

Submitter DB ID 7791
IP Address [REDACTED]
Submission Recorded On 01/12/2026 4:26 PM
Time to Take the Survey 1 minutes, 41 secs.

Page 1

1. First and Last Name

Karen Askey

2. Email address (will not be publicly displayed)

[REDACTED]

3. Organization (Enter name of organization, business, or non profit if you are submitting comments on their behalf.)

Not answered

4. Street address (will not be publicly displayed)

[REDACTED]

5. City

Portola Valley

6. State

CA

7. Zip Code

94028

8. Date of Meeting you are submitting comment for.

01/14/2026

9. Agenda Item number or name

8a. Draft Housing Element Amendment

10. Comment

see attached

11. Optional: You can upload a copy of your comments.

[Comments to TC 1 14 26 re HE Amendment - Google Docs.pdf](#)

January 14, 2026

Dear Town Council -

Thank you for your dedication in following through on our commitment to identifying better, alternative development sites to Dorothy Ford Park & Open Space (DFPOS). As we now know, there was an oversight in calculating the actual developable area of DFPOS. And we do have an obligation to honor Tom Ford's legacy and his donation to fund the purchase of that property as open space in perpetuity.

It may not be feasible to find a solution that pleases everyone. Most of our residents agree that there are no ideal locations to add large housing complexes in our community and remain true to our General Plan. High-density housing in a WUI community with high fire-danger zones and limited evacuation routes, as well as the lack of public transportation, does not seem to make much sense, and has put our Town in a very challenging situation.

I, along with many other residents, am passionate about Dorothy Ford Park & Open Space remaining true to its name. It is a gem of Portola Valley, welcoming all to our community, and should live on as recreational space serving residents and surrounding community members in perpetuity, as originally intended.

The new Housing Element Draft Amendments spread our new housing across Town instead of placing a majority of new development on Alpine Road, our major evacuation route. In our current Housing Element, we have sited 141 homes along Alpine Road, which is 52% of our planned total of 272. The amendment offers more balance, with 102 ADUs/JADUs (38% of total) nestled around Town, 91 homes along Alpine Road (33% of total), 63 homes along Portola

Road (23% of total) and 16 dwellings along Skyline (6% of total). I believe this new geographic distribution of new units is better suited for safer evacuations.

Through 2+ years of work by Town Council members and resident volunteers (the Ad Hoc Site Evaluation Committee (AHSEC)), we have found truly better site alternatives for housing development, as well as a more equitable distribution throughout the Town. I am very supportive of Christ Church's desire to support low-income families, in creating tiny homes for rangers and/or local workers up on Skyline, and in development at Village Square, close to our recreational areas, the Town Center/library and a commercial hub. All of these initiatives will add to the charisma of Portola Valley.

In the most recent Planning Commission meeting on 1/7/25, there were concerns raised about building plans at Village Square, including the possibility of overdevelopment, as well as the impact on tenants, adjacent residents and the redwood trees. I am hopeful and believe that appropriate development can occur that addresses these concerns and that the impact will be minimized through a thorough planning process.

I look forward to amending our Housing Element as quickly as possible and saving Dorothy Ford Park & Open Space..

Thanks,

Karen Askey

Submitter DB ID 7794
IP Address [REDACTED]
Submission Recorded On 01/14/2026 12:30 PM
Time to Take the Survey 34 minutes, 59 secs.

Page 1

1. First and Last Name

Ken Van Tilburg

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[REDACTED]

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8a

10. Comment

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the inclusion of the Village Square parking lot as a candidate site for rezoning to Mixed Use High Density in the 2023-2031 Housing Element update. As the owner of 846 Portola Rd, my property directly adjoins the Village Square site, and I purchased this home just one month ago with the reasonable expectation that the adjacent commercial property would remain as such.

--- Recommendation ---

I urge the Town Council to remove the Village Square parking lot from consideration as a housing site in the Housing Element. This site is uniquely unsuitable for high-density residential development due to the convergence of severe negative impacts: immediate and unmitigable privacy violations for adjacent residences, destruction of irreplaceable heritage redwood trees, elimination of successful businesses and their economic contributions to the community, and fundamentally incompatible zoning relationships that violate basic planning principles.

I understand the regional housing pressures facing Portola Valley and the need for communities to contribute their fair share of housing at all income levels. I do not oppose housing development in appropriate locations. However, the Village Square parking lot represents the wrong location for housing development. The Town's Housing Element process should identify alternative sites that can accommodate the required housing units without these concentrated negative impacts---sites with existing residential zoning, sites not immediately adjacent to very low-density neighborhoods, sites without mature heritage trees, and sites that do not threaten existing businesses, would all be superior alternatives.

The Housing Element creates opportunities to thoughtfully plan for Portola Valley's future, but the Village Square site would create far more problems than it would solve. Below I detail the five primary reasons for my opposition.

1. Severe and Unmitigated Privacy Impacts

The physical relationship between my property and the Village Square parking lot creates a privacy situation that would become untenable with residential development. Due to grading requirements for water drainage, my home sits slightly elevated above ground level. My property line fence with Village Square is at the maximum allowable height of 6 feet, but the elevation differential means that anyone standing in the Village Square parking lot is already at eye level with my home's main floor.

Currently, people in the parking lot have direct sight lines into our kitchen, living room, and upstairs bedroom windows. The minimal setback between our fence and the house provides no buffer zone. This situation is tolerable only because the Village Square businesses close by 9 PM at the latest, meaning the parking lot is empty during evening and nighttime hours when privacy matters most.

The proposed high-density residential development would fundamentally and permanently alter this dynamic. Multi-story housing, which would be necessary to achieve the densities contemplated in the Housing Element, would create year-round, 24-hour direct sight lines into multiple rooms of our home, including our most private spaces. Residents on upper floors would look directly down into our bedroom and other interior spaces. This represents a dramatic degradation of privacy that did not exist when I purchased this property and would substantially diminish both our quality of life and property value.

Unlike typical residential-to-residential adjacencies where both properties have similar expectations and limitations, this situation would place high-density housing with elevated vantage points directly overlooking a single-family home that was built and purchased with the expectation of commercial neighbors with limited hours of operation. There are no feasible mitigation measures that could address this privacy impact: the proximity is simply too close and the elevation relationships too unfavorable.

2. Destruction of Irreplaceable Heritage Redwoods

The mature redwood trees on the Village Square property are not merely aesthetic amenities, they are living connections to Portola Valley's defining natural heritage. These specimens, including the prominent redwoods in the center of the parking lot and along its perimeter, represent the old-growth forest ecosystem that gives Portola Valley its distinctive character and environmental significance.

Construction of multi-story residential buildings on this site would almost certainly prove fatal to these trees through multiple mechanisms: excavation and foundation work would sever critical root systems; construction equipment would cause fatal soil compaction in the root zone; changes to site grading and drainage patterns would alter the water availability these trees have relied upon for decades; and the proximity of new structures would fundamentally change light exposure and microclimate conditions.

Once destroyed, these mature redwoods cannot be replaced within our lifetimes or those of several future generations. Their loss would represent an irreversible diminishment of Portola Valley's natural capital and a betrayal of the community's commitment to environmental stewardship. While new trees might eventually be planted, they would not provide the ecological functions, carbon sequestration capacity, or community significance of these established specimens for many decades.

The Town has consistently emphasized environmental protection and preservation of natural resources as core community values. Sacrificing these heritage trees for development would directly contradict these stated principles and set a troubling precedent for future land-use decisions.

3. Devastating Impact on Village Square Businesses and Local Economy

The Village Square businesses, particularly the Parkside Grille, depend fundamentally on the parking lot for their viability. The Parkside Grille has become an iconic community gathering place, and its outdoor seating area, which overlooks the parking lot and redwood trees, is central to its appeal and business model.

The proposed development would impact these businesses in multiple severe ways:

During Construction: Multi-year construction of residential housing would eliminate parking capacity, create noise and disruption, restrict access, and make the area generally unpleasant for restaurant patrons. The Parkside Grille and other Village Square businesses would likely be forced to close permanently during this extended period, unable to sustain operations without adequate parking and in the midst of major construction.

Post-Construction: Even after completion, a mid- or high-rise residential building directly in front of the Parkside Grille would permanently eliminate the restaurant's charm and outdoor dining appeal. The loss of parking spaces to residential development would create ongoing conflicts between business customers and residents competing for limited parking. The entire character that makes Village Square businesses successful would be destroyed.

Economic Consequences: The permanent closure of these established businesses would eliminate local jobs, reduce Town tax revenues from both business taxes and sales taxes, and remove community amenities that residents value highly. The economic impact would extend beyond the immediate businesses to affect property values in the surrounding residential areas and the overall vitality of Portola Valley's small commercial base.

The Town's Housing Element obligations do not require sacrificing existing successful businesses and the jobs and tax revenue they generate. Other site could accommodate housing without these severe economic consequences.

4. Fundamentally Incompatible Zoning Logic

From a land-use planning perspective, the proposed Mixed Use High Density rezoning of Village Square represents poor planning that violates basic principles of compatible zoning transitions.

The properties immediately surrounding Village Square, including my property at 846 Portola Rd, are zoned AP (Agricultural Preserve)---one of the lowest-density residential zones in Portola Valley. Creating a Mixed Use High Density zone directly adjacent to AP zoning would produce a jarring and incompatible juxtaposition with no transitional zones to buffer the dramatic density difference.

Sound planning practice calls for graduated density transitions, where higher-density development is buffered from lower-density neighborhoods through intermediate zones. The proposed rezoning would instead create the maximum possible contrast, jumping directly from very low-density single family residential to high-density multi-story housing with no gradual transition.

This incompatibility is not merely aesthetic or theoretical. It has concrete implications for traffic patterns, parking demand, noise levels, privacy expectations, and overall neighborhood character. The dramatic density discontinuity would create ongoing conflicts between the different land uses and undermine the stability and livability of both zones.

If the Town is committed to accommodating higher-density housing, it should identify sites where such development would be compatible with surrounding uses and where appropriate transitional zoning already exists or can be created. The Village Square site fails this basic planning test.

5. Loss of Views and Outdoor Space Character

Beyond the direct privacy impacts, the proposed development would eliminate the pleasant views and environmental amenity that currently characterize our western-facing outdoor spaces. Our property currently enjoys views of the mature redwood trees in the Village Square, which provide both aesthetic value and a connection to the natural environment that is central to the Portola Valley experience.

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Multi-story residential construction would completely block these views, replacing an attractive natural vista with the side of a residential building. This represents a substantial diminishment in both the subjective enjoyment of our property and its objective market value. The western orientation of these outdoor spaces means they are among the most used and valued areas of our property, particularly in the afternoon and evening hours.

Additionally, the character of our outdoor spaces would fundamentally change from feeling connected to a semi-natural, partially wooded environment to feeling enclosed by nearby multi-story structures. This loss of openness and natural character cannot be mitigated and represents a permanent degradation in the quality and usability of our property.

11. Optional: You can upload a copy of your comments.

Submitter DB ID 7795
IP Address [REDACTED]
Submission Recorded On 01/14/2026 12:38 PM
Time to Take the Survey 47 minutes, 24 secs.

Page 1

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Michael Ford

2. Email address (will not be publicly displayed)

[REDACTED]

3. Organization (Enter name of organization, business, or non profit if you are submitting comments on their behalf.)

Not answered

4. Street address (will not be publicly displayed)

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94028

8. Date of Meeting you are submitting comment for.

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8A - Draft Housing Element Update

10. Comment

Please see the attached file for proper formatting.

****Public Comment on Draft Housing Element****

****Village Square Site (884 Portola Road) Rezoning****

I'm Michael Ford and I moved to Portola Valley in 2021 my wife Pamela Levine. I'd like to express serious concerns regarding the proposed rezoning of 884 Portola Road, the Village Square site, and its disproportionate impact on our immediate neighborhood.

****Background and Context****

Our home is part of a small cluster of three single-family homes (846, 848, and 850 Portola Road) which are located directly adjacent to the proposed Village Square housing site and across the street from the proposed Christ Church housing site.

****Key Concerns****

****1\. Extreme Density Incompatibility with Adjacent Single-Family Homes****

Our homes sit in the A-P (Administrative Professional) zone, which is intentionally restricted to low-intensity, low-square-footage use.

A-P zoning has even more restrictive development standards than residential R-1 zoning: our Floor Area Ratio was limited to just 13% versus 34% for R-1 and the maximum 55% for Mixed-Use High Density. The proposed zoning changes to the Village Square Site would enable up to 55,000 square feet on just 2.3 acres, a dramatic intensification.

This proposal also ignores the traditional "step-down" planning principle that respects transitional zones. The Village Square site backs directly up to our homes—unlike the Christ Church site across the street, which is surrounded by open space.

Imagine a 3-story, 38-foot building just 15 feet from your home, towering over your backyard. While front setbacks were discussed at last week's Planning Commission meeting, the 15-foot side setbacks remain woefully insufficient when positioned directly against existing residences.

****Important note:**** These zoning changes are permanent and far more fundamental than the town staff's discussions with the developer about 20+ units. The proposed zoning enables a maximum buildout of more than 55,000 square feet (not including parking structures) and up to 55 units at 25 du/acre at the Village Square site.

****2\. Clustering of High-Density Sites and Very Low Income Housing****

The newly proposed Village Square's 20 Very Low Income units combined with the Christ Church updates across the street create unnecessary clustering that places disproportionate burden on one small corridor of town. Beyond the raw unit count, the current proposal places a significant concentration of Very Low Income housing in a single neighborhood.

As shown in ****Table 6-7: Housing Sites Summary**** of the January 2026 Amended Housing Element Update, the Christ Church Affiliated Housing Site was previously proposed for 6 Above Moderate-Income units. The amendment dramatically shifts this to 14 Very Low Income units and just 1 Above

Moderate unit. Combined with all-new Village Square's 20 Very Low Income units, this corridor would absorb 34 of the town's 73 Very Low Income units on two nearby parcels.

While we support Christ Church's mission-driven housing initiative, we object to adding the Village Square site and concentrating such a high percentage of one income category in a single area. It is inequitable and contrary to fair housing principles. Better distribution across town would:

- Spread impacts more equitably
- Avoid creating concentrations of any single income level
- And align with the town's stated goal of diverse housing throughout the community

Additionally, the three homes at 846, 848, and 850 are all newer construction; residents moved in between 2021 and 2026. As the town's newest residents in this area, we're eager to contribute to Portola Valley's future. However, concentrating the most significant Housing Element impacts on one small group of recent arrivals seems contrary to the equitable distribution the town seeks. We hope the Council will consider spreading these impacts more fairly across the community.

3\ Impact on the Viability of Long-Standing Local Businesses

The Village Square is home to several long-standing businesses, and any rezoning poses a significant risk to their viability.

The Village Square parking lot is already at capacity during peak times with Parkside Grille and existing business customers. How can this site support 20+ new residences (requiring more than 40 parking spaces per code) while also maintaining business viability?

The developer discussed with staff that "adding any housing would greatly impact" the parking situation. Without a clear solution:

- We risk the viability of businesses that have served Portola Valley for 25+ years
- Overflow parking will spill onto Portola Road, the town center, and our residential/A-P business driveways
- Lost tax revenue from struggling long-standing businesses could offset any fiscal benefits from new housing

Beyond the implications of adding housing while keeping current structures, rezoning the parcel to allow 20-25 du/acre opens the door to full redevelopment. Any active developer would be financially incentivized to maximize the newly permitted density, likely requiring demolition of existing structures. Fundamentally, there is no way to protect the businesses at Village Square if the parcel is rezoned.

4\ Environmental Impact - Loss of Mature Trees and Rural Character

The Village Square site contains dozens of large redwood and oak trees scattered throughout the property, creating a park-like setting that contributes significantly to the rural ambiance of this corridor, even amidst the existing parking lot. This mature tree canopy and open character are integral to the success and appeal of the businesses here; customers are drawn to the peaceful, natural setting.

The Dorothy Ford Park site was removed from consideration in part due to one beautiful oak tree. It would be equally devastating to lose the mature tree canopy and pastoral quality at Village Square. High-density development requiring even the lower 20+ residential units plus parking will almost certainly necessitate significant tree removal and hardscape expansion.

Will these trees be protected, or will they be cleared for maximum density development? Portola Valley's identity is deeply rooted in preserving our natural landscape - it's why residents chose to live here and why Dorothy Ford Park's oak tree mattered. The mature canopy at Village Square deserves the same consideration. Losing it would fundamentally change the character of this gateway to our community in ways that cannot be undone.

****Alternative Approaches****

I urge the Council to:

1. ****Remove the 884 Portola site**** from the Draft Housing Element and identify alternative sites with better neighboring compatibility
2. ****Distribute housing sites more equitably**** across town—particularly Very Low Income units—rather than concentrating nearly half in one corridor
3. ****Reduce density**** if the site must be included—consider 10-15 du/acre to better match the A-P buffer zone and preserve environmental assets
4. ****Require site-specific development standards**** that mandate:
 - ****a\.**** Increased side setbacks (25-30 feet) adjacent to A-P parcels
 - ****b\.**** Building height step-downs nearest to existing homes
 - ****c\.**** Preservation of mature trees and park-like character
 - ****d\.**** Comprehensive parking analysis and off-site solutions

****Closing****

In a dramatic shift from the previous housing proposal, this version, which removes Dorothy Ford Park and redistributes those 50 units, asks one neighborhood to absorb outsized impacts while placing local businesses at risk, concentrating nearly half the town's Very Low Income housing obligation in one area, and potentially sacrificing mature Redwood and Oak trees, which are irreplaceable environmental and aesthetic resources. There must be more appropriate sites than Village Square that would better match neighboring zoning and distribute community impacts fairly.

The A-P buffer zone exists for a reason - to provide transition between commercial and residential uses. Let's honor that planning principle and the character that makes Portola Valley special.

Thank you for your consideration.

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[Town Council Public Comment - Michael Ford - Jan 2026.pdf](#)

**Public Comment on Draft Housing Element
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