

~~SPECIAL PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING, TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY, JULY 22, 2003, TOWN CENTER, HISTORIC SCHOOLHOUSE, 765 PORTOLA ROAD, PORTOLA VALLEY, CA 94028~~

Chairman Breon called the meeting to order at 8:04 p.m. Ms. Lambert called the roll:

Present: Commissioners Elkind, McIntosh and Toben, and Chairman Breon
Absent: Commissioner Zaffaroni
Staff Present: Tom Vlasic, Dep. Town Planner
Leslie Lambert, Planning Manager

~~ORAL COMMUNICATIONS:~~ None.

AGENDA

- (1) ~~PUBLIC HEARING: Site Development Permit X9H-502, Corte Madera School Ball Field, 4575 Alpine Road~~

Mr. Vlasic reviewed the staff reports of July 15 and July 16, 2003, on the request to expand the recreational facilities at Corte Madera School to include a baseball field. As indicated in the July 15, 2003, report, he said the application could not be processed until additional CEQA analysis was done. He reviewed documents received since the staff report was prepared, including: 1) Trails Committee's memo of 7/16/03; 2) Town Geologist's report of 7/22/03; and 3) Parks and Rec Committee's email of 7/22/03. Using overheads, he discussed the current School District boundary, ball field as proposed, Town right-of-way, grading, existing and proposed trail alignment, significant trees impacted, and modifications to the siting and grading plans discussed at the ASCC meeting on 7/14/03. As discussed in the staff report of 7/15/03, he said the General Plan diagram showed the playfield extending close to Alpine Road; the text argued strongly for careful and appropriate design of this band of land. Right now, the proposed design was not appropriate within the fundamental policies of the Plan. He reviewed additional provisions in the General Plan (Section 2324) that addressed: 1) utilization of School recreational facilities; 2) development of School District sites within neighborhoods; and 3) joint financing of community recreation needs. Referring to the staff report of 7/16/03, he said the ASCC concluded that a ball field at this site would be appropriate and that a carefully developed plan could be found consistent with design principles and the land use provisions in the General Plan.

Responding to Chairman Breon, Mr. Vlasic said there was no CEQA time limit because there was currently no plan before the Town that could move ahead. As directed by the Town Attorney, this hearing was a study session; if the project came back before the Planning Commission, it would have to be re-noticed and the CEQA documents prepared at that time. Responding to Commissioner Elkind, he said red markers had been placed by citizens at the site and were intended to show the proposed grading, etc. Responding to Chairman Breon, he confirmed that as proposed, the project could not take place along with the other work going on right now at the School. More work needed to be done with the School District, Little League representatives, and neighbors, which would take some time.

Chairman Breon opened the public hearing. He reiterated that the current plans did not represent what might be ultimately built at the site.

Harold Hanerfeld, 4690 Alpine Rd., said earlier in the year, the Town was ready to give this land away. He questioned why the Town Attorney had not been neutral in this matter. Furthermore, he could point to more than 20 instances in the General Plan that indicated this should not happen. For the last week, he had tried unsuccessfully to find out the names of the children in Portola Valley in the Little League. As reported by the Little League representative, he did not believe that 280 children actually came from the Town. Mr. Denier had indicated that the ball field would be used by 8-12 year olds. There were about 500 8-12 year olds in Corte Madera School, and he did not believe that 280 children in that age range would be participating in Little League from Town. Additionally, in order to conduct business in Town, at least 50% of the people using the business had to come from the Town. The Little League representative said a total of 900 children would be using this facility. Even if the 280 number was correct, that didn't come close to

50%. Responding to Mr. Hanerfeld, Chairman Breon said the Town would not mandate that the Little League furnish a list of names. Commissioner Toben asked Mr. Hanerfeld to submit the relevant citations that he found from the General Plan.

Danna Breen, 4680 Alpine Rd. and Conservation Committee member, said she attended the Site Development Committee meeting prior to the Council meeting. Before that meeting, she understood it would be a 10' cut into the right-of-way. What was proposed was completely different, and she was very concerned. She suggested the Planning Commission and Council look at redesignating this piece of land as permanent open space. This area had the greatest density of housing in Town; people did not have 1-3 acres in which to run their dogs, ride horses, etc. It was the only piece of flat open space congruent to her neighborhood, which was a very important phenomenon. Additionally, while it was nice to accommodate children and playing fields, recreation should be subservient to open space, the Alpine Scenic Corridor, and the overall feel of Portola Valley. She also thought that Golden Eagles had been caught in the vicinity.

Marilyn Walter, 20 Coyote Hill, said she liked Little League and used to play at that site. She did not understand why they couldn't tear up pavement instead of getting rid of the park. The same space was there where they used to play, but they seem to have a preference for soccer over baseball. She questioned why the Town had to solve a problem that they made in the first place. Secondly, bleachers and a backboard in the Alpine Corridor would destroy some of that open space feeling. Third, the Ranch had been designed with narrow streets, and on-street parking was not allowed. Because the bus stop on Alpine had not been allowed, there continued to be tremendous parking problems at the Ranch. She described the situation at Horseshoe Bend and Indian Crossing. With an additional recreational facility, she questioned who would control the parking and teach people who didn't live at the Ranch that there could not be on-street parking. She asked: 1) why the Town had to solve a problem created by the School in the first place; 2) why the Alpine Corridor had to be interrupted; and 3) why the traffic problem continued.

Jean Eastman, 295 Willowbrook Dr., said she did not understand the Town's motivation in wanting to give this property to the School District for the purpose of Little League use. It was clearly valuable property--both economically and to those who were accustomed to using the land. For years, the School had a baseball field which was larger than the field they were asking for now. A year ago, the School District did an extensive review of their playing fields and rejected the idea of putting in a baseball field. She asked what caused the change. At the ASCC meeting, the Little League representative said the two playing fields that the Town already provided were not quite the Town's fair share, which was three; she wanted to know how that number had been derived. Today, an article in *The Almanac* indicated Menlo Park had been given some land that they would be turning into playing fields for soccer and baseball. Before this land was given over, the Town needed to look carefully at whether this was the Town's obligation and a benefit.

Rich Ponce de Leon, 345 Corte Madera, said he previously spoke to concerns about noise created by the fields which affected not only his neighborhood but the Ranch as well. Additionally, the field mentioned in *The Almanac* article was in Woodside and had been essentially approved; it was in open land and not near houses.

Sally Ann Reiss, Town Center Citizens Advisory Committee and Parks and Rec Committee member, said her children were in Little League and that she played adult soccer. If the plan proposed for the Town Center renovation went forward, most of the buildings would be moved and replaced by new playing fields for baseball and soccer four years from now. Once construction started, there would not be any fields at Town Center. That was one reason why it might be good to have another field at the School. Parks and Rec had reviewed this project and felt there was an opportunity to reduce the impacts on the neighbors; it was very important to get feedback and figure out a way to make this work for everyone. She felt all of the people in Portola Valley would benefit from having a field at that site if it was done in a way that would address parking, usage, etiquette, etc.--just as had been done with the other parks around Town.

Bob Pierce, 123 Tan Oak, said this was a bad idea. He had been dismayed to see that two of the three site committee commissioners had an active interest in a Little League park because of their own personal needs. He was pleased to learn that the Town Center would become the ultimate playing field site for the entire Town because this site was buffered naturally from any neighbors. Additionally, he understood the

Little League paid a small fee to the Priory to use their fields. As pointed out, six acres was being set aside in Woodside which would further alleviate the need for Little League playing fields. In addition to visual pollution (i.e., trash, etc.), there was also auditory pollution. The soccer field brought in an added dimension of auditory pollution on weekends, but that was one season. With baseball being in a different season, it would add up to an entire year. The neighborhood had done its part, and he asked that the Town respect that. Additionally, Mr. Denier said the Little League kids would not be able to hit baseballs to the nearest residences. He felt a foul ball to the left field line would go right down Alpine Road, which was not a very safe situation for anyone. Mr. Denier also mentioned adult softball. That was not a good idea in his or his neighbors' back or front yards--especially since there were other public and private playing fields available.

Mary Enright was concerned about making an 80' cut into the land that was left there. It was a benefit for students to be able to look out at some greenery that wasn't fenced in and was free and unkempt. She also thought Rossotti's could have been turned into a baseball and soccer field.

Bill Vermeere, 4660 Alpine Road, said he commented previously about traffic problems. He discussed efforts to install stop signs to protect children who ran back and forth across the street. The intersection where Corte Madera came into Alpine Road was still dangerous, with cars running the stop sign, people making U-turns, etc. Overall, this piece of land was not raw and ugly; it was a piece of recreational land that the local citizens had used for many years. Noting that Al at the Nursery had planted many of those trees, he said there had been a lot of upkeep and maintenance to improve the land. A lot of different options needed to be explored, including reshaping the diamond, converting the backstop into a clamshell, removing the dugout and bleachers, and rotating the field to another part of the property. Discussing his environmental work with NASA, he said he was very concerned about the movement of dirt without anyone checking to see if it was contaminated. Additionally, he was concerned about what the drainage would be.

Nancy Trueblood, Hawk View, discussed the work done by Ranch residents with the School to try to do something about the traffic, which was a big problem. Even if the games started before school was over, she questioned who would oversee the parking. If this project moved ahead, that needed to be looked at.

Diana Koin, 4660 Alpine Rd., encouraged the Commissioners to think about that piece of land not only as open space but as an important safety buffer. She opposed the project because it would not only harm her neighborhood but increase safety issues and liability for the Town. In addition to the fact that balls might go out, it was also a blind curve; kids running out to get balls would be a disaster and hazard.

Hartha Hanerfeld, 4690 Alpine Rd., clarified that Al from the nursery contributed the trees, but Town volunteers had done the planting and cared for the trees for many years.

Jon Silver, 355 Portola Rd., said one of the good things about Portola Valley was that it provided generous playing fields for youth and adult sports. The comments reflected a number of issues that should be looked at very carefully if a revamped version of this proposal went forward. Hopefully, there were creative ways to provide for recreation without impacting the neighborhood and this piece of land; there had been ample testimony that people appreciated seeing it in a wild state. He described previous proposals submitted for that land while he served on the Council. He also thought it was very important to ensure that the runoff from the baseball or soccer field would not in any way negatively impact the frog pond; amphibians were very sensitive to chemicals. He described impacts of inert chemicals in herbicides and pesticides.

Dave Denier, Little League Field Commissioner, said he had been selected by the Board to represent all the children in the Menlo/Alpine Little League. From the beginning, it was conceived that this field would be used by both Little League and the adult softball program--both of which competed for field use. The original field at Corte Madera was a 90' field used by the junior/senior program. The School District decided they did not want a field that size for that School. The Little League had argued that it was a very appropriate place for a smaller field to be used by children 8-12. It was intended to be used for the minors program and for the growing girls softball program. Contrary to what Mr. Pierce said, the Priory charged \$75/hour which was not nominal. While negotiations brought that down for a year, the private schools were developing their own school programs, the Little League's availability there was being restricted, and the fees were being increased. He felt it was incumbent upon the communities to provide playing fields for Little League sports

and adult softball, as they did for youth soccer. With respect to the numbers of youth served, he said he would check to see if the names could be given out. He confirmed it was 250-300 kids from year to year. He discussed the number of students in the Little League--including those from private schools and those who were home schooled. With respect to the 50% rule, he said the League was not a for-profit business. One of the reasons the League had pushed hard for this plan was because of the cost savings resulting from the dirt that was being excavated. Had he known more about the process, he would have started earlier. At this point, he recognized the concerns of the neighbors and felt a plan could be worked out that addressed them. With respect to the allocation of space and the pavement, he said the School District had made certain decisions about how they wanted to use the land; they wanted a certain amount of blacktop for PE, recess and their basketball program. The soccer community wanted a full size soccer field with no encroachment of the infield. The initial plan drawn up last December did not show anywhere near the encroachment shown on the present plan. He said the architect had come up with an ideal field to rival Ford Field which was much larger than the Little League needed. The Little League was all in favor of any reductions or mitigations and would work with the Town and neighbors on all of the concerns. He was also willing to work with the neighbors and the School District on the parking issue. He discussed practice and game starting times, noting that any scheduling conflicts could be worked out with the School. With respect to foul balls, he said 8-12 year olds would not be able to hit a foul ball 150' to the nearest home. The field was also oriented so the balls would be hit out toward the soccer field.

Michael Carter, 4600 Alpine Rd., noted that no one from the School District had shown up to talk about what they wanted. He said the School District, Little League and Town got together and decided a year ago that there wasn't going to be a baseball field at Corte Madera School. Since then, the basketball coach got more basketball hoops, the soccer coach got a bigger soccer field, and the Little League had been pushed out. The Little League then approached the School and asked for a smaller field, and the School decided it would take over the public park next door. Everything people said about the neighbors using that park was true. It did not make sense that in order to accommodate a smaller baseball field, 2/3rds of an acre of Town land had to be taken over. He did not understand why it was the Town's problem to solve; it had always been between the School and the Little League.

Jim Sansbury, 25 Tagus Court and Parks and Rec Committee, said he had been a member of the Little League Board in the past. He said there had always been a baseball field at the School, and he had been very frustrated at the loss of that field--particularly after voting for a bond issue which specifically stated that the baseball field would be replaced. The School Board had not taken that as literal gospel and felt they had a mandate under which they could re-optimize the open space/playing field area. For their own reasons, they chose to expand the soccer field and hard surface area. When that was done, there was no longer room for a baseball field--even a smaller than 90' field. He and others had investigated whether a 60' diamond would fit. Having measured that site, he found that the soccer field, basketball court and baseball field could fit within 5-10' of the fence line--even though the School Board concluded that there was no room for a baseball field. To those who were trying to keep it alive, there could be very little impact of putting in a baseball field by taking a sliver of the Town land. Something much less than 2/3rds of an acre should work, and it made a lot of sense to do that. This would not be a new impact on the neighbors. He also agreed the diamond should be rotated. The neighbors' concerns would be mitigated dramatically by a more compressed plan which should be looked at closely.

Charlie Adams, Los Trancos Woods, said he had been involved with the baseball program for the last 17 years. He agreed with Mr. Sansbury's comments. The Town had become involved in this initially because they sat in on some of the committee meetings that had been held. At one point, the participating Councilmember suggested that the Town might be willing to donate that land. He also recalled that it was supposed to be just a small sliver.

Bill Pickering, Family Farm Road and Parks and Rec Committee, said a set of six different plans from the architect had been looked at for the ball field; the only plan where it would fit involved a 15' piece of Town property. The School decided to move ahead with its field because of the undetermined amount of time it would take to get the Town land, develop the joint use agreement, etc. When it became possible that that land could be utilized, there were some tremendous advantages to being able to build the ball field at the same time the school field was being renovated; the cut from the ball field could be used on the soccer field.

He added that the original baseball diamond had been paid for by the Parks and Rec Committee as part of the Park In Lieu fund money from the Town. There was a history of the Town supporting those recreational facilities on that site. The original diamond had been there since the School, and the use was well established. Although there were other fields that were coming on line, there was a lot of pressure to expand the recreational programs; the fields were scarce and were utilized for as many hours as they were available. The Priory was also expanding its programs for softball and baseball on their fields; their fields were also not available during the summer. With respect to the School site, the original plan involved about a 15' sliver of Town land. In January, the Parks and Rec Committee iterated its support of the project. A lot of time had gone by before the plans came before the Town, and it was now quite a rush to squeeze in the project. Last night, the Parks and Rec Committee reiterated its support for the project and concluded it was very possible to come up with a better plan that would have less impact upon that area and mitigate a number of the concerns expressed. Additionally, he said there were over 200 residents over thirty that played in the adult softball league, which was a summer league that played in the evenings and on Sunday because of limited field use. When the Town Center construction started and this field was out of commission for 4-5 years, the adult league would not have a place to play unless there was a field built at Corte Madera. Baseball was a lifelong sport, and he encouraged finding a solution that would help this project go forward.

Graham Toben, 12 Santa Maria Ave., supported the baseball field. He said baseball was growing along with the adult softball and girls softball leagues. With the renovation of Town Center, it would be good to have a baseball field used by many different leagues. It was, however, important to acknowledge the neighbors' concerns about noise, traffic, etc. He urged the Parks and Rec Committee and Planning Commission to carefully scrutinize every facet of this layout to see if a solution could be found to alleviate concerns of the neighbors and arrive at a compromise.

Margaret Fischer, 4668 Alpine Rd., said she read the draft agreement between the Town and the School District for this land that indicated there would be no cost to the Town or to the District and that the costs would be covered by donations. Apparently the Little League didn't have much money, and she asked who would pay for this project.

Rich Ponce de Leon said the stakes at the site had been placed with the help of the Town Engineer. The inner row of stakes was where the new fence was proposed; the outer row was where the grading would go to. Easily, more than half of the open space would be wiped out or significantly changed.

Bob Pierce said if the adult softball league would be using the field, a large screen along Alpine Road in the scenic corridor would be required to keep left field foul line balls from coming down into traffic on Alpine Road. Everyone agreed there should be more playing fields, but that was not the place to put one; another solution needed to be found.

Bill Vermeere said there was a parking lot next to the Sequoias, and there was a large chunk on the Jelich land authorized for hang gliders and other recreational activities. He suggested developing that piece of land as a ballpark. There were no immediate residences there, and a parking lot was already there. Chairman Breon noted that the land belonged to Spring Ridge LLC.

Harold Hanerfeld questioned why a regulation ball field was needed at all. Children could just put down bases, etc.

Danna Breen said this was not just about the people around the field; this was about a legacy of open, wild land in Portola Valley for children. Additionally, this issue had been reviewed by a community advisory committee that included the Athletics Director, a Town Council representative, various sports groups including baseball and soccer, and members from the community at large. An exhaustive research, review and recommendation process was completed in June 2002, and the old baseball diamond was paved over. Also, no one had mentioned that during baseball season, that field had cold winds/fog during the spring.

Lindsay Bowan, 195 Portola Road, said the community advisory committee referred to had been appointed by the School Board for their purposes. He agreed it was cold there, but people had played there before the

field was taken away. As pointed out by Mr. Sansbury, it was in the bond issue that that field would be renovated as a baseball field on that site.

Mr. Denier, addressing Ms. Fischer's question, said the school had set aside some of the bond money for construction of a baseball field with a substantial contribution to the Little League. Mr. Sansbury added that private funding could be arranged to make up for any gaps if the money from the School fell short. The money from the Town fell short for the Rossotti renovation, and a private fundraising campaign had been set up. If necessary, something similar could be done. Additionally, he said adults would not hit pop-up fouls very far in slow-paced softball. While a hard foul going down the left field line could be a legitimate concern, rotating the field would allow it to fit better and rotate the left field line away from Alpine Road.

Chairman Breon closed the public hearing.

Responding to Chairman Breon's question on the applicability of the 50% rule, Mr. Vlasic said this facility was recognized in the General Plan as a school. Under the Zoning Ordinance, it was a principal, permitted use, and that finding did not need to be made for a school. Public recreational facilities that served the community had been traditionally found to be acceptable by the Town. Chairman Breon asked if soccer and baseball games might occur on the same day. Responding, Mr. Vlasic said a clear understanding of the pattern of use was not known.

Commissioner McIntosh asked how the plan went from 15' to 80'. Mr. Pickering said he did not know, and it had been expected that the plans that came back from the School architect would be comparable to the preliminary plans. Mr. Denier added that the architect had not had any concept of the constraints. Also, there had been an attempt to slope the area back instead of having a retaining wall; the area had been extended farther than necessary to put the field in. At the ASCC meeting, it had been suggested that a retaining wall would lessen that impact.

Commissioner Elkind said she did not have a sense whether the field could be pulled back enough to preserve the open space values that had been so passionately addressed. That and the parking were critical issues. She would like to see staff come up with some recommendations or the Little League come up with some volunteer program that would address the parking issue that included some enforcement. As hard as the School had tried, they had trouble with parents who would not honor the requests.

Commissioner Toben said he felt the Trails Committee, Conservation Committee, and Traffic Committee should have an opportunity to work on this. Mr. Vlasic noted that during the Site Development Committee meeting, there had been a clear concern that there wasn't sufficient review of the options to offer comments that would be all that helpful. Additionally, the ASCC felt that any action on the joint use agreement should include provisions that addressed the parking issue. The School District clearly needed to be involved as activities related to the ball field could conflict with school activities.

With respect to the Town Center facility, Commissioner Toben said there was much that remained to be determined. The Town Center Committee was in the middle of its work, and several schemes for the Town Center had been discussed. None of them created a net gain in playing fields for this campus.

Chairman Breon said the Town should do more than its fair share of providing fields if possible, but he was generally leaning against this project. He would need to see a needs assessment that covered the whole Little League area. He also did not think this should be considered the Town's problem. It was potentially a Town opportunity--if more of these facilities were needed. If that was the case, all of the design issues with respect to minimizing the impacts needed to be addressed in a proposal that was considerably better. Additionally, while some of the concerns about the frog pond were legitimate in terms of the runoff being polluted, that frog pond depended on a certain amount of runoff. The CEQA documents should look at the issue of runoff in terms of whether: 1) polluted runoff would hurt the pond; and 2) blocking the runoff would hurt the pond by starving it of some of its water. He also thought retaining walls should be considered; a stepped retaining wall might double as a set of bleachers. Additionally, the School District promised in a bond that they would build a baseball field. They chose not to, and that was unfortunate. Overall, if a needs assessment showed this was of real value to the Town, he would be willing to work hard on minimizing the

impacts. He thought illegal parking/enforcement would be the biggest issue to deal with.

Commissioner Toben said the Council asked the Planning Commission to examine this proposal from the standpoint of conforming to the General Plan. The assignment to the ASCC was more related to design concerns, and he appreciated the job they had done in flushing out some of the issues. He also appreciated the constructive moves to find an accommodation of interests. While some had strong views about the inappropriateness of this use on this site, the ASCC was the lead body that would tackle some of the design concerns. With respect to conformity with the General Plan, his reading did not suggest a fundamental incompatibility between this proposed use--once it was designed properly--and the policies in the Plan. Even under the most restrictive interpretation of those policies, there was the possibility of doing a project of this type. Secondly, the Plan diagram appeared to accommodate this type of recreational use at this location. He was also inclined to respect the historic designation of this terrain for recreational uses rather than redesignate the land. Thirdly, the General Plan (Section 2324) actively encouraged the Town and the School District to provide recreational opportunities. He did not see any evidence to suggest a solution couldn't be found that subordinated the recreational use to the open space values. Beyond conformity with the Plan, there should be no net loss of playing fields in the community. As some speakers pointed out, historically there were two playing fields (soccer and senior baseball) at Corte Madera School, and now there was only one. Five years ago, there was no adult softball, adult soccer, or adult volleyball. Girls softball had doubled in the last 23 years, and that trend would continue. He suspected that if a softball diamond could be worked out, it would be utilized by the School for their programs as well. The trend lines were unmistakable, and he questioned the need for a needs assessment. Additionally, the adult softball program in Town was a great community resource that provided an opportunity for citizens who did not know one another to meet. It was important in the same way that it was for those who met at dawn at that neighborhood park. He also felt that the concerns about enforcing traffic laws and dealing with the problem of parking on Alpine Road were serious. Responding to Chairman Breon, he said all of the scenarios that he observed for the Town Center redesign involved the retention of two playing fields. He did not see any plausible scenario for going after land that was in private ownership and turning it into a softball field.

Commissioner Elkind said she did not have a clear understanding of how much intrusion on open space was too much. As much as she recognized the tremendous desire on the part of the community to have more recreational opportunities and playing fields, she did not want to see the open space sacrificed--especially in an area where it had been of particular value to members of the community. She could not offer an opinion on the project's appropriateness with respect to the General Plan policies until she understood more about what was being talked about.

Commissioner McIntosh said he was somewhat stunned by the School District's behavior. There clearly should have been one plan that included the soccer field and the baseball field. He also did not blame any of the people who were objecting to having an 80' intrusion into the space right in front of their houses. That being said, this was an historical use for this property. He agreed with Commissioner Toben's comments with respect to the need for playing fields and no net reduction in existing fields. He questioned the arguments against this use from the neighbors who had been there for years while there was a larger baseball field there. The fact that it would intrude into this open space was another issue, and he understood the annoyance. While it needed to be redesigned, he saw no argument against this use. The impacts needed to be sensitively dealt with--including parking and traffic. He felt it conformed to the General Plan in almost all aspects, noting that it was unfortunate that it came up this way.

~~COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:~~ None.

~~ADJOURNMENT~~

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 10:10 p.m.

Craig Breon, Chairman

Leslie Lambert

Planning Commission

Planning Manager