

Town of Los Altos Hills
Planning Commission Regular Meeting
May 01, 2025, Minutes

Zoom Meeting and Town Hall, 26379 Fremont Road, Los Altos Hills, California

1. [ROLL CALL AND PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE](#)

Chair Patel called the May 1 , 2025, Planning Commission Regular Meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Present: Commissioner Bredo, Commissioner Couperus, Commissioner Waschura,
Vice- Chair Indaco, Chair Patel
Absent: None
Staff: Community Development Director Bradford, Michael Baker International
Consultant Dan Wery , Michael Baker International Consultant Cameron
Savois, Associate Planner Fox, Administrative Clerk/Technician Ahumada,
Administrative Clerk/Technician Brunner, Attorney Claire Lai, Contract
Management Analyst Tim McBirney

2. [PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FLOOR](#)

Chair Patel opened PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FLOOR.

Resident Michael Grady commented on item 6.1 and the topic of trust between Town staff and residents with respect to the Housing Element.

Resident John O'Connell also presented on item 6.1. He echoed Michael Grady's concerns and called for a Special Planning Committee Meeting and the potential need for a recall of elected Town representatives. He also specifically criticized Twin Oaks zoning and warned the draft Housing Element document had “fundamental problems.”

Resident Gerda Cristal called for greater representation and justice for annexed properties.

Commissioner Waschura expressed empathy for Gerdas Cristal’s situation and reframed the issue as a matter of “view seekers” versus “view bearers.” Gerda disagreed with this characterization.

Chair Patel closed PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FLOOR

3. [CONSENT CALENDAR](#)

3.1 [Approval of February 10th, 2025, Planning Commission and Environmental Design](#)

Commissioner Bredo noted that she had submitted minor corrections to staff in advance.

The Commission approved Item 3.1 unanimously.

4 CODE INTERPRETATIONS

4.1 Discussion and Feedback Regarding Municipal Code Interpretation

Does the 900-square-foot exemption for floor area and development area apply to the construction of one SB 9 unit or two SB 9 units? Ref. Title 10, Chapter 1, Article 15: Objective Standards for Qualified Senate Bill 9 Lot Splits and Development Projects.

Staff: Jonathan Fox

Chair Patel Presented Item 4.1.

Associate Planner Fox presented the staff report.

Associate Planner Fox concluded the staff report.

Chair Patel suggested structuring the discussion in two parts: first, confirming staff interpretation. Second, determining whether the ordinance language should be revised.

The Commission asked clarifying questions.

Associate Planner Fox rephrased the situation by stating that “currently I (staff) could not tell you what the upper limit is for the size of an SB9 unit.”

Staff and the Commission clarified the distinction between the terms "exclude" and "exempt" as used in the Town’s code as it relates to SB9 units.

Chair Patel and Commissioner Waschura both stated that granting 1,800 square feet solely because two SB9 units are being built “does not make sense.”

Chair Patel presented two hypothetical cases and acknowledged the potential need to amend the Town ordinance.

Chair Patel sought Attorney Claire Lai’s opinion, while also asking staff if the Commission’s interpretation was sufficient.

Vice-Chair Indaco noted that this topic caused confusion in a past meeting.

The Commission and Staff deliberated the verbiage and presented hypotheticals.

Chair Patel addressed question number two from the staff report and concluded that the City Council should also address the matter, the central question being "Should we be changing the rules for sub-acre parcels?"

The Commission asked clarifying questions.

Chair Patel’s current interpretation is that 2,500 square feet of MFA(Maximum Floor Area) would be permitted for all sub-acre lots.

The Commission discussed scenarios under SB9 wherein property owners can add a 900 square foot unit even after reaching the MFA and agreed this should be revisited later.

The Commission reached consensus that the code language should be amended to reflect this interpretation and direct staff to bring back the matter for future discussion

Staff agreed that the discussion on this matter was sufficient.

Chair Patel Closed Item 4.1

4.2

Discussion and Feedback Regarding Town Grading Policy Interpretation

Does the height restriction for supported decks exceeding six feet in depth apply to balconies, terraces, and similar structures?

Ref. Town Grading Policy, Section #2.

Staff: Jonathan Fox

Chair Patel Presented Item 4.2.

Associate Planner Fox presented the staff report.

Associate Planner Fox concluded the staff report.

A question-and-answer session ensued between The Commission and staff regarding the figures from Fox's presentation.

Commissioner Waschura asked "What is the question?" Fox responded that his Grading Policy interpretation and enforcement has not been popular with owners and designers and was seeking Commission input.

Chair Patel stated that the Commission ultimately agrees with Associate Planner Fox's interpretation.

Staff and the Commission recalled a previous project on Matadero Creek and applied this interpretation.

Commissioner Couperus recalled that the Fire Department used to have a major input on these "stilt-houses."

Vice-Chair Indaco added that the Fire Department currently has screening requirements to prevent ignition from fire embers.

Public Comment

Resident and designer Walter Chapman explained that Fire Department requirements for decks are based on Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) standards. He clarified the key

question as whether an upper structure can be built over a lower patio if it exceeds six feet in height, noting this is not a grading exception. The Commission agreed.

Resident Mahdi Hamzeh asked how to determine measurement points for irregularly shaped homes.

Rajiv Bhateja, speaking as an individual, asked about the difficulty of maintenance for decks which are only three feet off the ground. He added that it is inconsistent that cantilevers seemingly are not limited but decks are. He also noted the existence of several nonconforming decks in town.

Commissioner Waschura expressed interest in revisiting the item at a future meeting to address the issue between decks and cantilevers.

Vice-Chair Indaco suggested having this regulation as a subsection of the grading policy under a different title to not cause confusion.

Commissioner Couperus likened the situation to the interpretation of daylighted basements of which some realtors have capitalized on by advertising as an additional story.

The Commission and Staff agreed the policy should be reframed beyond grading to better address decks, porches, patios and cantilevers.

Staff requested more flexibility in interpretation, and the Commission supported considering variances or future policy updates.

Chair Patel Closed Item 4.2

5.1 [Review and discuss an update to the Town's Water Efficient Landscape Ordinance \(WELO\) to conserve water usage and prepare for future droughts](#)

Review, discuss and provide direction to staff on an update of the Town's WELO amending the Water Conservation Factor of 0.8 to be lowered to either 0.65 or 0.55, that the Water Conservation Factor decrease each year by 0.02 for the next five years, and that the deposit increase from the current \$5,000 to an amount considered reasonable by the City Council to conserve water usage and prepare for future droughts. Staff: Tim McBirney

Chair Patel presented item 5.1.

Contract Management Analyst Tim McBirney presented the Staff Report.

Contract Management Analyst Tim McBirney concluded the Staff Report.

Vice-Chair Indaco asked for clarification on the household budget for water, which does not seem to consider household sizes based on bedrooms.

Staff clarified some facts for the Commission including why household size was excluded, the usage of CCF (centum cubic feet) units, the usage of PWB (Parcel Water Budget) from the Town's municipal code, and the procedure for returning deposits.

The Commission deliberated

Commissioner Waschura noted that this update would only affect about 15 new homes per year. Chair Patel Agreed.

Commissioner Bredo added that it could also affect any new ADU and SB9 units.

Associate Planner Fox noted that it would apply to a variety of other project types including landscape screenings and additions larger than 900-square-feet and that a better yearly estimate would be 40 to 50.

The Commission deliberated on the topic of deposits and ultimately expressed a need for the Town staff to preemptively contact residents and schedule inspections to return deposits.

Commissioner Bredo asked how slopes factored into water budget.

Contract Management Analyst Tim McBirney answered that it is tied to MDA and thus higher slope means a lower allocation of water.

Chair Patel stated that Purisima Hills Water District should adjust their tiers to reflect the Town and that would result in automatic conservation.

Anand Ranganathan, Chair of the Environmental Initiatives Committee, noted that new homes receive 540 CCF of water, despite average use being only 350 CCF. He urged lowering allocations through the WELO to promote long-term conservation. He cited worsening droughts.

Commissioner Waschura expressed his support

Chair Patel highlighted Anand's datapoint on allotted and actual water usage and suggested the allotted usage be changed to 400ccf.

Anand proposed increasing the deposit to \$10,000.

Carol Gottlieb, as a member of the Environmental Design and Protection Committee, asked if the deposit "is good" for two years but can be extended to three. She also noted that 4 or 5 years prior Staff had a \$2,000,000 account for deposits and it took 2 years and significant effort for the deposits to be returned.

John O'Connell, speaking as a resident, provided insight on the scarcity of water and cautioned that reducing irrigation usage could unintentionally raise rates. He emphasized that indoor water use is minimal.

Anand Ranganathan wanted everyone to note PHWD has a supply guarantee of 1.65 million gallons a day and “we are already above that guarantee.” He added that there are more residents arriving in Town and the availability of water should not be taken for granted. He also emphasized that the EIC is not seeking to cut water usage but rather maintain and thus rates would not be raised.

Commissioner Waschura asked if there is cooperation between PHWD and the Town to achieve certain controls over water during “droughts, construction, etc.”

Anand responded that “there was a lot of cooperation during that last drought.”

Elizabeth Loinaz, member of EDPC, proposed a system like Portola Valley’s which allows smaller projects (under 2,500 sq ft) to follow a checklist instead of submitting a full water budget. The checklist promotes sustainability.

Commissioner Waschura expressed his support for this idea and that there would be no fee involved.

Resident Martha Bowden suggested using building codes to reduce water use by encouraging gray water systems and tankless water heaters and recommended limiting permits for unnecessary landscaping.

The Commission echoed sentiments that updating WELO is the most expedient method to act on this matter.

Chair Patel closed item 5.1.

The meeting recessed at 8:20P.M.

6. NEW BUSINESS

6.1 Discussion and Direction on Multi-Family Zoning and Objective Design Standards

Review and Discuss Michael Baker International’s presentation on the Housing Element’s Multi-Family Zone and Objective Design Standards.

CEQA Review: Consider exemption pursuant to California Environmental Quality Act.
(CEQA) Guidelines Section 15061(B)(3) Staff: Jay Bradford

The meeting commenced at 8:26P.M

Chair Patel Presented Item 6.1

Director Jay Bradford introduced **Michael Baker International Representative Dan Wery**.

Dan Wery began the presentation.

Dan Wery concluded the presentation.

Vice-Chair Indaco began by asking clarifying questions regarding articles 16 and 17 and their placement in the municipal code.

Commissioner Couperus questioned whether RHNA(Regional Housing Needs Assessment) would consider a "half dwelling unit" as a full "dwelling unit."

Dan Wery answered yes.

Commissioner Couperus asked why open space reserves were included on the Multi-Family Zone District Map.

Commissioner Waschura asked a question clarifying parking space requirements and how they would correlate to half-dwelling units.

Commissioner Couperus clarified that the Planning Commission's request was for 24 units per acre and now the Michael Baker approach is seemingly out of scope.

Commissioner Waschura asked about the max height of the developments.

Commissioner Bredo asked if the 20-unit minimum rule really applies, since it's usually required only when there's a RHNA shortfall and the town had a surplus last cycle.

Dan Wery responded that there is a minimum density of 20 units per acre required by State law

Attorney Claire Lai responded, "this was not triggered because there was RHNA shortfall."

Dan Wery clarified that the shortfall refers to the difference between current zoning capacity and the RHNA allocation of 489 units, not the previous cycle's shortfall.

Commissioner Waschura inquired about the Town's ability to regulate non-dwelling areas, like hallways, without MFA/MDA.

The Commission raised concerns about large surface parking lots and emphasized a need for underground parking to maintain the Town's semi-rural character and if MDA would be needed for regulation.

The Commission noted that utilities, garbage facilities, and transformers reduce the practical developable area and asked whether stormwater runoff and storage requirements tied to MDA calculations would apply to multifamily projects.

Jay Bradford confirmed that compensatory storage is a statewide requirement and can be accommodated either at surface level or underground, such as beneath parking lots.

Commissioner Waschura complimented Dan Wery's presentation.

Public Comment

Resident John O'Connell answered a question about how RHNA numbers are calculated.

John O'Connell began a presentation.

John O'Connell concluded the presentation.

John O'Connell warned that Equivalent Dwelling Units need an MDA, MFA number and to reduce the unit per acre down to 24 as was agreed upon in previous meetings.

Carroll Gottlieb, speaking as a resident, inquired about the possibility of having the site overlaid as Multifamily and R-A (Residential Agricultural).

Jay Bradford responded that Twin Oaks is being rezoned, and the Foothill College and St. Nicholas sites will be overlays.

Carroll Gottlieb suggested “making it very clear” that some opportunity sites are overlays, noted that Multifamily developments should not be allowed on ridgelines, commented on setbacks and feasibility for Multifamily developments.

Chair Patel encouraged written comments to be sent to the commission and noted that three minutes is not sufficient for this topic.

Sue Welch, member of the Open Space Committee, recommended increasing creek setbacks beyond the current 25 feet to protect against flooding, creek bank failure, and impacts from larger buildings, and noted ongoing Open Space Committee work to define creeks versus swales.

Resident Martha Bowden noted that the parking requirements remain the same regardless of EDUs or standard units and proposed the need to change the term to "high-density" multifamily units. She also called for greater restrictions on retaining walls and building heights, no balconies, no solid fences, and other recommendations which would ensure fire safety.

Resident Ann Duwe noted that there was no mention of pathways in this presentation and wanted to ensure that staff do not lose sight of the development's relationship to pathway needs.

Commission Discussion

Chair Patel described that the average 1,200 square-foot size as “too high”. There is a need to reduce the average. If 1,000 square feet is the average, there would be no need for half-dwelling units, EDUs.

Dan Wery expressed openness to reducing the average unit size, noting that the goal is to encourage a mix of units.

Chair Patel asked whether a mix of unit types would naturally occur as developers seek density bonuses, and how the Town can ensure the bonus units remain small once granted.

The Commission discussed and deliberated the difference between using MFA/MDA and “average unit size” as a controlling measure for development.

Vice-Chair Indaco noted that the commission also must consider the square footage of the communal area within the building, like stairways, hallways, etc.

Commissioner Bredo that Indaco’s concern can be currently regulated by the MDA/MDA approach.

Dan Wery explained some hypotheticals in using MFA/MDA versus Average Unit Size and how it may be affected by density bonus laws ultimately noting that the effect will be similar in both cases.

Director Jay Bradford asked the Commission for a list of items that should be prioritized and brought back at a later meeting.

Commissioner Couperus noted an inconsistency between Dan’s presentation and our current Objective Design Standards as it relates to cuts within the setback.

The Commission discussed ideas for making rapid progress on this subject.

Commissioner Couperus cautioned against forming an ad-hoc committee, calling it “more bureaucracy.”

Chair Patel responded that it would only be needed for a month to address smaller issues under the given time constraints.

Rajiv Bahteja speaking as a resident noted that the Council had supported parallel efforts regarding lots 4–6 and a development agreement, which had previously focused on lots 1–2. He also addressed development on slopes and clarified certain Brown Act regulations related to meetings.

Commissioner Bredo began a presentation and identified a desire to focus on differences in municipal code specific to multifamily use rather than duplicating topics that apply to RA(Residential-Agricultural) and MF(Multi-Family) zones.

Commissioner Bredo presented a list of potential objective design standards for Multifamily Zones. See Item 6.1 Supplemental 7.

Commissioner Bredo concluded her presentation.

Commissioner Waschura supported shifting from MFA to average unit size for simplicity and noted that internal and external pathways should be included for circulation. He also emphasized reconsidering setbacks near banks, limiting buildings to 35-foot buildings on ridgelines, and the need to clarify what constitutes a ridgeline.

Vice-Chair Indaco listed her concerns: no tandem parking, a 55-foot setback from the top of bank, protection of neighboring views, proportional glass-to-wall ratios, requiring color boards and materials lists instead of LRV values, maintaining existing lighting policies, placing PG&E transformers underground, and prohibiting cell towers in multifamily zones.

Chair Patel did not approve of the EDU concept, recommended adding water usage standards, prohibiting Multifamily developments on ridgelines, reducing balconies due to fire hazards, requiring color boards and glazing details, and establishing a noise abatement policy."

Commissioner Waschura expressed the need to see what has been presented in a future draft.

The Commission and Staff, including attorney Claire Lai, deliberated on how to receive an updated draft before the next Commission meeting with sufficient time to digest the information.

Dan Wery thanked the Commission for their thoughts and recommendations and stated that he and his team could provide some form of an updated draft as early as the following week.

Jay Bradford proposed an additional meeting on June 5th, the date of the next regular scheduled meeting, and stated that he would send out a poll later to find an acceptable date.

Commissioner Couperus presented an issue he was having with his Town email address wherein he was not receiving emails.

Administrative Clerk/Technician responded that staff were aware of the issue and the IT consultants (Eaton) are working on the issue.

6.2 **Discuss and Direct Staff Regarding Housing Element Implementation**
Discuss and direct Staff regarding Housing Element implementation (Planning Commission discussion and direction).
Staff: Jay Bradford

Chair Patel presented Item 6.2

Vice Chair Indaco had a question about the June 5th Environmental Impact Report

7. **REPORTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS**

7.1 **Planning Commission-Led Discussion and Direction on Planning Department Workload and Staffing [No Staff Report]**

Chair Patel Presented Item 7.1

The Commission discussed ways to improve communication with the Council while ensuring compliance with the Brown Act.

Commissioner Waschura disagreed with Chair Patel’s assertion that current Planning staff is “decimated”, but rather “getting by with a lot of extra work” including Housing Element demands.

Rajiv Bhateja, speaking as a resident, noted that the Council had passed a motion allowing the Chair of each Committee or Commission to address the Council at every meeting.

Commissioner Waschura noted that it is importance of communicating to Council the increased staff workload and the importance of meeting key deadlines.

Chair Patel began a slideshow presentation.

Commissioner Couperus mentioned that there are inconsistent Fire Maps on the website.

Chair Patel presented a need to "Educate the City Council on the important activities that Planning Commission needs to do that are beyond the fee-based items we typically hear"

Director Bradford informed the commission of active recruitment for an assistant planner and 22 interested applicants for an intern position.

The Commission discussed staffing relevant to workload and employee turnover, 8 people have left in two years.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: **Commissioner Waschura** motioned to Present to the Council a comparison of historical staffing levels and workload compared to present staffing level upcoming workload, along with a status report of key present items that need to be communicated to the City Council.
residential uses.

The motion was seconded by **Vice-Chair Indaco**

MOTION PASSED:

5-0

AYES:

Commissioner Bredo, Commissioner Couperus, Commissioner Waschura, Vice-Chair Indaco, Chair Patel

NOES:

ABSTAIN:

RECUSE:

ABSENT:

7.2 Upcoming City Council Meeting Assignments

- April 17, 2025 – Commissioner Bredo

7.3 Upcoming City Council Meeting Assignments

- May 15, 2025 - Chair Patel
- June 19, 2025 - Vice-Chair Indaco
- July 17, 2025 - Commissioner Waschura

Chair Patel introduced Items 7.2 and 7.3

Commissioner Bredo presented on the City Council Meeting for April 17, 2025.

Jay Bradford added that at the April 17th Council there was extensive public feedback and interest in using alternatives to Fire Maps for hardening defensible spaces.

Commissioner Couperus commented on a “Point of Failure” approach wherein each residence is rated based on the amount of available Town exits points in a fire emergency.

The Commission approved their upcoming assignments and **Chair Patel** also added that it would serve as assignment for the Planning Commission Liaison to address City Council.

8. REPORTS FROM PAST FAST TRACK/SITE DEVELOPMENT MEETINGS

8.1 April 08, 2025
CANCELLED

8.2 April 15, 2025
10531 Berkshire Drive – File #SD25-0016, VAR25-0001 – Lands of Ricketts & Canessa
Site Development Permit and Variance for a remodel of an existing legal nonconforming single-family residence within the required 30-foot side yard setback, resulting in a 4-foot increase in building height within the setback due to a new dormer/roof structure.
CEQA review: Categorical Exemption per Section 15301APPROVED

8.3 April 22, 2025
25091 Tepa Way – File #SD24-0035 – Lands of Ravula
Site Development Permit for a landscape screening plan including new outdoor lighting and hardscape improvements associated with an approved single-family residence (File #SD22-0085– Previously Approved on May 2, 2023).
CEQA review: Categorical Exemption per Section 15304(b)CONTINUED TO TUESDAY 29TH

8.4 April 29, 2025
25091 Tepa Way – File #SD24-0035 – Lands of Ravula
Site Development Permit for a landscape screening plan including new outdoor lighting and hardscape improvements associated with an approved single-family residence (File #SD22-0085– Previously Approved on May 2, 2023).
CEQA review: Categorical Exemption per Section 15304(b) APPROVED

9. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR’S REPORT

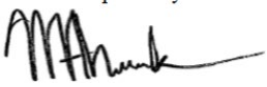
Director Bradford provided an update on the annual Housing Element progress report

Commissioner Couperus asked for update on Maple leaf pathway item and various ongoing topics.

10. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12 AM by **Chair Patel**.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'MAhumada', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Marco Ahumada
Administrative Clerk/Technician