somewhat difficult because of the prevalence of small parcels of land. A combination of regulation and acquisition of easements or full fee title through purchase or dedication will be needed.

For the trail and path system, easements for recommended trails should be acquired as part of the subdivision process. Some easements on the west may need to be purchased. A bicycle lane in the roadway is recommended. This will require more detailed design study.

6. It is recommended that the town request a resolution by San Mateo and Santa Clara County Supervisors declaring mutual concern in San Francisquito and Los Trancos Creeks and their watersheds as valuable natural resources along their common boundary and designating these streams as “scenic streams.” The San Mateo County Supervisors should be asked to also designate Corte Madera Creek as a “scenic stream.” The entire corridor should be designated as an open space scenic preserve.
7. Change in creek flow of Los Trancos and San Francisquito Creeks should be investigated to determine whether there have been long term undesirable effects from diversion of waters and what remedial action, if any, may need to be taken. The need for creek bank protection in critical locations should be evaluated.
8. Advice of an ecologist or arborist should be sought for recommendations on tree care, particularly for large important trees. Valley oaks are reportedly not replacing themselves. Seeding, with protection of young trees from grazing cattle and other damage for a few years, could ensure perpetuation of these valuable groves on the hillsides. Introduced species of trees such as eucalyptus have seeded along the creek in some section and should be removed where undesirable. County cooperation should be sought.
9. The town should continue to pursue undergrounding of overhead lines through funds obtained from the utility companies.
10. Outside of the town, the town should seek the cooperation of other jurisdictions in the corridor to have overhead lines placed underground.
11. The town should cooperate with CRMP (Coordinated Resource Management and Planning) Process in its efforts to protect the San Francisquito Creek.
12. The town should sponsor programs for appropriate tree planting and for encouraging cooperative actions by residents and other property owners in landscaping and maintenance compatible with the scenic corridor.