

TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY

OVERVIEW OF PLANNING AND BUILDING APPLICATIONS

General Information, Requirements and Costs

The following information is provided to acquaint those interested or involved in planning and building in Portola Valley with the Town's plans, regulations and administrative practices.

Town Government and Control of Development and Building

The Town, incorporated on July 20, 1964, is a community of approximately 4,407 people. Through the Town's general plan, a document required by California State law, the residents have expressed their strong common interests in preserving the small-town character and natural conditions of the area. The plan, based on a foundation of preservation, permits "reasonable" development of suitable lands that are identified in the plan text and accompanying plan diagram.

The Town's governmental organization and land use controls further the objectives contained in the General Plan and are based in large part on the voluntary efforts of local citizens. The size of the Town staff has been kept small through the use of volunteer citizen committees as well as professional consultants for planning, geology, and legal services. In addition, specialized staff services are obtained under contract with the County of San Mateo for health. The Town has a full-time building inspector and contracts with Kutzmann and Associates for plan checking.

Most building, grading or other land improvement activities are subject to Town permit requirements. Each application for a planning or building permit is carefully reviewed for completeness and compliance with Town plans and regulations. Reviews are made according to a system of procedures and forms that has been established by the Town Council.

The Planning Manager, You and Your Application

Initial checking of a proposed development "application" is made at Town Hall by the Planning Manager. The Town Planner may be requested to review some applications to assist in determining if an application is complete and ready to be accepted for filing. This check is to identify inconsistencies with Town requirements which the applicant can correct and to make certain that applications, when filed, are complete. After an application is accepted for filing, the Planning Manager circulates it to appropriate volunteer committees, staff and consultants for review.

The Planning Manager is the key liaison between the applicant and staff, consultants, committees and decision making bodies. Leslie Lambert is the Portola Valley Planning Manager, and her office is at Town Hall. She is responsible for knowing the status of any application at any point in time and keeping applicants aware of any additional information that is needed for application processing to be completed. The Planning Manager does not make Town policy, nor does this person supervise the volunteer committees or consultants. The chief function is to see that all applications are processed as quickly and efficiently as possible. Whenever an applicant or potential applicant has any question about Town planning procedures, the Planning Manager should be contacted (650) 851-

1700.

Application Review Procedures and Costs

Once an application is accepted for filing, it is circulated according to Town procedures. The actual "circulation" varies by type and complexity of the application and can include some or all of the following staff, consultants, or committees:

PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

Howard Young is designated as the Public Works Director. He is responsible for advising Town officials on the suitability of engineering design and conformance of development plans with Town grading, drainage and construction standards. He is required, by ordinance, to enforce many of the Town's development standards.

HEALTH OFFICER

The San Mateo County Environmental Health Department provides health services in Portola Valley. Steve Hartsell serves as the Town Health Officer. He is responsible for ensuring that all development meets accepted health standards. His main involvement in review of new development relates to adequacy of water supply and sewage disposal.

TOWN GEOLOGIST

The Town employs the consulting firm of Cotton, Shires & Associates, Inc. as Town Geologist. William Cotton is designated as Town Geologist and is assisted by several members of the firm. The Town Geologist is charged with ensuring that all new development conforms with the adopted geologic hazard safety standards of the Town.

TOWN PLANNER

The Town employs the consulting firm of Spangle Associates, Inc. as Town Planner. George Mader is designated Town Planner and is assisted by Tom Vlastic, Deputy Town Planner, in providing planning services. The Town Planner is responsible for development and application of the Town's land use plans and regulations. He provides direct advice to the Architectural and Site Control Commission (ASCC), Planning Commission and Town Council and works with other staff and officials to ensure that the plans and regulations are implemented.

BUILDING INSPECTOR/BUILDING OFFICIAL

Brent Hipsher is designated Building Inspector/Building Official. He is responsible for ensuring that new construction complies with the Uniform Building Code as adopted by the Town Council.

FIRE MARSHAL

Robert Nahmens of the Woodside Fire Protection District serves as Fire Marshal. His key responsibilities are to ensure that all development has adequate access and water flow for fire

safety.

TRAILS COMMITTEE

This committee is appointed by the Town Council and composed of volunteer citizens. The Committee oversees the extension, improvement and maintenance of the Town's system of public trails according to the Town's adopted Trail and Path Element of the General Plan.

CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

This committee is appointed by the Town Council and composed of volunteer citizens. The Committee's purpose is to help ensure that all land development respects and preserves the natural condition of the area.

ARCHITECTURAL AND SITE CONTROL COMMISSION

The "ASCC" is composed of five citizen volunteers appointed by the Town Council. Its purpose is to monitor new development against Town regulations to ensure that structures and grading harmonize with the existing character of the community. It reviews the majority of new development in the Town.

STABLE INSPECTOR

The Stable Inspector, Sue Toumanoff, is responsible for ensuring the safe and healthful keeping of horses and other animals in the Town, as well as enforcing the Horsekeeping and Stables Ordinance of the Town.

The costs for reviews provided by these staff members, consultants, committees, and commissions are covered mainly by fees and deposits paid by an applicant to the Town when filing an application. All fees and deposits are understood to be paid and accepted without any prior indication about the acceptability of any proposal.

Some permits can be handled "over the counter" while others must be approved by either or both the Planning Commission and the Town Council. Some permits require approval by only the ASCC. As a general rule, a permit request that must be heard by the Planning Commission and/or Town Council will require more time and cost, and higher fees and deposits than will a permit that can be more routinely acted upon over the counter.

Town Land Use Policies and Ordinances

Either because of State of California mandates or local needs, the Town has established plans, policies, ordinances and procedures to govern development. Some of these are simple and straightforward; for example, you may not build a gas station in an area designated or "zoned" only for residential uses. Some are much more complicated and require considered judgment; for example, only those commercial uses "serving mainly the needs of area residents" will be permitted in the Town. The following section provides a short description of the General Plan and Plan Diagram, Zoning Ordinance and Map, Subdivision Ordinance, Site Development Ordinance, Horsekeeping and Stables Ordinance, Building Permits, Geologic Policies and Review and Requirements, and CEQA, which are intended only to give an introduction to the Town's plans and regulations. Every

applicant is encouraged to review the actual documents to fully appreciate the goals and objectives of the Town. From time to time these documents are amended or other documents are added to the Town's stable of planning regulations and guidelines. The Planning Manager can advise you on the most up-to-date listing of the Town's plans and regulations.

General Plan and Plan Diagram

The Town General Plan is a long-range, comprehensive guide to the future physical form of Portola Valley. The plan was originally prepared and adopted by the Town Council, pursuant to State law, in 1965, just after Town incorporation. Since that time the plan has been amended several times to respond to new information and changing conditions.

The plan text and plan diagram address all land uses, services and facilities needed to make Portola Valley a functioning component of the Midpeninsula and the San Francisco Bay Area. All uses are tailored to the type of community desired by area residents. Scale and intensity of uses and structures, and the capacity of support services and facilities are based on the population "holding capacity" of the lands within the Town. In setting holding capacity the plan takes into account, among other things, the desired environmental quality, preservation of the natural conditions, and avoidance of areas subject to geologic hazard. In addition, the protection of the existing quality of residential area is given high priority. Support services and facilities, including commercial, office and institutional uses, are provided for based on the projected "holding capacity" and the desired residential character.

The "goals", "objectives", "principles", and "standards" stated in the General Plan set the framework for the zoning, site development, subdivision and other land use regulations of the Town. Whenever there is question over the meaning of a regulation, or the appropriateness of a use or activity, the plan can be, and is normally, referred to for guidance by decision makers. Everyone interested in developing land in the Town, or just wanting to be aware of the future course the Town has set for itself should become at least generally familiar with the plan. However, as examples, some of the key "major community goals" are listed below. *[Note: The Town's General Plan is being revised and quoted material/numbering may vary slightly from the revised Plan language.]*

- "1. To preserve and enhance the natural features and open space of the planning area because they are unusual and a valuable asset for the planning area, the peninsula, and entire San Francisco Bay Area."
- "2. To conserve the 'rural' quality of Portola Valley and maintain the Town as an attractive, tranquil, family-oriented residential community compatible with the many physical constraints and natural features of the area."
- "3. To provide for those commercial and institutional uses which are needed by residents of Portola Valley and its sphere of influence on a frequently recurring basis and which are scaled to meeting primarily the needs of such residents."

- "5. To provide civic and recreation facilities and activities desired by local citizenry and which encourage the interaction of residents in the pursuit of common interests and result in a strong sense of community identity."
- "7. To guide the location and construction of developments so as to reduce the exposure of people and improvements to physical hazards such as landslides, fire, floods, and traffic accidents."
- "8. To minimize the need for additional governmental services so as to maintain and preserve our predominantly volunteer local government."

All Town residents are encouraged to become familiar with "your" General Plan.

Zoning Ordinance and Zoning Map

The Zoning Ordinance, adopted by the Town Council, implements the General Plan by regulating the use of all land within the Town. In 1984, the Town's ordinances were "codified" and the "Zoning Ordinance", which contains the majority of the Town's land use regulations, is now found under Title 18 of the Municipal Code, i.e., the "green book"! For simplicity, we refer to Title 18 as the "Zoning Ordinance".

The Zoning Ordinance is made up of the specific regulations, described by text and tables, in Chapter 18 and six(6) maps. The maps are:

Sheet 1 Zoning Map, scale of 1" = 1,000 feet. This map shows the boundaries of the various zoning districts discussed in the zoning ordinance.

Sheet 2 Special Building Setback Lines -- EF, scale of 1" = 500 feet. This map covers the portion of the Town along the San Andreas Fault Zone and shows special building setbacks that are required along the earthquake fault.

Sheets 3, 4, 5, and 6

Flood Hazard Boundary Maps, scale of 1" = 500 feet. These maps cover the entire Town and show the flood hazard areas mapped by the Federal Insurance Administration.

These maps should be the first step in any review of the land use laws that pertain to a particular piece of property. The designations on the maps are the keys to the land use restrictions that are contained in the Zoning Ordinance which define:

1. The types of main and accessory uses permitted.

2. How much construction and improvement is permitted and where it can be located.
3. The procedures that must be followed to establish any new use, modify an existing use, build a new structure, modify an existing structure, or obtain design review of new structures.

In many cases a special permit, i.e., conditional use permit or variance, may be necessary to establish a land use and/or build a structure. If the Zoning Ordinance requires such a permit, Tables 1 and 2 should be referred to for information on permit processing. In addition, a handout is available from the Planning Manager describing the specific permit requirements.

Subdivision Ordinance

The Subdivision Ordinance, Title 17 of the Municipal Code, describes the conditions and procedures under which land may be subdivided in the Town. This ordinance was adopted by the Town Council as required by the Subdivision Map Act of the State Government code. An approved subdivision is required before someone can legally divide an existing property into two or more new parcels for sale, lease or financing.

The Subdivision Ordinance specifies the kind of information that must be considered by the Planning Commission when land is to be subdivided as well as the formal subdivision map and map recording requirements. The Subdivision Ordinance requires that the Planning Commission find that any subdivision is in "conformity" with the provisions of the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance.

Tables 1 and 2 and the subdivision handout available from the Planning Manager more fully describe the subdivision requirements and procedures of the Town.

Site Development Ordinance

Once a person who wants to improve property has verified that he or she has a "legal" parcel, and has determined the zoning provisions that apply to that parcel, the next step is usually to consider plans for the "site development". This means that within the confines of the zoning limitations, decisions need to be made as to where structures are to be placed, how people and vehicles are to get to the structures from the public streets, and the manner in which services and facilities are to be delivered to the new building site. In most cases to accomplish these plans, requires removing vegetation and moving dirt (i.e., grading by "cutting" into the site, and/or "filling" on the site), activities by the Site Development Ordinance.

The Site Development Ordinance (i.e. Chapter 15.12 of Title 15 of the Municipal Code) establishes the framework for removal of vegetation, including tree cutting, grading and construction. In addition, geologic hazards analysis requirements and procedures are identified or referenced. Handouts on Site Development Ordinance provisions and permit requirements are available from the Planning Manager. Geologic hazards review requirements are separately discussed in a later section.

Horsekeeping and Stables Ordinances

The Horsekeeping and Stables Ordinance, found under Title 6 of the Municipal code, regulates the private and commercial keeping of horses in the Town (commercial stables also require a CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT). It regulates the number of and manner in which horses may be kept. In addition, it establishes the annual horsekeeping permit requirements that are administered by the Stable Inspector. The handout available from the Deputy Town Clerk gives more specific data on the Town's horsekeeping requirements.

Building Permits

Any new structure to be constructed within the Town must receive building permit approval prior to construction. Title 15 of the Municipal Code, particularly Chapter 15.04, contains or references the building design requirements that all new structures must adhere to including the Uniform Construction and Administration Code, Uniform Building Code, National Electrical Code, and Uniform Mechanical Code. The Town Building Inspector/Official administers these codes for the Town.

In addition to building permit review with respect to the various codes mentioned in Title 15, all building permits are reviewed for compliance with the provisions of the Zoning Ordinance, and as necessary, the Site Development Ordinance. This review is typically done by the Planning Manager and/or the Town Planner. In fact, the review often begins at the counter when the Planning Manager is receiving a building permit application. At this time the Planning Manager may notice some plan feature that either requires special processing or that is in conflict with Town regulations.

The cost for building permit processing is based on the estimated value of the structure to be built or remodeled. The estimated value is provided by the applicant, but is checked by Town staff for reasonableness.

Geologic Policies and Review Requirements

The geologic mapping and policies of the Town have been recognized nationally for their pioneering contributions to safe land use planning. The attention paid by the Town to this subject is due to the presence of the San Andreas Fault (that's why there's a valley here), landslides, and other ground failures that have caused significant economic loss to people within and close to the Town. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the review by the Town of any land use or building plan includes careful attention to geology.

SEISMIC SAFETY/SAFETY ELEMENT. The Town Council has carefully evaluated the geologic hazards present in the Town and the threats they pose to people and various uses people make of their property. The Seismic Safety/Safety Element of the General Plan records the Town policies with regard to risk and sets the framework for addressing the threats posed by identified local geologic hazards.

The Seismic Safety/Safety Element, as well as the current General Plan diagram, are based on fairly detailed geologic mapping that has been done for the Town. The Town's 1" = 500 feet scale GEOLOGIC MAP and MOVEMENT POTENTIAL OF UNDISTURBED GROUND MAP were prepared, and are updated as more detailed data are available, to provide a sound basis for judging the relative geologic safety of land use proposals. In particular, the MOVEMENT POTENTIAL MAP, which interprets the technical data shown on the geologic map, has been applied to guide all day-to-day decisions on land uses within the Town.

RESOLUTION 500. This document, adopted by the Town Council in 1974, and subsequently amended, sets forth the Town's policies on what land uses and activities are to be permitted in the various stability categories shown on the Town's MOVEMENT POTENTIAL MAP. Resolution 500 also contains provisions for challenging Town policy, and/or making actual changes to the mapped categories. Resolution 500 policy is administered by the Town Geologist as part of his normal review of land use proposals, including all building permits for new structures. Copies of Resolution 500 and the MOVEMENT POTENTIAL MAP are available for purchase at Town Hall.

GEOLOGIC REVIEW OF INDIVIDUAL PROPOSALS. Anyone proposing to build on a vacant parcel, make a significant addition to an existing structure, or do significant grading on a property should be prepared to provide at least some special geologic reporting in support of the proposal. Further, it should be recognized that special costs will be encountered for such reporting and for review of the proposal and supporting report by the Town Geologist. Such reporting and review is a well-established procedure in Portola Valley and is essential for compliance with the Town General Plan and Town Resolution 500.

Whenever a land use proposal is brought to the Planning Manager, it is reviewed against Resolution 500 policies to determine if a significant conflict exists. If one is found, it is recommended that the proposer either revise the proposal or immediately set up a meeting with the Town Geologist to discuss the matter and probability of being able to satisfy his concerns regarding anticipated geologic hazards. The proposer will be required to place a deposit in advance to cover the time of the Town Geologist at the meeting. The outcome of the meeting would normally be used by both the Town and proposer to define next steps, anticipated work, and costs for further geologic review.

If no significant potential for conflict is found based on review of Resolution 500, the Planning Manager will explain the normal geologic review requirements which include referral of all subdivision, site development, and building proposals to the Town Geologist for review and comment. A deposit is taken to cover the review time of the Town Geologist. The handout GEOLOGIC/GEOTECHNICAL SERVICES, PORTOLA VALLEY TOWN GEOLOGIST available from the Planning Manager, explains the review approach that is employed by the Town Geologist.

California Environment Quality Act (CEQA) and Local Guidelines for Implementing CEQA

Pursuant to California State law, the Town is legally responsible and accountable for determining the environmental impact of any land use proposal it approves. The California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and State guidelines for implementing the act set the framework for required Town reviews. In light of and pursuant to these State guidelines, the Town Council has adopted local

guidelines for judging the environmental impact of any proposal.

The local guidelines, contained in a separate manual and available from the Planning Manager, are typically administered by the Town Planner and Planning Commission. Applying the guidelines demands special review, reporting and noticing requirements. All of these conditions result in added costs to the Town. Therefore, fees and deposits for applications must be sufficient to cover the time and services mandated by CEQA requirements.

DIRECTORY OF TOWN OFFICIALS, KEY STAFF, AND CONSULTANTS

The following officials, staff and consultants have important involvement in almost all building and planning applications that are presented to the Town:

Town Council

Meeting dates and time: Second and fourth Wednesdays of the month, 8:00 p.m.,
Council Chambers, Town Center

George Comstock, Mayor
Ed Davis, Vice-Mayor
Ted Driscoll
Steve Toben
Richard Merk

Planning Commission

Meeting dates and time: First and third Wednesdays of the month, 8:00 p.m., Council
Chambers, Town Center.

Craig Breon, Chair
Linda Elkind
Chip McIntosh
Ann Wengert
Lea Zaffaroni

Architectural and Site Control Commission

Meeting dates and time: Second and fourth Mondays of the month, 8:00 p.m., Council
Chambers, Town Center.

Laura Abbott-Chase, Chair
Danna Breen
Carter Warr
Sam Gelpi
Mike Schilling

Town Hall Staff

Office Hours: Monday through Friday, except for holidays, 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

Building Counter Hours: Monday through Friday, except for holidays, 8:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.

NOTE: Town Offices are closed daily between 1:00 p.m. and 3:00 p.m.

Telephone: (650) 851-1700.

Angela Howard, Town Administrator
Howard Young, Public Works Director
Leslie Lambert, Planning Manager
Brent Hipsher, Building Official
Carol Borck, Planning Technician
Debbie Martinez, Planning & Building Assistant
Sharon Hanlon, Deputy Town Clerk-Administration

Staff and Consultants

Contact Procedures: Direct contact with the following staff and consultants should be made only after checking with the Planning Manager. Often a deposit for services is necessary prior to meeting with Town consultants.

Town Planner, George Mader, Spangle Associates, Inc.
Deputy Town Planner, Tom Vlastic, Spangle Associates, Inc.

Town Geologist, William Cotton, Cotton, Shires & Associates.

Town Attorney, Sandy Sloan.

Town Website

The town of Portola Valley's website contains many helpful handouts and applications for Building and Planning. Please visit us at www.portolavalley.net