

REGULAR PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING, TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY, MAY 5, 2004,  
TOWN CENTER, HISTORIC SCHOOLHOUSE, 765 PORTOLA ROAD, PORTOLA VALLEY, CA 94028

Chairman Breon called the meeting to order at 8:06 p.m. Ms. Lambert called the roll:

Present: Commissioners Elkind, Wengert and Zaffaroni, and Chairman Breon  
Absent: Commissioner McIntosh  
Staff Present: Tom Vlastic, Dep. Town Planner  
Leslie Lambert, Planning Manager  
Richard Merk, Town Council Liaison

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS: None.

REGULAR AGENDA

- (1) Staff Referral, Woodside Priory Request for International Benedictine Youth Congress, Conformity with Conditional Use Permit X7D-30

Commissioner Zaffaroni stepped down from the Commission.

Chairman Breon explained the reason for the staff referral of the Priory's request to host an International Benedictine Youth Congress to the Planning Commission. Mr. Vlastic reviewed the staff report of 4/29/04. Responding to Commissioner Wengert, he said he was not aware of any other conferences of this size held at the Priory in the past.

If the Commission approved the event, Commissioner Elkind asked how it could be made clear that this was not a precedent. Responding, Chairman Breon said he had raised the same question in discussions with staff and Priory representatives. The Town did not have the final master plan and proposed conditional use permit at this time. The existing permit was fairly vague in terms of what activities fell within the scope of a school of this sort. Any decision on this event should not set a precedent for whether this kind of thing would or would not be allowed when the final proposed CUP was before the Town. He said the event seemed to fall under the current use permit, but it would not set a precedent. If the Commission declined this request, it might decide later it was acceptable in the context of a larger use permit that was more detailed. Whatever decision was made tonight was in the context of the current permit; this sort of use might or might not fit into a future permit.

Mr. Vlastic added that the Town was trying to get a solid understanding of all of the activities that went on at the Priory on a yearly basis. As with other permits, when someone proposed a unique event, the Town asked that that be submitted prior to the time the event was scheduled for review by the Planning Commission for a finding of conformity. This was an unusual event. The Planning Commission would have an opportunity to make a judgement each time an unusual event was scheduled. Responding to Chairman Breon, he described the recognized and permitted uses on Windy Hill. If there was an organized event that the Open Space District sanctioned, the Planning Commission would have to make a judgement on whether it was in conformity with the use permit. Responding to Commissioner Elkind, he confirmed the expectation that any organization operating under a CUP who wanted a special event would contact the Town before the event was scheduled.

Responding to Chairman Breon, Mr. Vlastic said it was his understanding that if attendees went off campus for hikes, there would be chaperons. Chairman Breon suggested making that a condition.

Chairman Breon asked that public comment be limited to whether the proposed event fit within the mission/kind of activities that one would expect of this type of school. There would be hearings on the overall CUP at a later date.

Tim Molak, Priory Headmaster, said there had not been an event of this size held in the past; four years ago, the Priory held a Benedictine Colloquium for Educators that had 50-60 attendees. He confirmed that there would be chaperons of any students that went off campus; that was also a part of the safety/legal responsibilities. A list of those going off campus would be maintained. He said attendees would be coming from 7 countries and 18 schools. The conference was originally scheduled for the Philippines in January, but was cancelled because of security concerns. Over the past 3-5 years, the Priory had been involved in national and international Benedictine colloquiums in Sao Palo, Brazil, Morristown, NJ, etc.; there was one scheduled this summer in Tulsa, OK. He described previous colloquiums and the request to use the Priory for this event. He said there had been a lot of internal discussion about the size of this conference; the Priory was very aware of the Town's and residents' concerns about traffic, noise, etc. The Priory felt it could contain the conference within the gymnasium, assembly hall, dormitories, classrooms and dining hall. Residents of Town might not even know it was going on. The Priory had also been in situations before where large groups of people had to be organized. Unfortunately, the Priory was not aware that prior permission was necessary. The Town had put the Priory on notice that that was necessary and that this was not a precedent setting event. He felt the event would be a great opportunity for the students. He discussed the attendees and the excitement of welcoming a group from around the world. He described sleeping/bathroom facilities, food services, emergency plans, etc. There would also be an orientation about safety. Responding to Commissioner Elkind, he said Priory staff attendees would include the steering committee, which consisted of about 10 people; the dining room staff (4-5 people) would have to be there along with the maintenance crew. Each school would bring their own chaperons at a 1:6-7 ratio. The 200 figure was in addition to those who would be there normally during the summer. Responding to Commissioner Wengert, he anticipated reaching the full capacity. He discussed financial aid offered to some of the schools so they could attend.

Jon Peters, Trinity Lane, asked about the consequences of not obtaining approval from the Town for special events. Chairman Breon said there were no written fines in the CUPs. The Town could issue a cease and desist order or pull the permit.

Dan Cornew, Brookside Dr., felt this event was absolutely consistent with what a school should be doing during the summer. No school was expected to sit empty during the summer; they needed to get their facilities occupied and do good, educational work. The Priory had been a great neighbor, and they were due the same treatment.

Laura Trudelle, Portola Rd., said she was on the Priory's committee for the event. She said it was a big honor for the Priory to host the event and a way to give back. She was very excited to meet all of the attendees who would be coming from all over the world. She was eager to share the facilities with them and talk about peace, values, etc.

Peter Zaffaroni, Georgia Ln., said he attended the Priory for 7 years and received a top-notch education. This conference would help to promote those values and virtues. He was also a neighbor of the Priory and supported the event.

Lea Zaffaroni, Georgia Ln., said she was a neighbor of the Priory and had a child enrolled. To the issue of whether this was an appropriate use for the Priory school, she said the existing use permit was very broad and not as specific as what would be currently issued. It did, however, grant the Priory broad use of the premises for Benedictine educational purposes. She felt the Benedictine Youth Conference was related to the purpose, mission and objective of the Benedictine educational facility. The broad use of the school entailed bringing other schools onto the campus for athletic events, etc. The operation of the school wasn't just limited to the use of the site by the school itself, but encompassed interaction with related schools and groups. She understood the Town's right to look at issues such as size, safety, and traffic. In this particular situation, the Fire Marshal had investigated the safety issues. In terms of traffic, she understood that most of the attendees would arrive in vans. Since the school currently had 339 students, 200 individuals would be less than what was normally experienced during the academic year.

Furthermore, the on-campus, 24-hour use should lessen overall impacts on the Town since people would not be commuting on a daily basis. She felt this use could be distinguished from a use where the school was being rented by an unrelated group for an unrelated use.

Maureen Sansbury, Tagus Ct., agreed with Ms. Zaffaroni. She felt the Town should be very proud to have an institution like the Priory that was willing to open up its grounds and bring young people from around the world together to discuss peace.

Nick Combs, Menlo Park, said he had been a member of a United Nations team at the Priory and had represented some of the countries that would be attending. He wanted to meet these people and learn what their opinions actually were. Additionally, some children from Uganda had come to the school; that had been an uplifting and fantastic experience. A lot of people had been working very hard to see this event happen this summer.

Ed Kovachy, Sioux Way, said he was a coach at the Priory and the parent of students at the Priory. He said the heart of the school was about spirituality, community, caring and compassion, which was the heart of this conference. In a world growing increasingly smaller, there was no better event than this one.

Father Martin, Priory, said one of the charisms of the Benedictine community was that of hospitality. Priory students accepted hospitality from brother communities, and he felt it was important for the Priory to do exactly the same. The Priory was also intensely proud of Portola Valley. He felt an event like this would add a richness to the community and that it would be a very positive thing.

Bernie Bayuk, Paloma Rd., said the residents very much appreciated what the Priory did and the education of the students. His concern was about setting a precedent.

Nancy Shott, Willowbrook, said this sounded like a great event. However, this property owner had been in violation of its CUP for several years. Allowing a property owner to continue to extend its use in certain directions was a precedent unto itself. It was unfortunate that this was so tightly linked to the Priory, but there were potential impacts by other parties.

Virginia Bacon, Golden Oak, said she appreciated what the Priory did. She was bothered by the word "international." The General Plan clearly put an emphasis on things being local. She did not think the conference met the test of the General Plan that the event meet the local needs.

Responding to Maureen Sansbury, Chairman Breon confirmed that the CUP did not state that the use had to be local. He said Ms. Bacon was referring to a more generalized notion that businesses in Town with CUPs were intended to serve a majority of the Town and its spheres of influence.

Responding to Jim Sansbury, Tagus Ct., Mr. Vlastic confirmed that the Town had not specifically addressed Camp Unique in terms of whether it was an appropriate use. Responding to Mr. Sansbury, Chairman Breon said whether Camp Unique occurred in the future would be determined by the future use permit.

Susan Light, Sioux Way, said people were trying to keep Portola Valley rural by, for example, controlling traffic; that was the point of the local use requirements. However, she would hate to live in a Town that said you couldn't have a conference because it was "international." That felt so parochial and rigid. The bigger issue was whether it was impacting the Town in a negative way. Everyone cared about living in a beautiful place. The way the Priory set this up, it wouldn't impact anybody.

Claire Jernick, Grove, felt that what could come from the conference could be a benefit to her family. She noted that the MUR was rented out for weddings. She did not think that just Town residents should be allowed to get married there.

Jack Hundley, Georgia Ln. and Priory Dir. of Finance and Operations, said one of the things stated in the existing CUP was that the Priory could have summer programs and after school programs for non-Priory students. Several years ago, the decision was made to contract with Camp Unique to provide the Woodside Priory School with a summer program. It was one of the few things delineated out in the use permit, and it fit.

With respect to concerns about international versus local, Jon Peters asked if someone from out of state should be prohibited from buying something at John's or getting a haircut at the salon. While he had questions about the use permit in general, he did not think this event was objectionable.

Dan Cornew said people had commented about the consequences of the event on the community. He wanted to discuss those and help the Priory solve them.

Richard Swan, Ramona, said the agenda for the international conference had subjects like peace, substance abuse, parents, etc. This seemed so tuned to the philosophy and mission of the school. He questioned whether anyone would stand up and oppose world peace. Fewer people were going to be there than on a normal school day. He thought it would be a terrible travesty for the Town to say that it was opposed to this kind of activity.

Paul Trudelle, Priory teacher, said this event was precious and would strengthen all of us. He would like to get his children in on some of the proposed seminars. If there was something that local kids could attend, that would be wonderful.

Virginia Bacon was concerned about the scale of this event. She understood the Priory had facilities for about 60 residents to live there. People would be living at the Priory for this event, and she questioned whether the Priory was designed for the scale of this conference. She thought it would make more sense to limit it to the number of beds. Chairman Breon noted a housing plan had been received.

Dan Turner, Kiowa Court, said his daughter would be attending the Priory in the fall. He felt this was a very well thought out plan and that the Priory was trying to be a great neighbor, as they had been in the past by letting the community use the fields. He urged the Planning Commission to approve the event.

Regarding the scheduling of the CUP amendment application for the revised master plan, Mr. Vlasic said additional information should come in by May 10, 2004; that would be part of the Town files. He said the Priory was re-thinking their whole mission in a way that had to serve the use permit framework. The Town had asked a lot of questions, and those questions had pushed them to think further about what they did and be more complete in their responses. Quite a bit of information had been provided, but there was additional material that would be coming from the technical consultants. That material would be looked at by the planning staff and available for others to review. The Town would have additional questions--particularly with respect to traffic and drainage; that would be checked by the Public Works Director and the consultants that he was using for peer review. After staff's review, it would come to the Planning Commission with recommendations; the public hearing should take place within 1-1.5 months.

With respect to the proposed event, Chairman Breon noted that the staff report included recommended conditions. If it was approved, he re-iterated his suggestion to add a condition about chaperoning the off-campus activities.

Commissioner Wengert said the second condition required that any significant changes to the conference schedule, size, on-site activities, etc., be reported immediately to the Town. She felt "any significant changes" was somewhat open ended and subject to interpretation. Some language might be added that addressed potential impacts relative to traffic, attendance, housing, staff, transportation, etc. She also thought there should be some reasonable time period prior to the event after which changes would no longer occur. Additionally, she said the Town was clearly in a transitional period relative to the

whole approach to CUPs. Tonight's comments were confined to this specific CUP. Going forward, there would have to be an even application to all of the CUP holders throughout Town in order to succeed in managing the Town's growth reasonably and with great sensitivity to the citizens. A lot of changes would likely come from this next process.

To Commissioner Wengert's suggestion, Mr. Vlasic said a final date for changes could be inserted, but there could still be a catastrophe a week before the conference that would have to be addressed. He felt it was clear enough to the Priory that there needed to be sufficient time for the Town to react to any changes. While fewer attendees would not raise concerns, a request for 100 additional attendees would be turned down. Chairman Breon noted that the conference could probably not be opened up to people in Town. He added that he supported the proposal but would be very wary of the Priory trying to go above 200 attendees because of the potential bad faith it would show.

Commissioner Elkind said she found the public comments very enlightening. Her inclination was to approve the event for many of the reasons that had been articulated. At the same time, she had some concerns about: 1) the event not serving principally Portola Valley residents; and 2) the issue of precedent. She thought those issues needed to be worked out over the course of the discussions on CUPs. She recommended approving the event.

Commissioner Wengert moved that the Commission find the International Youth Congress use consistent with the existing use permit, subject to conditions 1-4 listed in the staff report of 4/29/04, with the addition of condition 5 requiring that any off-site activities be chaperoned and those people be registered. Commissioner Elkind seconded the motion.

Chairman Breon said he supported the event for many of the reasons people mentioned tonight. For those with concerns about the overall, larger issues at the Priory, he said he too had some strong concerns about what had gone on both from the Town's perspective and the way the use permit had been handled and from the Priory's perspective. He called for a vote, and the motion carried 4-0.

#### APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Commissioner Zaffaroni rejoined the Commission. Commissioner Elkind submitted a change to the minutes of the April 21, 2004, meeting. By motion of Commissioner Elkind, seconded by Commissioner Wengert, the minutes were approved as amended by a vote of 4-0.

COMMISSION, STAFF, COMMITTEE REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS: None.

#### ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 9:12 p.m.

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Craig Breon, Chairman  
Planning Commission

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Leslie Lambert  
Planning Manager