

# Town of Portola Valley General Plan

## Scenic Roads and Highways Element

Last amended March 11, 2015

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# *Scenic Roads and Highways Element*

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## ***Introduction***

- 3300      The state scenic highway legislation passed in 1963 set up a plan and program for the designation of “Official State Scenic Highways.” These were to be limited to state highways that traversed corridors of outstanding natural scenic beauty. The routes, nominated by local jurisdictions, were included in a master plan approved by the state. Official state designation comes only after the local jurisdiction provides assurance that the scenic quality of the road will be maintained and after such plans are approved by the Department of Transportation. Skyline Boulevard in San Mateo County, between Route 92 and the boundary with Santa Clara County, was the second highway in the state to receive official designation. Scenic highway law also authorizes the State Department of Transportation to designate county highways as “Official County Scenic Highways.”
- 3301      In 1973, the legislature required all cities and counties to prepare a scenic highway element; however, the law was subsequently changed to make this an optional element. Inclusion of roads in this element could in some cases be a first step toward official designation as state or county scenic highways. The legislation also provides for “unofficial” scenic highways and is not meant to preclude local agencies from developing and adopting local scenic routes.

## ***Objectives***

- 3302
1. To provide policies with respect to designation of highways within the planning area that are or may be eligible for scenic highway designation by the state.
  2. To provide guidance regarding the maintenance of the scenic qualities of our major roads. Because Portola Valley is a place of unusual natural beauty, all roads in Portola Valley can be considered “scenic.” However, it is possible that the pressure of increasing development and the resultant traffic could lead to the erosion of the aesthetic quality of our roadsides if care is not taken.

## ***Principles***

- 3303
- These principles are intended to guide future actions of the town and private parties.
1. Regulate density and land use, as provided in the general plan and zoning ordinances, with special attention to the view from the road.
  2. Give special consideration to site development, including controlled access for driveways and special setbacks for buildings.
  3. Keep the amount of roadway cuts and fills required in road maintenance or construction to a reasonable minimum.
  4. Contour and plant cut and fill slopes as an integral part of the road design, construction and maintenance process.
  5. Carefully control earth moving, grading, contouring and replanting in areas adjacent to and visible from the road.
  6. Keep traffic signs and markers to a minimum and place with consideration for the visual quality of the road. In addition, all commercial signs on scenic routes must be of such design as to be in keeping with a rural and natural atmosphere.
  7. Control the design of all structures abutting scenic routes, including review by the Architectural and Site Control Commission.
  8. Landscape all development along scenic routes and maintain such landscaping.

9. The town and user groups should be responsible for the regular pick up of trash in the rights of way of town scenic routes.
10. Encourage planting of native wildflowers, shrubs, and trees on public and private property. Wherever possible, remove aggressive exotic volunteers such as yellow star thistle, pampas grass, acacia, Scotch and French broom and eucalyptus.
11. Provide hiking and riding trails and bicycling paths separated from the pavement, where possible, as a part of future road improvements.
12. As a condition of their conditional use permit, require commercial developments along scenic roads to maintain a neat and tidy appearance. Surroundings of the buildings must be kept clean, and planted areas must be maintained.
13. Give high priority to placing underground all existing overhead utility lines, and structures to the extent possible, along the town scenic roads. Do not erect new or additional overhead facilities.

## **Description**

3304 The regulations of the Town of Portola Valley are designed to protect the natural beauty of the whole area, including roadways. Skyline Boulevard is already an officially designated State Scenic Highway. It is not anticipated that official state designation will be sought for the Alpine or Portola Roads. Nevertheless it is the intention of the town to protect and enhance the appearance of scenic roads and highways by careful attention to adopted design principles.

## **State Highways**

- 3305 The two state highways designated in this plan as scenic highways are Skyline Boulevard and Highway 280.
- 3306 Skyline Boulevard (Route 35), from the intersection with Route 92 south to the county border, became the second officially designated scenic highway of the state on January 22, 1968. The town, by Town Council Resolution No. 38-1965, joined with the Town of Woodside and San Mateo County in requesting the designation. Town regulations for that part of the Skyline corridor lying within the town, as approved by the state, may be found in pages 58 to 76 of *A Proposed Corridor Plan for a Scenic Highway, Skyline Boulevard, San Mateo County* published by San Mateo County in September of 1967.

- 3307 Special town regulations adopted for the Skyline corridor should continue to provide for special building setback lines and design reviews.
- 3308 Part of Highway 280 is within the planning area and the sphere of influence of the town. The town recommended and the state designated Interstate Highway 280 as a state scenic highway because of the beauty of the countryside through which it passes and because of the many excellent features of its design.

### **Local Scenic Roads**

- 3309 The two roads designated in this plan as local scenic roads are Alpine Road and Portola Road.
- 3310 Alpine Road is now a route of great natural beauty and variety. The creeks it follows through the foothills are lined with tall trees, and the countryside has kept much of its rural tranquillity. The mountain canyon is still wild and new views open up at each turn of the road. A superb scenic route already exists. It is threatened by change. The challenge is to find and pursue the ways that can protect and preserve this route through the mountains for our present enjoyment and the delight of future generations.
- 3311 The town has, since its incorporation, endeavored to protect the scenic quality of the Alpine corridor. From a policy statement adopted in July 1969:
- 3312 “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 Scenic corridor should be developed in accordance with the 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.”
- 3313 In May, 1971, the town adopted the Alpine Parkway Plan, subsequently renamed the Alpine Scenic Corridor Plan, as a part of the town general plan which includes detailed description of the road and of related design policies (see part 6). Special provisions to implement the plan and to protect the corridor include:
1. Open space zoning for sections of the corridor.
  2. Special setback lines along a major portion of Alpine Road.
  3. An open space program which does and should include recommendations for land acquisition and regulations pertaining to the corridor.
  4. The recreation element and the trails and paths element which include proposals for trails and paths in the corridor.

- 3314 Alpine Road above the intersection with Ciervos Road is a recreation route restricted to horse, bicycle, pedestrian and emergency vehicle traffic. The town endorses this designation. Nothing in this plan is meant to negate this provision.
- 3315 Portola Road within the confines of Portola Valley is the most “urban” of the scenic roadways. It is nevertheless a road of more than usual natural beauty, running through what may be considered the heart of the town—the floor of Portola Valley including residential areas, The Sequoias, the meadow, orchards, stables and properties. Special consideration should be given to building size, design and setbacks along this road. The Portola Road Corridor Plan was adopted in 2015 as part of this General Plan and includes detailed goals, objectives and policies for the corridor.
- 3316 It is town policy that land abutting our scenic routes should be zoned to maintain the maximum possible open space and scenic quality. Land to the south and west of Portola Road is under special restriction, local and state, because it is underlain by major fault traces. The regulations of the town, and the design principles for Portola Valley scenic roads, should be sufficient to preserve the natural rural beauty of this corridor.

### **Connecting Roads**

- 3317 Scenic roads in other jurisdictions such as Woodside, Menlo Park, Palo Alto and San Mateo County which connect to Portola Valley scenic roads are to be encouraged so as to provide a continuous quality of road corridor. All scenic roads in Portola Valley do, in fact, continue into adjoining jurisdictions. Also, the small portion of Arastradero Road in the town should be treated so as to be compatible with the scenic character in Santa Clara County and Palo Alto.

## **Scenic Roads and Highways Element, Appendix 1: Implementation of the Scenic Roads and Highways Element**

### **Actions to date:**

1. Adopted a special building setback line requiring a buildings to be set back at least 200 feet from the right-of-way of Skyline Boulevard.
2. Adopted a design review combining district in the zoning regulations that requires special design review of all development that borders Skyline Boulevard to the east.
3. Cooperated with the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District in the establishment of open space preserves that border Skyline Boulevard.

### **Future actions:**

1. The town should continue to administer the zoning regulations that help ensure the quality of the scenic highway.
2. The town should continue to cooperate with the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District in its efforts to preserve open space along the highway.