

**TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY**  
**Conservation Committee Meeting**  
**May 5, 2026**  
**5:30 p.m.**

**Marianne Plunder**, Chair  
**Judith Murphy**, Vice Chair  
**Megan Richards**, Secretary  
**Nona Chiariello**, Member  
**Teresa Coleman**, Member  
**Sarah Gilbert**, Member  
**Eliza Low**, Student Member  
(honorary)  
**Dieter Walz**, Member  
**Joera Zimmerman**, Member

**AGENDA**

**REGULAR MEETING**

**HISTORIC SCHOOLHOUSE – 765 PORTOLA RD. – PORTOLA VALLEY, CA**

**REMOTE MEETING ADVISORY:** On March 1, 2023, all committees in Portola Valley will return to conducting in-person meetings. A Zoom link will be provided for members of the public to participate remotely; however, the Town cannot guarantee there will be no technical issues with the software during the meeting. For best public participation results, attending the meeting in-person is advised.

**ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, if you need special assistance to participate in this meeting, please contact the Town Clerk at (650) 851-1700 or by email at [towncenter@portolavalley.net](mailto:towncenter@portolavalley.net). Notification 48 hours prior to the meeting will enable the Town to make reasonable arrangements to ensure accessibility to this meeting.

**VIRTUAL PARTICIPATION VIA ZOOM**

**To access the meeting by computer:**

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/87992926554?pwd=693De433oOBsYZZvbM4TyHpbDIYC99.1>

**Webinar ID: 879 9292 6554**

**Passcode: 369532**

**To access the meeting by phone:**

1-669-900-6833 or 1-888-788-0099 (toll free)

*Mute/Unmute – Press \*6 / Raise Hand – Press \*9*

- 1. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL**
- 2. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA**  
*Speakers' time is limited to three minutes.*
- 3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**
  - a. April 7, 2026
- 4. COMMITTEE BUSINESS**
  - a. Budget discussion and approval (Appendix A: Proposed FY 2026/27 budget)
- 5. OLD BUSINESS:**
  - a. Community Engagement subcommittee (Morace)
    - i. Centralized CC document repository / Update
  - b. Subcommittee on wildlife-friendly fencing (Plunder)
    - i. Draft Fence Regulations / 2<sup>nd</sup> ASCC meeting – update
      1. Currently on hold
      2. Progress report for planning director
    - ii. Draft Guidelines to wildlife-friendly fencing – update
  - c. Tip of the Month (Richards)
  - d. What's Blooming Now (Chiariello)
  - e. Committee / Townwide Cooperation
    - i. Committee liaison reports
    - ii. Open Space update (Chiariello)
      1. Developments at Hawthorne (Appendix C)

- 2. Springdown FY 2026/27 proposed scope of work
- iii. Town Center FY 2026/27 proposed scope of work (Plunder) (Appendix D)

**6. NEW BUSINESS**

- a. Rodenticide subcommittee (Chiariello)
  - i. Update to subcommittee’s planned approach & timeline
- b. Owl box community request (via Town Manager) (Low)

**7. SITE REVIEWS:**

- a. 131 Brookside 3<sup>rd</sup> done
- b. 1345 Westridge pending – due 5/8/26

**8. TREE PERMITS:**

- a. 857 Westridge pending
- b. 3530 Alpine Road done
- c. 85 Palmer Lande done
- d. 20 Arapahoe done
- e. 145 LaSandra (4/13/26 due – pending; no permission to access property)

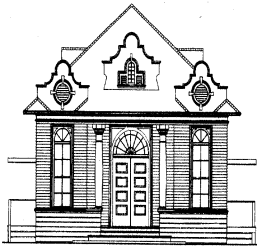
**9. ADJOURNMENT**

The next regularly scheduled meeting date is June 2, 2026 at 5:30 p.m.

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**Land Acknowledgement:**

The Town of Portola Valley acknowledges the colonial history of this land we dwell upon—the unceded territory of the Ramaytush (rah-my-toosh) Ohlone, Tamien Nation, and Muwekma (mah-WEK-mah) Ohlone, who endured a human and cultural genocide that included removal from their lands and their sacred relationship to the land. Portola Valley recognizes that we profit from the commodification of land seized from indigenous peoples and now bear the ecological consequences. We seek to understand the impact of these legacies on all beings and to find ways to make repair.



**TOWN OF PORTOLA VALLEY**  
**Conservation Committee Meeting**  
**Apr 07, 2026**  
**5:30 PM**

**Marianne Plunder**, Chair  
**Judith Murphy**, Vice Chair  
**Megan Richards**, Secretary  
**Nona Chiariello**, Member  
**Teresa Coleman**, Member  
**Sarah Gilbert**, Member  
**Eliza Low**, Student Member  
(honorary)  
**Christopher Morace**,  
Member  
**Dieter Walz**, Member  
**Jean Zimmerman**, Member

**MEETING MINUTES - DRAFT**

**1. CALL TO ORDER & ROLL CALL**

The meeting was called to order at 5:31 pm

Members present: M. Plunder, M. Richards, C. Morace, J. Murphy, S. Gilbert, N. Chiariello, D. Walz, T. Coleman

Members absent: E. Low, J. Zimmermann

Also present: R. Flynn (Council liaison), C. Dremann

Attendance Via zoom: D. Cardinal, unknown

**2. ORAL COMMUNICATIONS FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA**

- a. T. Coleman mentioned Palo Alto Weekly article re: bird safe glass.
- b. N. Chiariello received literature from a neighbor re: dark sky compliant lighting and can share with interested members.
- c. C. Dremann shared materials regarding mowing to encourage wildflowers and to reduce fuel loads based on his experience at Kite Hill. Strategies include monthly mowing from February to June, and fertilization to discourage invasives (e.g. star thistle). Findings: Percent native cover is inversely related to fuel load.

**3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES Mar. 3, 2026**

- a. *Approved unanimously (T. Coleman abstain)*

**4. COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

- a. M. Plunder: A future resident contacted the committee via the Town website regarding her desire to begin controlling Oxalis on her property. M. Plunder and N. Chiariello have fielded communications.
  - i. J. Murphy suggests advertising in the future that the committee is available to advise on similar topics.
- b. Rodenticide poisoning:
  - i. 4/1 article in The Almanac states that Committee has no concerns regarding the use of D3 rodenticide.
    1. M. Plunder suggests that following external meetings, subcommittees prepare minutes as a record, provide those minutes to attendees, and include them in committee agendas, to maintain a reliable record of communications and recommendations.
    2. N. Chiariello and S. Gilbert note that a summary report was prepared following the meeting with the school district, but was not externally distributed.
  - ii. There is currently no clear path for residents who find dead wildlife to have them tested for cause of death.
    1. CDFW will accept reports but does not perform testing.
    2. N. Chiariello reported it is possible to get wildlife tested by UC Davis but if wildlife has been dead for an extended period, testing is not a viable option and wildlife should be disposed of so that it cannot be consumed by other wildlife such as vultures. Requires delivery of the animal to Davis for testing.
    3. Rodenticide subcommittee will review options to determine if Committee can provide clearer guidance for residents.

4. C. Morace worked separately with E. Low on a workflow diagram that might be used to provide clear guidance and will follow up.
- c. Budgeting: M. Plunder will share a budgeting spreadsheet by email for input by Committee members. Email will note the deadline for inclusion in agenda packet. Budget requests will be discussed at May meeting and voted on. The CC budget is due on 5/15/2026.

## 5. OLD BUSINESS

- a. Community Engagement subcommittee update (Morace)
  - i. Centralized digital CC document repository - subcommittee has begun establishing an online archive of CC materials to make existing and new work more readily searchable and available for use.
  - ii. New content includes a lessons learned list from the recent native plant month tabling events at the Farmer's Market.
  - iii. Committee members request C. Morace to limit members' ability to delete.
  - iv. Currently, C. Morace is funding the initiative; at the next meeting, committee will discuss potential additions to the budget should the committee elect to continue the initiative. C. Morace to provide guidance for budget consideration.
    1. Domains: free for the first year, cost may be \$20/yr/domain in future years.
    2. Google Drive: cost for 5 terabyte capacity and access for two users may be in the hundreds of dollars per year. 5 tb might not be needed.
    3. Engagement platform: if implemented, cost would be hundreds of dollars per year but may not be something the Committee is prepared to implement.
  - v. Brown Act: working documents can't be shared with the full group; there is an option to create subcommittee folders with limited access to ensure Brown Act compliance. Committee Engagement subcommittee will test this workflow.
  - vi. Security: low concern, because documents are all public record.
- b. Subcommittee update on wildlife-friendly fencing (Plunder, Murphy)
  - i. Draft Fence Regulations / Pending 2nd ASCC meeting, update on meeting with Sarah Cawrse, Planning Director:
    1. S. Cawrse indicated that the regulations are not on the Council's list of priorities, and there is no budget to move wildlife friendly fencing code updates forward. S. Cawrse will not schedule a 2<sup>nd</sup> ASCC meeting; a brainstorming session with ASCC or a subcommittee of ASCC is necessary to address open issues like barbed wire, etc. and multi-housing fencing, as suggested by Council member R. Flynn.
    2. In a follow-up meeting with J. Murphy, M. Plunder, S. Cawrse and R. Flynn, S. Cawrse stated that she was not aware of the Committee's work on wildlife-friendly fencing; staff only works on items on Council's priority list.
      - M. Plunder is compiling a report for staff that provides context for the fencing guidelines work and its history.
    3. M. Plunder voiced concern that Planning director is working on Town processes and alignment with best practices without considering external input, institutional knowledge or informal context; newly defined Town processes are likely to not include Portola Valley's longstanding values unless already codified. This will potentially lead to habitat loss, less screening with native

planting, wildlife hostile fencing and potentially result in a change in look-and-feel of Portola Valley from natural to more suburban. First examples of this shift are already noticeable.

4. J. Murphy and M. Plunder expressed concern that site development permits are not being reviewed by ASCC and Conservation. While the Committee has historically contributed substantial time and resources to identify and promote initiatives that work their way up to Council (e.g. Redwood guidelines and heritage tree removal requirements) at no cost to the Town, this process and the role of ASCC are unusual in other towns, and frequency of involvement has been decreasing in 2026.
5. R. Flynn assured Council will advocate continued Committee involvement. Priority setting process for Council is evolving in response to overarching Town goals. Immediate need is to stabilize basic department operations; more discretionary code improvements will follow.
  - ii. Draft Guidelines to wildlife-friendly fencing for Town Website:
    1. M. Plunder will call a subcommittee meeting to move guidelines forward for the website.
- c. California Native Plant Month - Update on scheduled activities (Murphy)
  - i. Work completed and in process includes educational activities and curricula at local schools; farmer's market table with wildflower display; preparation of writeups for Forum and Town newsletter; docent-led tours; and coordination with committees and organizations. Ladera Gardens is preparing a display of native plants; library has a display of books relevant to native plants; cultural arts has included a native plant category in their photo contest.
- d. Update on Broom pull (Coleman):
  - i. Event was well attended, particularly by students looking to earn community service credits, scouts and volunteers connected to the event via Grassroots Ecology. Less well attended by residents.
  - ii. M. Plunder reminded committee members to record observations of broom in the right-of-way now, while it is flowering, to inform next year's locations.
- e. Tip of the Month (Richards): April's tip related to irrigation. Plans for the next several months include gophers and moles in May; summer weeds (star thistle, dittrichia) in June; planning the garden in July.
- f. What's blooming now (Chiariello): *Carpinteria californica*, Bush anemone
- g. Committee / Townwide Cooperation
  - i. Trails (Coleman): Horse fair will be May 16; work at Portola Terrace is active, including tree removals. While stated at the Trails meeting that the Conservation Committee is involved in nesting bird surveys, environmental surveys are being provided by biological consultants, and the Conservation Committee does not have further purview or involvement.
  - ii. Openspace (Chiariello):
    1. Town Council has requested that the trails committee consider allowing use of openspace funds for work (e.g. trails and fire risk reduction) rather than limiting funds to acquisition.
      - Committee approved motions to (1) engage town attorney re: legal restrictions on use of openspace funds as approved by voters and (2) obtain a forensic evaluation on how openspace and general funds have been spent relative to openspace.
    2. Subcommittee prepared a report re: status and timing of opening Hawthorns for public access. Midpen is 1 board decision away

from beginning CEQA process in 2026, with possible opening by 2028. Midpen has not yet substantially engaged with the Town of Portola Valley; leading parking lot options have significant landscape impacts within the Alpine Rd scenic corridor. Town is seeking legal counsel to engage with Midpen regarding the potential for coordination and alternative studies.

3. Committee approved a motion to form a subcommittee and review the possibility of converting Hawthorns from Midpen to Town-owned.
- iii. Wildfire (Plunder):
1. J. Murphy nominates C. Morace to act as liaison to wildfire committee. *Unanimously approved.* M. Plunder and C. Morace will work through formal process.
  2. M. Plunder mentioned a planned town-wide mailer that will be distributed soon, which may have space for messaging by Committee. J. Murphy and C. Morace will lead coordination to provide language re: balancing wildfire safety and habitat with links to existing Committee documents.
  3. Fire Marshall is recommending removal of trees when properties change ownership and with new builds, which contradicts prior fire department guidance. M. Plunder and M. Richards will coordinate communications and possible attendance at Committee meeting by Fire Marshall for discussion and alignment.
- iv. Town Center (Plunder):
1. M. Plunder and J. Murphy walked the site with J. Bixby and received a request for re-planting instructions so that planting recommendations can be included in budget. M. Richards and J. Murphy will coordinate a response.

## **6. ADJOURNMENT: 6:15 pm**

- a. The next regularly scheduled meeting date is May 5, 2026, at 5:30pm

The Town of Portola Valley acknowledges the colonial history of this land we dwell upon—the unceded territory of the Ramaytush (rah-my-toosh) Ohlone, Tamien Nation, and Muwekma (mah-WEK-mah) Ohlone, who endured a human and cultural genocide that included removal from their lands and their sacred relationship to the land. Portola Valley recognizes that we profit from the commodification of land seized from indigenous peoples and now bear the ecological consequences. We seek to understand the impact of these legacies on all beings and to find ways to make repair.

Town of Portola Valley  
 FY 2026-27 Operating and Capital Budget  
 115 - Town Committees - Conservation Committee

101 - General Fund							
		Actuals				Adopted	Proposed
		22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	25-26	26-27
<b>Revenues</b>							
46079	Miscellaneous Revenues	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Subtotal</b>		\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -	\$ -
<b>Expenses</b>							
63203	Conservation	\$ 55	\$ 7,000	\$ 65	\$ -	\$ 2,410	\$ 2,630
<b>Itemize Budget Below</b>							<b>Amount</b>
Banners							400
Broompull refreshments							500
Fall lecture event 2026 (monthly community event)							500
Spring lecture event 2027 (monthly community event)							450
BYH and Town Center brochure reprints							400
Native plants seeds for Springdown and ROW							380
Table handouts							-
Frogpond maintainance							-
Software subscriptions (currently paid by Chris Morace)							
<b>NOT CC BUDGET ITEMS</b>							
Information requested by Town Manager							-
Scope of work for Town Center - discussed w. J. Bixby - NOT CC BUDGET:							-
Plants/Mulch: \$1100							
Tools: \$480							
Labor: \$9,120							
Total: \$10,700							
Scope of work for Sprinddown - to be discussed w. J. Bixby before 5/15/2026 NOT CC BUDGET							-
							-
							-
							-
<b>Subtotal</b>		\$ 55	\$ 7,000	\$ 65	\$ -	\$ 2,410	\$ 2,630

OSC letter to Council 1 - (find ref. materials in the TC agenda packet)

20 April 2026

**To:** Mayor Craig Taylor

Vice Mayor Mary Hufty

Council Members Rebecca Flynn, Judith Hasko, and Helen Wolter

Town Manager Darcy Smith

**From:** The Portola Valley Open Space Committee (OSC)

**Subject:** Recommended actions on the Hawthorns

We are writing to alert you to significant environmental impacts associated with the Hawthorns Area Plan (Plan), which is now one Board decision away from starting the CEQA process (Figure 1).<sup>1</sup> We consider elements of the Plan unacceptable and in violation of the Hawthorns Conservation Easement. We recommend the following actions:

1. **Town Manager:** a) formally convey the Town's concerns to Midpen, and b) advise Midpen to submit a preliminary application to the Town for a conditional use permit.
2. **Town Council:** a) quickly secure legal representation for engagement with Midpen, including the possibility of Town acquisition of Hawthorns, and b) facilitate this by increasing the cap on the Town Manager's discretionary use of the Open Space Fund.

A lot is at stake for Portola Valley. A major concern is that the Plan's two parking lot options are in the scenic hillside southeast of Alpine Road and Alpine Trail, adjacent to the Town's busiest crosswalks and intersection—Alpine Road and Portola Road (Figures 2 and 3). The hillside is a mix of meadow and oak woodland. It is a prominent feature of the Alpine Road Scenic Corridor, which is now recognized in regional planning as a Priority Conservation Area. Both of the Plan's parking options are scaled for 50 cars and would entail: removal of significant trees; substantial cut and fill; and construction of a roadway, a permeable concrete surface, retaining walls, and a screening berm upslope from Alpine Trail. These impacts would violate the Conservation Easement<sup>2</sup> and would dramatically degrade the

Town's safe and scenic buffer along a heavily used trail and major road. One OSC member said it would be a travesty. The grantee of the Conservation Easement, the Peninsula Open Space Trust (POST),<sup>3</sup> has not enforced the Conservation Easement's restrictions.

1 At the March 17, 2026 meeting of the Midpen Planning and Natural Resources (PNR) Committee, the Plan

was advanced to the Midpen Board for their meeting on May 13, 2026. Figure 1 provides a timeline. See also

the **videorecording** of the meeting, especially timestamp 1:30:34–1:32:15.

2 Highlighted text of Appendix A to this letter (the Conservation Easement) includes restrictions on tree

removal (p. 5), prohibits grading and other actions that would “clearly degrade the scenic and natural

character of the Real Property” (p. 6), and specifies that a parking lot for public access should be in the

Improved Portion of the property (p. 8, and Recital B, p.1).

3 The Conservation Easement for the Hawthorns (Appendix A of this letter) was granted to the Peninsula Open

Space Trust (POST) in 2005 by Frederick Woods, III. It states his intent to preserve the natural, scenic,

historical, and open-space values of the Hawthorns in perpetuity. Midpen accepted the property in 2006

and officially finalized the transfer in 2011. At the time, this was Midpen's largest-ever private land gift. See

OSC letter to Council 2

The bigger picture is that the entire Hawthorns property is a unique asset for Portola Valley.

In addition to its diversity of natural habitats, there are visible legacies of the region's agricultural past, and structures that likely merit state and national recognition for their

historic quality.<sup>4</sup> Appendix B of this letter describes how all these elements are woven

together in a manner consistent with the conservation values of Portola Valley and the

Historic Element of the General Plan. The Open Space Committee considers the Hawthorns so significant and “right-sized” as Town Open Space that acquisition should be considered.

Right-sizing should apply to every aspect of the Hawthorns. Providing sufficient parking for public access to Hawthorns is as much a goal for the Town as it is for Midpen. Residents are all too familiar with the consequences of inadequate parking at Midpen’s Windy Hill Open Space. The question is how much parking is needed for a 79-acre parcel with a 1.5-mile loop trail, and how those needs will change with greater use of e-bikes, ride services, and future modes of travel. Residents and committees have suggested parking arrangements—either inside the Hawthorns property or outside it—that would meet the needs for parking while protecting open space.

Action is needed now by the Town of Portola Valley. If the Midpen Board approves the draft Hawthorns Area Plan as a project description for CEQA at its meeting on May 13, the Town should engage with Midpen before the CEQA process begins, saving time and taxpayer dollars relative to waiting until a CEQA document is completed. This requires immediate Town action to obtain legal representation, focused equally on both Midpen’s Hawthorns Area Plan and the potential acquisition of Hawthorns by the Town. To facilitate this, we recommend increasing the cap on the Town Manager’s discretionary use of the Open Space Fund.

Respectfully,

The Portola Valley Open Space Committee:

Carter Warr, Chair

Jackie Magno, Vice Chair

Nona Chiariello

Terry Lee

Delle Maxwell

Betsy Morgenthaler

Gary Nielsen

*“Property Acquisition”* on p. 2 of:

**[https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/20210518\\_HawthornsPublicAccessPlan\\_R-21-65.pdf](https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/20210518_HawthornsPublicAccessPlan_R-21-65.pdf)**.

The gift was supported by a \$2 million endowment for ongoing stewardship. See “Budget” on p. 3. of

**[https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/20180627\\_FYI\\_HawthornsHistoricComplexReuseUpdate.pdf](https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/20180627_FYI_HawthornsHistoricComplexReuseUpdate.pdf)**.

4

**[https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/2013.10.31.Hawthorns\\_HistoricResourceStudy.pdf](https://www.openspace.org/sites/default/files/2013.10.31.Hawthorns_HistoricResourceStudy.pdf)**

## **Plant Demonstration Garden Town Center proposed improvements / FY2026/27**

Perform targeted maintenance and enhancement work within the Native

Plant Demonstration Garden at the Portola Valley Town Center.

The goal of this work is to improve plant health, guide foot traffic, and reinforce the overall structure and function of the garden while maintaining its ecological integrity and aesthetic quality.

### **Scope of work**

#### **Site-Wide**

- Identify and formalize informal “paths of use” to reduce plant damage
- Transplant plants from high-traffic areas into adjacent suitable locations
- Install mulch in defined paths and impacted areas to guide circulation and protect soil

#### **Bed 10 (Front of Town Hall)**

- Reorganize traffic-impacted areas
- Transplant blue-eyed grass from footpaths into adjacent beds
- Install mulch in paths of use
- Install *Epilobium canum* at flagged locations

#### **Bed 11**

- Define and mulch corner traffic zones
- Install *Salvia spathacea* at flagged locations

#### **Bed 7**

- Establish defined path parallel to hardscape walkway
- Weed and mulch heavily impacted areas
- Install *Penstemon heterophyllus* and *Salvia spathacea* at flagged locations
- Convert diagonal path into planted corridor using *Fragaria chiloensis*
- Perform detailed weeding along lawn-facing edge

#### **Bed 17**

- Install *Salvia greggii* at flagged location
- Provide temporary protection (wire cage) during establishment period

### **Library Wall Planting Areas**

- Perform general weeding
- Install *Iris douglasiana* near main entrance

### **Baccharis / Artemisia Area**

- Coppice approximately 75% of *Baccharis*
- Lightly prune remaining plants
- Cut back declining *Artemisia* and assess for replacement if needed

### **Materials**

Materials will include mulch and plant stock appropriate to each location.

- Mulch will be installed to an approximate depth of 2–3 inches in designated areas
- Plant material will be sourced from local wholesale nurseries based on availability

Cost estimate:

Plants/Mulch: \$1100

Tools: \$480

Labor: \$9,120

Total: \$10,700