



Town of Los Altos Hills GENERAL PLAN UPDATE 2007

Adopted April 26, 2007



Town of Los Altos Hills
GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

Phase One

Introduction

Conservation Element

Open Space and Recreation Element

Appendix A—Inventory of Historic
Sites and Structures

General Plan Update Committee

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Acknowledgments

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Open Space Committee

Environmental Design and Protection Committee

Environmental Initiatives Committee

Parks and Recreation Committee

Purissima Hills Water District

Cover photo by Saul Chaikin

Introduction

1. The Los Altos Hills planning area is characterized by its natural beauty, extensive open spaces, and semi-rural lifestyle. The rolling hills and rugged mountains of the planning area provide a natural backdrop for the more intensively developed urban areas around San Francisco Bay. The topography also provides significant constraints to development such as steep slopes, unstable soils, seismic faults and other natural hazards. Preservation of the natural setting is important for maintaining and enhancing the quality of life for residents of the Town, as well as the Mid-Peninsula and Bay Area region. This General Plan provides a policy framework within which Los Altos Hills can develop in a safe, orderly manner while preserving its semi-rural, residential character.

BACKGROUND

2. Up to the decade of the 1950's, land ownership in the Los Altos Hills planning area was in relatively large holdings, which had been held as ranches and estates. With the coming of intensive urbanization to Santa Clara County, these holdings were threatened with development patterns similar to those taking place in other parts of the Bay Area, the results of which would have been to destroy completely the pleasant rural character that existed. To protect themselves against these threats and to preserve the rural atmosphere, the residents joined together and incorporated the Town of Los Altos Hills on January 27, 1956.
3. At the time of incorporation, the area was more truly rural and agricultural than it is today. Los Altos Hills is now a semi-rural residential area, with many residents who are employed in the more urbanized portions of the region. This transition from rural to semi-rural has not significantly altered the Town's character. Although Los Altos Hills is no longer an agricultural community, the rugged physical characteristics of the area have helped to maintain its pastoral quality. In addition, residents continue to pursue small-scale crop and tree farming, the keeping of horses and other domestic animals, viticulture, and other agricultural pursuits compatible with residential uses and a semi-rural lifestyle.
4. In 1959, in an effort to implement the community goals expressed at the time of incorporation, Los Altos Hills adopted its first General Plan. Since that time, the General Plan has evolved through revision and the adoption of new elements to meet the Town's needs. The last major update of the General Plan occurred in 1975.
5. Since 1975, significant changes have occurred in Los Altos Hills, the state, and the nation that should be reflected in the General Plan. Also, state requirements for General Plans have broadened. To fulfill the current General Plan requirements of the California Government Code and, more importantly, to reflect the many changes that have occurred since 1975, the goals and policies as well as the data in the original plan have been reevaluated and revised to ensure that the Los Altos Hills General Plan meets the needs of the community today and in the near future.

*The Town of Los Altos Hills
was incorporated to ensure the
"preservation of the rural
atmosphere of the foothills and
orderly and unhurried growth."*

*Articles of Incorporation
1956*

THE CURRENT UPDATE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

6. The current update of the General Plan is based on the belief that an informed public can and will decide the kind of environment and level of the public services it desires and will take actions necessary to achieve its goals. The characteristics of the environment desired by the residents of Los Altos Hills were initially expressed in the Platform for Incorporation in 1955. The essence of that document was the preservation of a rural (or semi-rural) atmosphere with a minimum of government and taxes. These principles are still relevant, having been continually reaffirmed through Town actions and surveys, and have been reemphasized in policy contained in the current revision.
7. The revised General Plan, when adopted, becomes an official statement of public policy regarding the future physical development of the Town, and serves as the basis for public and private decisions and actions. The purpose of the General Plan is to provide a guide for coordinated decision-making. To be effective, the General Plan must provide a framework within which private and public actions can take place in a manner consistent with the public interest. Furthermore, the plan must be understood and respected by neighboring jurisdictions and agencies of the state and federal governments. It is therefore necessary that private interests and other levels of government be informed of the General Plan and its philosophical basis. The realization of the vision embodied in the General Plan will depend upon positive actions taken by governmental agencies and private interests.

SCOPE OF THE GENERAL PLAN

8. The plan is “general” in that it does not attempt to address details, but focuses on the major aspects of community development and change. Detailed planning is reserved for shorter-range plans and programs. The General Plan also is “comprehensive” in that it is the one document that sets forth ALL of the major physical parameters of development in the Town and assures that all aspects are consistent with each other. Finally, the General Plan deals primarily with the physical development of the community and land use issues. This does not mean, however, that non-physical aspects of the community are ignored. General Plan goals and policies sometimes address non-physical aspects of the community, such as social, economic and public interest concerns.
9. The General Plan becomes the basis for a wide range of community actions. These include the establishment of community development regulations such as zoning, site development, and subdivision ordinances as well as public safety programs.

THE PLANNING PERIOD

10. The General Plan is a long-range, comprehensive guide for the future development of the community for the next 20 years. Such a period is probably as far into the future as we can realistically plan, and at the same time allows for considerable change to take place through the implementation of programs intended to achieve specific goals.
11. The General Plan should be evaluated periodically to determine whether it continues to reflect the aims of the citizens and provide a realistic guide for future development. State law requires the Housing Element to be updated every five years. Other elements also should be reviewed and updated at least every five years to ensure that the General Plan continues to cover a future time span of 20 to 30 years. In this manner, the General Plan will continue to serve as the Town’s long-range guide.



Jitze Couperus

Steep slopes to the south and west provide a natural backdrop.

THE PLANNING AREA

12. The Los Altos Hills planning area is located in northwest Santa Clara County, south of Palo Alto and west of Los Altos. The planning area contains some 14,000 acres, approximately 5,400 of which make up the Town of Los Altos Hills, California. The planning area is hilly and mountainous, with extremely irregular patterns of drainage. Elevations range from 100 feet in the lower portions, primarily along the northeastern edge of the planning area, to approximately 2,700 feet above sea level along the Monte Bello Ridge Line to the south. The lower elevations in the northeastern part of the planning area are characterized by gently rolling hills, while the southwest terrain becomes more precipitous. Almost all of the planning area is endowed with heavy natural vegetative cover, including many oak-studded hills and canyons.
13. Three major faults traverse the Town of Los Altos Hills:
 - Berrocal Fault, which runs from west to east.
 - Altamont Fault, parallel to Berrocal Fault.
 - Monte Vista Fault, running from northwest to southeast

All of these fault lines are categorized by the state as potentially active. The effects of a significant seismic event would be most intense on lands with steep slopes and weak soils, which represent much of the remaining undeveloped land with the Los Altos Hills planning area.

14. To plan for the future of Los Altos Hills, areas beyond the Town corporate limits should be included as part of the planning area. Because of important functional or visual relationships

to Los Altos Hills, portions of Palo Alto, Los Altos, and unincorporated areas of Santa Clara County, including portions of the lands of Stanford University, are included in the Los Altos Hills planning area. Such land can be broken into two categories of concern:

- a. Sphere of Influence – This is the Town’s sphere of influence as established by the Santa Clara County Local Agency Formation Commission (LAFCO). The General Plan proposes policies for the sphere of influence as a guide to Santa Clara County and as an indication of Town policy that would apply, should the area be annexed. The Town’s sphere of influence covers approximately 3,700 acres of unincorporated area.
 - b. Areas of Direct Concern – These lands are beyond the Town’s corporate limits, but not included as part of the sphere of influence. For these areas, the General Plan includes policies that provide a basis for cooperative programs or negotiations with the jurisdictions having primary responsibility for planning and development of these lands. Of the total 14,000-acre planning area, Areas of Direct Concern comprise approximately 4,900 acres.
15. The planning area is delineated by recognizable physical features, including major thoroughfares, large non-residential areas, and natural topographic features. To the south, the planning area includes Hidden Villa, Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, and Hanson Cement properties up to and including a portion of Monte Bello Ridge and Kaiser Ridge. To the west it includes a portion of adjoining Palo Alto. To the north and northeast it includes lands in Los Altos and generally follows Foothill Expressway. To the east it is bounded by Permanente Creek.
 16. Based on U.S. Census data, in the year 2000 there were 2,816 primary housing units (a significant number of which have secondary units) within incorporated Los Altos Hills, and the residential population was 7,902 persons. Beyond 2000, ABAG projects that the population of the Town may reach 9,200 by 2030.

REGIONAL CONTEXT

17. The Town of Los Altos Hills is functionally interrelated to other parts of the San Francisco Bay region. Residents of Los Altos Hills are dependent on other parts of the Bay Area for a wide variety of cultural, commercial, and recreational facilities. The Town is particularly dependent on employment centers in the Bay Area that are within commute time of the residents of the community. The relationship, however, is not one-sided. The Town and its surroundings are endowed with significant natural beauty which is relatively close to major activity centers in the Bay Area, making the Town attractive for those seeking a natural environment in which to make their home. In addition, because the planning area includes hillsides that are visible from a significant part of the region, Los Altos Hills provides visual relief from the congestion of the more urban area for a large number of Bay Area residents.
18. Los Altos Hills is also part of the Mid-Peninsula, a sub-region of the Bay Area. Palo Alto and Los Altos serve as the commercial hub of this sub-region. Major shopping areas include downtown Los Altos and Palo Alto as well as the Stanford Shopping Center. Health care services are provided by the El Camino Hospital and the Stanford-Palo Alto Hospital Center. Stanford University provides another important cluster of services and cultural amenities. Employment centers are readily accessible to Los Altos Hills by way of an extensive sub-regional highway system (see following diagram). As a part of the Mid-Peninsula region,

Los Altos Hills is important as a low-density residential area meeting a specific housing need for the area, and as a naturally scenic and open space area complementing the intensively developed urban portions of the Bay Area.

ASSUMPTIONS

19. The General Plan for Los Altos Hills must relate to larger forces at the national, state, and regional levels. Most importantly, it must relate to the forces at work in the San Francisco Bay Area. Because the Town has little or no control over the many external forces that will influence its future, it is necessary to identify some of the more significant general conditions that appear likely to prevail in the future. If the following assumptions prove to be incorrect, it will be necessary for Los Altos Hills to re-evaluate the goals and objectives of the General Plan.
 1. California and the Bay Area will continue to experience an increase in total population; however for at least the near future, growth in the Bay Area will be substantially slower than the growth in Southern California or many other portions of the state.
 2. In the nation, state, and Bay Area, there will be a continuing concern for the quality of the environment, which will be expressed in public and private decisions to control the extent and form of growth and the utilization of energy and water, and to vigorously preserve our natural environment.
 3. The major needs of Los Altos Hills residents for goods and work opportunities will continue to be satisfied through outlets and facilities located outside of the Town.
 4. Los Altos Hills and adjacent areas similar in character will continue to provide an important, unique and diminishing sub-regional resource – that is, an area that meets the needs of individuals and families seeking a semi-rural lifestyle in a natural setting.
 5. The residents of California and the Bay Area will continue to demand high quality residential, working and recreational areas.
 6. The primary mode of transportation between Los Altos Hills and other parts of the Mid-Peninsula will continue to be the automobile, with secondary movement by bicycle, by foot, and by horseback.
 7. Feeder systems, as part of an overall mass transit network, will provide only limited service to the Los Altos Hills planning area.

REGIONAL GOALS

20. If Los Altos Hills and similar areas are to continue to provide a natural environment as a balance and alternative to congestion in the more intensively developed portions of the Mid-Peninsula and Bay Area, certain conditions must prevail. These conditions cannot be assumed; they must be vigorously supported by the Town. As a result, the Town establishes the following regional goals:

1. Government, groups, and individuals should be encouraged to participate in the planning, management, and use of the limited natural resources of the Bay Area in such a way as to conserve and restore the environment.
2. In the areas adjoining Los Altos Hills planning area, control of development should be adequate to prevent adverse effects on properties in the Los Altos Hills area.
3. Legislation should be encouraged to guide regional patterns of growth and development, with particular attention being given to the establishment of population limits based on environmental constraints, space availability, and reasonable extension of services and facilities.
4. All persons in the Bay Area should be able to obtain needed community facilities and services, as well as adequate housing in satisfying neighborhoods and in locations convenient to jobs. Each community should be viewed in this regional context, and should provide the housing types that are best suited to its natural setting and proximity to employment, recreation, goods and services, and other facilities.
5. Belts of natural, open land should be preserved surrounding jurisdictions wherever possible, to maintain community integrity and to enhance the environmental quality of the region.

COMMUNITY GOALS

21. The major community goals stated below are general in nature and provide the most basic policy for the General Plan:
 1. Los Altos Hills should be a community dedicated to maintaining a semi-rural atmosphere, where people can live in the midst of open space, exposed to minimum noise, congestion, and confusion, and with sufficient space on each lot to allow activities such as gardening, cultivating vineyards and orchards, keeping horses, and enjoying outdoor recreation.
 2. Los Altos Hills should continue to serve as a transition between the urbanized areas of the Mid-Peninsula and the open coastal mountain range.
 3. Los Altos Hills should provide a low-density residential environment and open space for the region, and rely on the more urbanized areas for the provision of employment, goods and most services.
 4. Los Altos Hills should continue to support public elementary schools and education programs within Los Altos Hills, including the reintroduction of neighborhood public schools in the community.

COMMUNITY STRUCTURE

22. The land use and circulation proposals contained in the General Plan stem from the recognition that the natural beauty and semi-rural character of the planning area are resources that must be preserved for local residents and inhabitants of the Mid-Peninsula and the Bay Area. The intensity and distribution of land uses and standards for development are largely determined and conditioned by the natural environment of the area. In addition, existing development sets the general framework for further development.
23. The primary uses of land in Los Altos Hills are single-family residences including secondary dwelling units and other accessory structures; small-scale agricultural activities; and recreation and open space. A minimum of one acre of land is required per primary residence. In general, however, the density of dwelling units decreases as the steepness of land increases, due to Town regulations and physical constraints. In addition, uses within the planning area include public and private facilities necessary to serve the residents on a continuing basis.
24. Some employment and commercial areas are located adjoining the northern and northeastern portions of the planning area and are easily accessible by major thoroughfares. Commercial activities, except commercial stables, are not proposed within the corporate limits of Los Altos Hills. The only employment activities expected to be located in the Town are those associated with necessary facilities and services.
25. In the planning area, the steep slopes to the west, southwest and south are to be preserved as open space because of their scenic qualities and natural hazards inherent in their development. Elsewhere, major emphasis is placed on the preservation of the natural environment throughout the development process. In addition, development is to be strictly controlled in those areas determined to be potentially dangerous due to inherent natural hazards.



Jitze Couperus

**Interstate 280 links Los Altos Hills
to other parts of the Bay Area.**

26. The thoroughfares of Page Mill Road, Arastradero Road, El Monte-Moody Road, and Magdalena Avenue provide for primary movement within the planning area. These routes also connect the planning area with Interstate 280, Foothill Expressway, and Highway 101, which in turn link the area with all parts of the Bay Area.

27. Page Mill and El Monte-Moody Roads also serve as important Mid-Peninsula links to recreation areas in the foothills and south to Skyline Boulevard. These routes also lead to the more western and rugged portions of Santa Clara and San Mateo counties and eventually to recreation areas on the coast. These routes are used by individuals traveling by motor vehicle, bicycle, horseback or by foot.
28. The circulation system within the Town is generally organized so as to minimize the intrusion of the automobile and to maximize alternative modes of transportation. Roadways are generally narrow and circuitous, which tends to discourage extraneous through-traffic. By contrast, the Town's unique system of trails and paths facilitates direct, easy circulation by pedestrians, bicyclists and equestrians.

USE AND ORGANIZATION OF THE PLAN

29. The Town's General Plan is intended to be used by all members of the community, as well as any other person or organization interested in the future of Los Altos Hills. The citizens and officials who have prepared the plan designed it to be a useful, easy-to-read document.
30. State law requires General Plans to contain seven mandatory sections, or "elements." The table below shows the State-mandated elements and their counterparts in the Los Altos Hills General Plan.

State-Mandated Elements	Corresponding Los Altos Hills General Plan Elements
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Land Use• Circulation• Housing• Open Space• Conservation• Safety• Noise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Land Use• Circulation & Scenic Roadways• Housing• Open Space & Recreation• Conservation• Safety• Noise• Pathways

31. The Town's General Plan departs from the structure suggested by the state in a number of ways. The Open Space has been combined with Recreation, which is an optional element. The plan also includes a Pathways Element. Although these elements address topics that are not required by state law, they address issues that are fundamental to the future quality of life in Los Altos Hills. Once adopted, the optional elements have the same legal status as the mandatory elements. No single element or subject supercedes any other.
32. Most of the elements of the General Plan share a common format and use similar terms and references. Each element contains background information on specific subjects to make the General Plan more useful as a reference document and to provide the technical basis for its policies and programs. In addition, each element includes goals, policies and programs that are the essence of the plan and are to be consulted to guide decisions on a wide range of issues.

COMPONENTS OF THE PLAN

33. The Introduction, the Elements and the Land Use Diagram constitute the official General Plan of the Town of Los Altos Hills. Each Element of the General Plan includes goals, policies and programs to guide the Town's actions. The General Plan has been developed pursuant to the state law governing local planning as found in Chapter 3, Title 7, of the Government Code. Plans for sub-areas, when developed and adopted, become part of the General Plan. Appendices provide background information relevant to the General Plan. The appendices are supplemental information and are not intended to be adopted as part of the General Plan.

Definitions

A **Goal** is a general end or objective towards which the Town will direct its efforts.

A **Policy** is a statement of principle or general direction that guides decision-making. The Town sets policies to follow in order to meet its goals.

A **Program** is an action, activity or implementation measure that carries out adopted policies in order to achieve a specific goal or objective.

34. To facilitate future updates, the General Plan is organized in parts and sections so that amendments, when shown to be necessary, can be accomplished in an orderly manner. For convenient reference, each paragraph is numbered.

IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

35. The General Plan will be implemented through the actions of the City Council, the Planning Commission, Town committees, and Town staff. Plan policies will be carried out through the implementation of programs and the administration of ordinances, through annual budgeting and capital improvement programming, and through decision-making on development proposals.
36. The plan is intended to be a living document, to grow and change as local conditions change. It may at times be necessary to amend the plan. Amendments may be initiated by property owners, the Planning Commission, the City Council, or staff. All amendments require public hearings by the Planning Commission and City Council and evaluation of the environmental impacts in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.
37. Through continuing to use, evaluate and amend the General Plan, the residents of Los Altos Hills can ensure that the Town continues to develop in accordance with their vision of the future.