Town of Los Altos Hills
City Council Regular Meeting Minutes

Thursday, March 19, 2026, at 6:00 P.M.
Council Chambers, 26379 Fremont Road, Los Altos Hills, California

Present:	Mayor Bhateja, Council Member Mok, Council Member Swan, and Council Member Tankha
Absent:	Vice Mayor Tyson
Staff:	Acting City Manager Cody Einfalt, Community Development Director Jay Bradford, Public Works Director WooJae Kim, Finance Director Thomas Leung, City Attorney Mattas, and City Clerk Arika Birdsong-Miller

CALL TO ORDER (6:00 P.M.)
Mayor Bhateja called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

ROLL CALL
Mayor Bhateja, Council Member Mok, Council Member Swan, and Council Member Tankha were present.

Vice Mayor Tyson was absent.

1. AGENDA REVIEW

Mayor Bhateja asked if there were any items on the agenda that needed to be deleted or addressed out of order.

Council Member Swan requested ITEM 7B be removed from the agenda and presented at next month's Council meeting.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Swan moved to remove ITEM 7B, Ordinance Amending Title 2, Chapter 1 "Council Member Salaries" of the Los Altos Hills Municipal Code to Increase the Council Members' Salaries to Nine Hundred Fifty Dollars a Month from the agenda and continued to a date certain, on April 16, 2026.

Council Member Mok seconded the motion.

MOTION FAILED:	**2-2**
AYES:	MOK, SWAN
NOES:	BHATEJA, TANKHA
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

2. PRESENTATIONS AND APPOINTMENTS

A. Proclamation Recognizing March 2026 as Youth Arts Month in the Town of Los Altos Hills (Mayor Bhateja)

Mayor Bhateja presented the proclamation recognizing March 2026 as Youth Arts Month to

Sofia Fojas, Art Coordinator for the Santa Clara County Office of Education

B. Proclamation Recognizing March 2026 as Red Cross Month in the Town of Los Altos Hills (Mayor Bhateja)
   Mayor Bhateja presented the proclamation recognizing March 2026 as Red Cross Month to Larry Hebb, the American Red Cross Silicon Valley Chapter.

C. Proclamation Recognizing March 2026 as Women's History Month in the Town of Los Altos Hills (Council Member Swan)
   Council Member Swan presented the proclamation recognizing March 2026 as Women's History Month in the Town of Los Altos Hills to Carol Gottlieb and all the women present.

D. Reappointment to the Los Altos Hills Open Space Committee – Peter Brown (Staff: A. Miller)

   City Clerk Birdsong-Miller presented the staff report.

   Council Member Mok thanked Peter Brown for his volunteer service and endorsed his reappointment request.

   MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Swan moved to reappoint Peter Brown to the Open Space Committee.

   Council Member Mok seconded the motion.

   MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

E. Reappointments (3) to the Los Altos Hills Technology Committee – Ameesh Divatia, Annie Ju, and George Lee (Staff: A. Miller)

   City Clerk Birdsong-Miller presented the staff report.

   Mayor Bhateja thanked the residents for their volunteer service and endorsed their reappointment requests.

   MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Mayor Bhateja moved to reappoint Ameesh Divatia, Annie Ju, and George Lee to the Technology Committee.

   Council Member Tankha seconded the motion.

   MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

F. Reappointment to the Los Altos Hills History Committee - Sylvia Jensen (Staff: A. Miller)

City Clerk Birdsong-Miller presented the staff report.

Council Member Swan thanked Sylvia for her volunteer service and endorsed her reappointment request.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Swan moved to reappoint Sylvia Jensen to the History Committee.

Council Member Tankha seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

G. Report from the Los Altos Hills County Fire District (J. Logan, LAHCFD General Manager)

J. **Logan**, General Manager of the Los Altos Hills County Fire District, provided an update on fire service agreements and recent actions affecting both the Fire District and the City of Los Altos. She reported that on February 10, the Board of Supervisors approved a 10-year fire services agreement with Central Fire (2027–2036), which was subsequently affirmed by the Fire District Board on February 17. The agreement maintains existing financial terms, ensures no reduction in services, and supports long-term planning, including potential development of a new fire facility. Amendments include provisions such as a 24/7 battalion chief, annual hydrant inspections, and continued collaboration on services and regional projects.

Logan also noted that on March 10, the City of Los Altos approved a resolution to pursue annexation of its fire services into Central Fire through LAFCO, representing a shift from the prior shared agreement. She emphasized that these actions allow each agency to address its specific needs while ensuring continued delivery of fire and emergency services.

Council Member Swan asked for clarification on the difference between Central Fire and County Fire. J. Logan explained they are the same agency, formally known as the Santa Clara County Central Fire Protection District, commonly referred to as Central Fire or Santa Clara County Fire Department.

Mayor Bhateja raised questions about the City of Los Altos' transition from a three-party to a two-party agreement, including concerns about financial impacts, infrastructure responsibilities, and potential effects on service levels. Logan responded that these details are still under negotiation and will be addressed through upcoming discussions and the LAFCO process.

Mayor Bhateja also requested expanded vegetation management efforts, including removal of hazardous trees and broader coverage beyond designated evacuation routes. Logan acknowledged the concerns and indicated staff is considering program expansion and would return with more information.

Council Member Swan emphasized the importance of including evacuation pathways in planning, citing concerns about relying solely on shelter-in-place strategies during major fire events. Logan agreed to bring the topic back for future discussion.

NO MOTION.

3. PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Persons wishing to address the Council on any subject not on the agenda may do so now. Please complete a Speaker Card located on the back table of the Council Chambers and submit it to the City Clerk. Comments are limited to two (2) minutes per speaker. California law prohibits the Council from acting on items that do not appear on the agenda. Under a Resolution previously adopted by the Council, such items can be referred to staff for appropriate action, which may include placement on the next available agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. **John O'Connell** informed the Council of a recent planning application for the Twin Oaks site and a subdivision meeting held earlier in the week, noting limited resident attendance. He raised concerns about the proposed development, including the use of multifamily-zoned land for single-family housing, reduced usable land due to roadway requirements, and significant grading needed on the hillside. He also expressed concern that the Council may not have been fully aware of the project and encouraged awareness moving forward.

   Mayor Bhateja confirmed awareness of the Twin Oaks subdivision meeting and requested clarification on public notification. Community Development Director Bradford stated that notice was provided to property owners within a 500-foot radius by mail and to additional interested parties via email, including Council Members.

   Council Member Tankha expressed concern that the notification process was insufficient for a project of town-wide interest and emphasized the need for broader outreach to ensure transparency and public participation. Staff noted the meeting was an informational session required by statute and that a report would be made available.

   Acting City Manager Einfalt provided cost estimates for town-wide mailings, ranging from $3,000 to $5,000 per notice. Council discussion included potential alternatives, such as expanding the notification radius. The Mayor directed staff to return with recommendations for improving public notification.

   John O'Connell returned to emphasize that effective communication and clear messaging were critical to ensuring community awareness and engagement.

2. **Eric Bredo** supported earlier comments regarding inadequate public notification and stated that the purpose and significance of the informational meeting were unclear, which may have discouraged attendance. He emphasized the need for clearer communication to inform the community that input opportunities remain. Bredo also expressed concerns about the scale and density of the proposed project, including grading impacts, and characterized it as inconsistent with community values.

   Council Member Tankha emphasized the importance of clear and effective communication with residents, noting that messaging should highlight the significance of issues to encourage public engagement. He expressed concern that unclear or overly lengthy communications may reduce participation and limit valuable community input needed for decision-making.

3. Resident and Planning Commissioner **Rajiv Patel** referenced a letter submitted by Jitze Couperus, expressing general agreement with its analysis and supporting materials while noting reservations about a specific proposal outlined in the letter. He highlighted the Town's need for stronger long-term planning and noted past challenges due to limited staffing and reactive decision-making. Patel encouraged the development and evaluation of multiple innovative planning approaches and urged the Council to consider both long-term strategy and staff capacity in addition to near-term housing requirements.

4. **Elizabeth Wilson** commented on the timing of notification for the subdivision meeting, noting that official notice was received late and emphasizing the importance of timely communication. She suggested considering alternative methods, such as telephone outreach, to more effectively and promptly notify the community.

4. INFORMATIONAL REPORTS (ITEMS PROVIDED SOLELY FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES)

A. Treasurer's Report (Staff: T. Leung)

B. Disbursement Report (Staff: T. Leung)

Acting City Manager Einfalt noted the reports were provided for informational purposes only but would entertain questions, if any.

5. CONSENT CALENDAR

A. Approval of the City Council Special Meeting Minutes January 15, 2026 (Staff: A. Miller)

B. Approval of the City Council Special Meeting Minutes January 21, 2026 (Staff: A. Miller)

C. Approval of the City Council Special Meeting Minutes February 2, 2026 (Staff: A. Miller)

D. Approval of the City Council Special Meeting (Goal Setting) February 4, 2026 (Staff: A. Miller)

E. Approval of the City Council Regular Meeting Minutes - February 10, 2026 (Staff: A. Miller)

F. Vacating Appointment to the Los Altos Hills Pathways Committee - Mike Henshaw (Staff: A. Miller)

G. Resolution Accepting the Proposed Donated Architectural Services from M Designs Architects for the Replacement of the Parks and Recreation Building (Staff: W. Kim)

H. Resolution Terminating the Emergency Declaration for the Town Hall Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning System Repair/Replacement Project (Staff: W. Kim)

I. Resolution Awarding a Construction Contract for the FY25/26 Pavement Rehabilitation and Drainage Improvement Project to G. Bortolotto & Company, Inc., the Lowest Responsible and Responsive Bidder, for an Amount of $1,103,936 and Authorizing the City Manager to Execute the Construction Contract; and Approving Project Contingency Funds of $165,000 and Authorizing the Public Works Director to Approve Potential Contract Change Orders Within the

Said Funds (Staff: J. Chau)

J. Resolutions Granting Various Extensions for Various Building Permits (Staff: J. Bradford)

K. Notification of Fast Track Approval at 10225 West Loyola Drive (Staff: J. Bradford)

L. Letter of Support for AB 2517 (C. Einfalt)

Council Member Tankha requested that ITEM L be removed from the CONSENT CALENDAR and considered separately.

Mayor Bhateja OPENED public comments for the CONSENT CALENDAR.

No comments.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED public comments for the CONSENT CALENDAR.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Tankha moved to APPROVE the CONSENT CALENDAR except for ITEM L.

Council Member Swan seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED:	**4-0**
AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

ITEM L

Community Development Director Bradford presented a request for Council support of AB 2517, which proposes reforms to fire hazard severity zone mapping by the State Fire Marshal. He provided background on the Town's prior adoption of the state maps and noted concerns raised statewide regarding data transparency, methodology, implementation, and impacts on property owners.

Bradford explained that AB 2517 would improve mapping processes, including establishing regular update timelines and allowing for greater public engagement prior to map release. He noted the bill maintains local jurisdiction authority to designate fire hazard severity zones, including the ability to increase designations.

Council Member Tankha raised concerns about maintaining local discretion to designate entire parcels as high fire hazard when only a small portion is affected. **Mayor Bhateja** and staff clarified that staff would return with recommendations on handling mixed-designation parcels.

Staff emphasized that the bill addresses several prior concerns and enhances public input opportunities and requested Council support.

Mayor Bhateja OPENED public comments for ITEM L.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. **John O'Connell** expressed concern that AB 2517 could allow the Town to increase fire hazard severity zones for a significant number of properties unnecessarily. He cited examples where parcels mostly classified as moderate risk could be re-designated as very high hazard, creating overly stringent requirements. O'Connell emphasized the need for public discussion on the potential impacts and recommended that the item be removed from the consent calendar for further review.

2. **Elizabeth Wilson** expressed concern over the presentation of AB 2517, noting that slides suggested parcel-level fire hazard designations "must be" consistent, whereas the legislation allows local authorities discretion to increase designations. She cautioned that such overstatements had caused public uproar previously and could appear non-negotiable. Wilson recommended withdrawing the Town's support for the bill entirely.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED public comments for ITEM L.

Council Member Swan asked whether AB 2517 would change the Town's flexibility in designating fire hazard severity zones.

Director Bradford explained that the law provides more education and public outreach before implementation and confirms that local jurisdictions retain authority to make parcel-level designations. He clarified that parcels with only a small portion in a higher fire hazard zone will not have the designation applied to the entire parcel, and affected properties are no worse off than under current rules.

Council Member Mok asked if the Town has authority to decrease fire hazard severity zones. Director Bradford confirmed that local jurisdictions can only increase severity, not decrease, which has been the case previously.

Council Member Tankha expressed concern that past actions allowed the Town to designate entire parcels as high hazard based on very small portions, causing stress for homeowners, and worried the same could happen again under current language.

Mayor Bhateja clarified that the proposed law does not change the existing authority of the local jurisdiction; future councils retain discretion, and staff proposals vetted by the Planning Commission will prevent automatic upgrading of parcels.

Council Member Tankha emphasized that while the law does not change authority, she opposes supporting language that allows local discretion as a "moral stand," even though it mirrors current law.

MOTION MADE: Council Member Swan moved that they support AB 2517.

MOTION FAILED for the lack of a Second.

6. <u>ONGOING BUSINESS</u>

A. Discussion and Possible Action on Establishing a Housing Element Ad Hoc Committee (Staff: A. Miller)

City Clerk Birdsong-Miller presented a follow-up on establishing a Housing Element Ad Hoc Committee, per the Council's request to explore committee options. Staff reviewed the pros and cons of ad hoc versus standing committees:

- Ad Hoc Committee Pros: Flexibility, faster decision-making, lower administrative burden.
- Ad Hoc Cons: Limited transparency, no continuity, limited authority, risk of overuse.
- Standing Committee Pros: Transparency, public trust, continuity, consistent oversight, clear authority.
- Standing Committee Cons: Slower process, less flexibility, potential redundancy, higher administrative work.

Staff Recommendation: Proceed with an ad hoc committee with a defined membership, charge, and sunset date aligned with the town's six-cycle housing element. Staff proposed incorporating transparency measures from standing committees, including open meetings, posted agendas, public notifications, and a dedicated webpage for community engagement.

City Attorney Mattas explained key distinctions between an ad hoc and a standing committee regarding the Housing Element:

- Ad Hoc Committee: Limited duration and subject matter jurisdiction, focusing solely on housing element implementation. Provides flexibility in scheduling and allows Council to guide the committee's focus. Must be composed of fewer than a majority of the legislative body. Can still take public input and hold meetings, similar to a standing committee.
- Standing Committee: Can include members from multiple legislative bodies or residents outside the Council. More formal structure with consistent rules and authority.

Mattas emphasized that the proposed ad hoc committee would maintain public transparency by noticing meetings, merging the flexibility of ad hoc committees with accountability features of standing committees.

City Attorney Mattas clarified questions regarding the proposed Housing Element ad hoc committee:

- Duration: While the staff memo suggested aligning the sunset date with the sixth-cycle Housing Element (2031), Mattas recommended limiting an ad hoc committee to one year due to its temporary nature, with the option to recreate it later if valuable. A standing committee could continue through the full cycle.
- Transparency: Noticing ad hoc committee meetings provides the same level of public input as a standing committee, with added flexibility to extend public comment on substantive issues.
- Authority and Recommendations: Both ad hoc and standing committees serve in an advisory capacity. Recommendations are not binding on the Council. Structurally, neither committee holds more weight in influencing Council decisions; the Council retains ultimate decision-making authority.
- Focus: Ad hoc committees allow Council to limit subject matter and control focus, while standing committees can include broader membership, including residents not on the Council.

Mayor Bhateja and **City Attorney Mattas** discussed the relationship of the proposed Housing Element committee to the Planning Commission and legal considerations:

- Function in Relation to Planning Commission: The committee's role will be defined by its charge. It can make recommendations to the Planning Commission or directly to the Council, but the Planning Commission retains its statutory advisory role on the Housing Element and will act independently regardless of the committee.
- Brown Act Applicability:
  - Ad hoc committees are generally not subject to the Brown Act, allowing members to communicate more freely.
  - Standing committees are subject to the Brown Act, restricting discussions among a majority outside of noticed meetings.
- Recusal Requirements: Apply to both ad hoc and standing committees for conflicts of interest, such as property ownership in areas under discussion. Members of the public are not constrained by these rules when participating in noticed meetings.

Mayor Bhateja OPENED public comments.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. **John O'Connell** addressed the Council regarding the proposed Housing Element committee, emphasizing that standing committees, such as the Technology, Pathways, and Open Space Committees, are a foundational part of how the town operates and work collaboratively with the Planning Commission. He expressed concern that the discussion about ad hoc versus standing committees seemed repetitive, given the town's prior experience with committees. O'Connell highlighted that residents prefer a standing committee, particularly because past ad hoc committees, especially on housing matters, had been criticized for secrecy. He urged the Council to establish a standing committee for the Housing Element to allow for transparent, substantive resident input, rather than limiting public participation to brief comment periods.

2. **Michael Grady** spoke in response to the discussion on the Housing Element committee, noting that he disagreed with John O'Connell's preference for a standing committee. Grady expressed support for an ad hoc committee, citing its flexibility and the ability to manage recusal obligations. He emphasized that as long as the ad hoc committee operates collaboratively, with noticed open meetings and ample opportunity for public input beyond brief comment periods, it could function effectively. He noted some of the challenges with the previous agreement were due in part to circumstances at the time.

3. **Carol Gottlieb** spoke as a resident, not as a committee representative, and expressed a preference for a standing committee, explaining that the housing element represents a significant next step for the community. She emphasized the importance of thoughtful planning to ensure development occurs without negatively impacting the character of Los Altos Hills. Gottlieb suggested partnering with a nonprofit organization and raising funds to support the construction of lower-income units, noting that relying solely on private development could result in a much larger number of units with very few affordable ones. She believes forming an organized approach is necessary to achieve the housing goals responsibly.

4. **Bridget Morgan** expressed her support for a standing committee, emphasizing that it is fundamentally about giving residents more control and meaningful participation in housing decisions. She noted that housing is, as John O'Connell said, the most important issue facing the town, and a standing committee allows residents to engage on equal footing with council liaisons. Drawing on her experience serving on the Pathways and History Committees, Morgan highlighted that a structured, well-understood process empowers residents, fosters open

communication, and enhances transparency. She stressed that over the past few years, the relationship between the Council and residents in the housing arena has been strained, and establishing a standing committee would help restore trust, collaboration, and a sense of shared purpose.

5. A resident voiced strong support for John O'Connell's points, particularly regarding the importance of transparency in housing decisions. He raised a critical distinction between ad hoc and standing committees, noting that the claimed flexibility of an ad hoc committee comes primarily from its exemption from the Brown Act. He emphasized that this exemption can lead to a lack of transparency, which has been a challenge for the town in recent months. While he acknowledged that staff's summary of ad hoc committees was mostly accurate, he stressed that the main point was missing, that without the Brown Act, ad hoc committees inherently risk less public openness. He suggested that if the Council considers an ad hoc committee, it should clearly define what flexibility is being sought beyond what the Brown Act requires.

6. **Brian O'Neill** spoke on behalf of the owners of the Twin Oaks Housing Element site, expressing support for an ad hoc committee to monitor ongoing compliance with the housing element. He noted that some community members have opposed development on the Twin Oaks site, citing concerns such as steep slopes and hillside constraints. O'Neill noted that an ad hoc committee could play a valuable role in facilitating the continued development of Twin Oaks, helping ensure that the current planning application is processed efficiently and aligns with the town's certified housing element and RHNA obligations. Additionally, he suggested the committee could explore alternative sites, including the nearby Sea Landing site, to identify viable residential development options that the town would support, thereby advancing the creation of new housing in the community.

7. **Jitze Couperus** shared a presentation and noted that the choice between an ad hoc committee and a standing committee is not really a true choice, as neither fully meets the needs for effective housing element oversight. From his experience, he emphasized three essential elements for a successful committee: first, active public participation where community members feel a sense of ownership; second, continuity and preservation of knowledge through "keepers" or a system that maintains institutional memory across multiple housing element cycles; and third, the work product, which can be reviewed in the presentation provided. He stressed that housing oversight is an ongoing, long-term responsibility, not limited to the current cycle.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED public comments.

Council Member Tankha emphasized that transparency and broad public participation are essential for any process, particularly one that will shape the town's housing future. She noted that the ad hoc subcommittee approach used over the past few years has not produced effective outcomes because of perceptions that it lacks transparency and may favor certain groups. By involving all residents and treating them as stakeholders, the town can develop solutions that reflect collective interests and gain community buy-in. She also highlighted a structural concern with ad hoc committees: even with public input, a small council-dominated committee could advance recommendations that feel skewed toward its own preferences. In contrast, a standing committee composed of residents allows for a fresh, balanced approach, after which the full city council can deliberate and make decisions in the town's best interest. For these reasons, she strongly supports a standing committee.

Council Member Mok expressed support for a standing committee, emphasizing its formal structure and permanence. He highlighted that standing committees hold regular noticed meetings, follow the Brown Act, and maintain a permanent record, which allows for transparency and accountability over time. This record ensures that future residents or officials can understand the reasoning behind past recommendations. Mok noted that because the housing element will continue to impact the town well beyond the sixth cycle, it is important to establish a durable, structured committee that builds institutional knowledge and provides ongoing transparency. For these reasons, he advocates for a standing committee.

Council Member Swan raised questions about a standing committee, expressing concern that those most directly affected by housing element decisions in their neighborhoods, such as residents near Twin Oaks, might be excluded from participating. She noted that while a standing committee can provide transparency, an ad hoc committee offers greater flexibility, including the ability to renew it with a new charter for each phase of work. Swan also highlighted that a standing committee might require balancing representation by geography, which could limit participation from residents in the areas most impacted. In contrast, an ad hoc committee can include interested residents from across the town. She emphasized that transparency and thorough record-keeping, which are typical advantages of a standing committee, can be implemented in an ad hoc committee through properly noticed meetings and detailed notes, making it equally accountable while remaining more adaptable.

Council Member Tankha reflected on the past two to three years of ad hoc and standing committees addressing housing issues, noting that previous committees struggled to reach consensus because members became too attached to their positions and overlooked other perspectives. She emphasized that meaningful decision-making requires broad participation, particularly from those most affected by housing projects, so that decisions reflect the collective interest of the town rather than individual preferences. Tankha used the Twin Oaks example to illustrate residents' willingness to compromise for the town's greater good, acknowledging that while they did not want to bear the entire housing burden in their area, they were supportive of multifamily development in their neighborhood. She concluded that including impacted residents in the process, even if they must sometimes abstain from voting, ensures that decisions serve the town as a whole.

Council Member Swan asked whether the previous ad hoc committees failed because their charters were not detailed or specific enough to provide the information and guidance the Council needed.

Mayor Bhateja clarified that the previous ad hoc committee was focused solely on negotiating a development agreement with Twin Oaks, not on broader housing element issues. While it did not achieve the desired outcome, it fulfilled its purpose and operated transparently, providing regular reports and public meetings. Mayor Bhateja acknowledged the advantages of an ad hoc committee, including wider participation, fewer recusal issues, and greater flexibility for public input, contrasting this with the limitations of a standing committee, such as fewer members, stricter Brown Act requirements, and short public comment periods. Despite these concerns, Mayor Bhateja expressed support for creating a standing committee because it reflects the strong preference of residents, while cautioning that it is a flawed solution with inherent limitations and that the community will need to navigate those challenges. Mayor emphasized the importance of public involvement for future housing element planning and framed the vote as aligning with the will of the residents rather than his personal view of the best approach.

Acting City Manager Einfalt reminded Mayor Bhateja about the procedural steps for forming a standing committee. He explained that the process begins with developing a charter, followed by advertising the committee positions and then making appointments. While the timeline could be shorter than three months, a minimum of three meetings and sufficient advertising time is needed. He also raised the question of who should draft the charter, asking whether the Council wanted a member of the public to do it or staff.

Mayor Bhateja emphasized that the first step is to decide whether the committee will be ad hoc or standing. He agreed with Mr. Einfalt that all the procedural steps, such as drafting the charter and advertising positions, will need to follow, but those actions depend on the Council first passing a resolution on the type of committee.

Council Member Mok noted that leadership can either dictate to the public or listen to residents and follow their wishes. He thanked Mayor Bhateja for choosing the latter approach.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Tankha moved to APPROVE a standing committee on the Housing Element.

Council Member Mok seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED: 3-1

AYES:	MOK, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	SWAN
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

Mayor Bhateja stated that staff would need to return with proposals and facilitate further discussion on the committee charter at a future meeting.

City Attorney Mattas advised that the agenda allowed for discussion, but typically the charter and committee structure would be formalized through a resolution, including details such as scope, composition, and membership criteria. He noted that the committee would likely serve in an advisory role on housing element implementation, and staff could prepare draft charter options based on that purpose.

Mayor Bhateja agreed to direct staff to develop draft charter language for consideration at a subsequent meeting.

7. PUBLIC HEARINGS

City Council Ex Parte Contacts Policy Disclosures

Council Members Mok, Swan, Tankha, *and* ***Mayor Bhateja*** *met with representatives from the Pinewood School regarding ITEM 7A.*

A. Resolution Approving a Conditional Use Permit and Variance for modifications and improvements to Pinewood School at 26800 Fremont Road; Lands of Palo Alto Unified School District; File #CUP25-0004 (Staff: J. Bradford)

Senior Planner Jonathan Fox presented the proposed conditional use permit for Pinewood

School at 26800 Fremont Road, a 7-acre site operating under a long-term lease from the Palo Alto Unified School District. The project includes demolition of five single-story buildings and construction of three two-story buildings and a theater, along with reconfigured parking, circulation improvements, and a new driveway. Several variances to zoning standards are required, as well as amendments to conditions related to enrollment, staffing, hours, and outdoor sound. The Planning Commission unanimously recommended approval, adding conditions for motion-sensitive lighting to reduce neighborhood impacts and prohibiting pickleball due to noise concerns. Staff concluded that the project's circulation and traffic improvements are adequate and recommended that the City Council approve the permit and adopt a CEQA categorical exemption.

Fox outlined the public notice and outreach conducted for the project, noting three formal notification opportunities to property owners within a 500-foot radius: a courtesy notice in August 2024 prior to a Planning Commission study session, a notice in January 2026 for the February public hearing, and a formal notice issued on March 6 for the current hearing. He added that the applicant conducted additional outreach beyond the required radius. Fox concluded by stating that staff recommends the City Council follow the Planning Commission's recommendation to approve the project, adopt a CEQA categorical exemption, and approve the conditional use permit subject to conditions.

Scott Riches, Head of School at Pinewood, presented the project and emphasized the school's long-standing connection to the Los Altos Hills community. He explained that the redevelopment addresses aging facilities while aiming to benefit both the school and surrounding neighborhood. The project has undergone extensive outreach over two years, including multiple public hearings, town halls, and direct engagement with neighbors, whose feedback shaped key elements such as traffic circulation, landscaping, privacy, and noise mitigation. Proposed improvements include upgraded campus layout, sustainability features, and enhanced traffic management. The school is also requesting a modest enrollment increase of 75 high school students to support expanded academic and extracurricular opportunities. Riches noted strong neighbor support and committed to ongoing communication throughout construction and implementation.

Chris Wasney, the project architect, presented the design for the Pinewood School redevelopment, highlighting improvements to site layout, architecture, and neighborhood compatibility. The proposal reorganizes the campus into a U-shaped layout with a central student quad, relocates tennis courts, removes buildings near sensitive setbacks, and retains the existing gym. New two-story buildings feature open-air circulation for sustainability, and the design emphasizes a refined, low-profile architectural style that blends with the surrounding community while using fire-resistant materials.

Wasney emphasized enhanced landscaping, preservation of heritage trees, and added screening to improve privacy for neighbors. A key community benefit is significantly improved traffic circulation, including a new exit-only driveway, expanded on-site queuing, and a dedicated passing lane to reduce congestion at the nearby intersection. Overall, the project aims to modernize aging facilities while being a respectful neighbor through improved aesthetics, reduced impacts, and better traffic management.

Mayor Bhateja OPENED public comments.

<u>PUBLIC COMMENT</u>

1. A nearby resident expressed support for the Pinewood School project, noting the school's consistent efforts over the past two years to engage with neighbors and incorporate community

feedback. He highlighted that the proposal maintains the existing campus footprint while modernizing facilities for safety, sustainability, and accessibility. He also supported the planned traffic and parking improvements to reduce congestion and stated that the design is compatible with the character of Los Altos Hills, encouraging Council approval.

2. **Michael Lee,** a nearby resident, expressed support for the Pinewood School renovation, noting that the school has been communicative and considerate throughout the process. He appreciated the regular updates and opportunities for community feedback. He highlighted the proposed traffic improvements, including separate entry and exit points and increased on-site circulation, which he believes will significantly reduce congestion at the nearby intersection. He stated that the project would enhance both the campus and the surrounding neighborhood.

3. **Jeff Mason**, a nearby resident and Pinewood parent, expressed support for the project and sought confirmation that access points on Ortega Drive and Ascension Drive will remain designated for emergency egress only.

4. A resident expressed concern about the long-term impact of the Pinewood project, particularly regarding traffic and noise. While supportive of campus modernization, the speaker urged the Council to ensure stronger planning and mitigation measures. She cited other schools with robust traffic management strategies, including shuttle programs and carpool incentives, and noted ongoing frustration with existing congestion on Fremont Road. The residents encouraged the Council to require more proactive solutions to address traffic impacts.

5. **Katya Kamangar**, a nearby resident and former Pinewood parent, expressed strong support for the project. She stated that the scale of the expansion and building placement are appropriate for the town's rural character, and praised the thoughtful design, including the siting of the performing arts facility. She also noted Pinewood's history as a considerate neighbor with effective communication and responsiveness to community input. Finally, she supported the requested variances, explaining they are necessary due to zoning limitations, and urged Council approval.

6. **Aaron Tia**, a Pinewood junior and long-time student, expressed support for the project, highlighting the school's strong academic community and supportive environment. He noted that existing facilities are outdated and insufficient for current programs, and stated that the proposed modernization would provide improved spaces that better support student learning and activities. He urged Council to approve the project for the benefit of current and future students.

7. **Maddie Wheatley**, a longtime resident and Pinewood alum, expressed support for the modernization project. She noted the need to update aging facilities to better support student learning and daily life and stated that the proposed improvements would benefit both the school community and the surrounding neighborhood. She highlighted planned upgrades to pathways and traffic circulation as positive impacts and encouraged approval of the project.

8. **Caitlin Kramer**, a Pinewood senior, expressed strong support for the modernization project, highlighting her positive experience at the school and involvement in student activities. She noted that current facilities lack key spaces such as a cafeteria, theater, and library, and that overcrowded classrooms limit the student experience. She stated that the proposed improvements would better support students and enhance the overall campus environment, and urged Council approval.

9. A nearby resident expressed support for the Pinewood project but raised concerns about traffic and construction impacts. He noted that the proposed enrollment increase may not be matched by sufficient parking and emphasized the need for stronger traffic management, including on-site staff oversight. He also recommended making certain Planning Commission suggestions, such as transformer placement and locker location, mandatory conditions rather than optional. Additionally, he urged the Council to include detailed construction management requirements in the permit to minimize neighborhood impacts.

10. **Kathleen Pickett**, a longtime resident, Pinewood board member, and parent, expressed strong support for the project. She emphasized the need to modernize outdated facilities to better serve students and noted that the project would also beautify the area and improve traffic conditions. She highlighted the school's extensive collaboration with staff and neighbors, including incorporating community feedback and receiving adjacent neighbor support. She concluded that the project would benefit both Pinewood and the broader community and urged Council approval.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED public comments.

Council Member Mok expressed strong support for the Pinewood project, praising the school's long-standing educational excellence and thoughtful planning process. He noted the extensive outreach and effort undertaken by the project team and stated he would fully support the proposal without further questions.

Council Member Swan expressed support for the project and commended the applicant's outreach and planning efforts. She raised questions regarding compliance with the town's dark sky requirements in addition to neighbor-specific lighting mitigation and sought clarification on updated sound amplification rules. The applicant responded that the changes were intended to clarify outdated and conflicting provisions in the original permit, limiting amplified sound to specific events and defined time periods.

Council Member Swan asked about greenhouse gas reduction measures, specifically whether heat pumps have been installed and if the campus is now fully electric. The Pinewood representative confirmed that the campus is all-electric. Additionally, regarding acoustics, they noted that the existing use permit and loudspeakers date back to 1974, and that modern sound systems use distributed, lower-volume amplification positioned closer to listeners. While a detailed design has not yet been completed, staff will review the proposal to ensure that public address systems minimize sound energy and reduce noise impacts on the community.

Council Member Swan raised concerns about ongoing maintenance of tree trimming along pathways to ensure continued equestrian access, as well as construction-related impacts such as dirt on roadways and on-site parking for workers. The applicant responded that a general contractor has not yet been selected but emphasized that experienced contractors will be used. While a detailed construction logistics plan has not been finalized, the applicant anticipates primary construction access from Fremont Road, with limited use of other access points only when necessary. They indicated that construction management practices, including minimizing neighborhood disruption, will be considered, and expressed willingness to explore measures such as reducing noise impacts from equipment where feasible.

Council Member Swan asked whether the traffic conditions would improve, worsen, or remain the same with the addition of more students. Pinewood deferred to their traffic engineer, Elizabeth

Chao, who explained that the new exit driveway and traffic pattern would reduce conflict points at the four-way stop and improve overall safety. Regarding the increased enrollment, Chao noted that the traffic study showed a slight delay, but overall operations would remain acceptable and essentially similar to current conditions. Council Member Swan confirmed that traffic is expected to be roughly the same as it is now.

Council Member Tankha thanked Pinewood School for their outreach but expressed concern about traffic impacts on Fremont Road and asked what additional measures the school would take to address neighbors' concerns.

Scott Riches responded that the new site plan, including an extended drop-off/pick-up area and additional staff directing traffic, would address most traffic issues even with increased enrollment. He highlighted several measures already in place or planned:

- 2–3 staff currently directing traffic in the morning; 5–6 staff for drop-off/pick-up.
- Walkie-talkie coordination and car signs for faster student pickup.
- Shuttle service from the middle campus to upper campus, with plans to expand if demand increases.
- Parking lot is currently at 69% capacity, accommodating more student drivers.
- Potential driving permit system for upperclassmen to limit student vehicles on campus.
- Use of off-site parking and shuttles for large events.

Council Member Tankha suggested an independent traffic study after project completion to verify mitigation measures and ensure neighbors' lived experiences are considered.

Jennifer Rancom, Land Use Counsel for Pinewood, noted that traffic engineering based on Level of Service (LOS) shows the Fremont/Weston intersection currently operates at LOS B and will remain B or better after enrollment increases, indicating the project would not worsen traffic conditions.

Mayor Bhateja opened by thanking Pinewood School for their extensive outreach, engagement with staff, the Planning Commission, and neighbors beyond the required level. He recognized Pinewood as a valuable community asset—the only high school within Town boundaries—and asked a series of questions focused on noise concerns.

Lockers:

- The Planning Commission raised lockers as an acoustical issue, recalling noise from metal lockers in middle school.
- Pinewood plans to limit lockers to the ground floor, use non-metal materials, and include noise attenuation.
- **Mayor Bhateja** confirmed this was primarily a noise concern.

Theater and Amplified Sound:

- Pinewood explained the theater will be professionally soundproofed, with much lower decibel levels than rock venues, ensuring neighbors are not disturbed.
- Loudspeakers for school events and bands will use modern distributed systems that focus sound and reduce energy output.
- Amplified sound outdoors is limited to 12 times per year, covering graduations, cultural

events, and special occasions.
- Scott emphasized that current sound amplification is already limited, directed inward, and regulated by the use permit.

Outdoor Sports Field:
- **Council Member Swan** asked about the field at the bottom of the campus and potential noise from games.
- Scott clarified there will be no outdoor PA system**,** only natural sounds of play and cheering.
- Sports include eight-man tackle football, girls and boys soccer, and girls flag football.
- There are no field lights**,** and all outdoor activities end by 7 p.m., typically by 6 p.m., to minimize sound impact.

Neighbor Notification for Amplified Events:
- Scott confirmed neighbors have been notified of past amplified events and will continue to be notified.
- Example: March 15th event notification included hours, sound amplification schedule, and invitations for neighbors to attend.

Mayor Bhateja asked whether Pinewood had implemented staggered drop-off times for different grades to help mitigate traffic and construction impacts.

Scott Richie explained that staggered schedules are not logistically possible at the school because it is small and junior high and high school students share teachers across grades. However, some natural staggering occurs indirectly: many high school students have free periods, which creates times in the morning and afternoon when fewer students are arriving or leaving. This results in partial, natural staggering on certain days, even without formal bell schedule adjustments.

Mayor Bhateja asked whether a dedicated right-turn lane (and possibly a left-turn pocket) could be added on Fremont to improve traffic flow into the school and reduce congestion. **Director Kim** explained that while such changes are technically feasible, they would require significant roadway widening, potentially impacting nearby pathways, park space, and shoulders. A third-party traffic engineer reviewed the situation and concluded that the proposed plan already provides adequate mitigation for queuing and would not worsen existing conditions, so additional turn lanes are not currently recommended. **Mayor Bhateja** asked who would fund such improvements if required; **Mr. Kim** responded that if mandated through the conditional use permit (CUP) process, costs would be negotiated with the school. However, at present, no such requirements are included in the approval under consideration.

Mayor Bhateja then raised concerns about the impact of construction traffic on Fremont Road, including potential damage from heavy trucks, debris control measures like tire washing, and whether repair costs would fall on the project or the town. **Director Kim** responded that it is standard practice to document pre-construction roadway conditions, and the project applicant would be responsible for repairing any damage attributable to construction, with fixes ranging from slurry seal to full resurfacing depending on severity. However, normal wear and tear may still be absorbed into the town's regular maintenance. Kim also noted that Fremont Road is scheduled to be repaved this year—after prior delays—despite the unfortunate timing with construction, and the town will closely monitor roadway conditions throughout the project.

Mayor Bhateja invited the school representative, **Scott Richie**, to respond to concerns about construction impacts, traffic improvements, and roadway damage. Richie stated that the school would collaborate with the town to develop a detailed construction management plan, including strict controls on delivery times, safety, and site operations, drawing on prior experience with complex campus projects and high-quality contractors. He emphasized the school's willingness to document pre- and post-construction conditions and to repair any roadway damage caused by construction activities.

In response to additional questions, **Mr. Richie** confirmed that existing emergency access points on Ortega and Ascension would remain in place, primarily to ensure multiple evacuation routes for student safety. Addressing concerns about tennis courts near the creek, he noted that while final fence heights are not yet determined, current fencing is typically 10–12 feet high, and the school is open to implementing maintenance measures—such as regular retrieval of stray tennis balls—and incorporating staff feedback to minimize environmental impacts.

Mayor Bhateja asked about a proposed exception to the 0–5 foot "Zone Zero" defensible space guideline near the building, where some landscaping is planned. **Director Bradford** explained that current state regulations do not strictly govern this immediate zone but do regulate defensible space beyond it. He recommended minimizing vegetation as much as possible near structures, noting that even fire-resistant buildings can fail under direct flame exposure, and advised limiting and isolating plantings to reduce risk.

In response, the school representative stated that the project team takes fire safety seriously and is voluntarily exceeding standard building code requirements by using highly fire-resistant, non-combustible construction methods. They explained that the proposed landscaping is intended to maintain a natural, neighborhood-compatible aesthetic by softening the building's edges, particularly near the parking lot and along Fremont Road. The team emphasized that these design choices are balanced with safety measures, including eliminating vulnerable building features and potentially adding exterior sprinkler systems, expressing confidence that the overall approach would maintain a high level of fire protection while preserving visual character.

Council Member Tankha expressed strong support for the Pinewood School project, describing it as a valuable community asset, and indicated willingness to approve it with additional conditions. These included directing staff to collaborate with the school on both a construction management plan and a traffic management plan during construction, as well as conducting a follow-up review after project completion to assess any ongoing traffic impacts and recommend further measures if needed. Tankha also asked whether implementing additional requirements after construction—such as three months post-completion—would be feasible. **Director Bradford** responded that the conditions of approval already allow the Town to revisit the project if operational impacts rise to the level of a nuisance, emphasizing that ensuring the project functions effectively once operational is more important than setting a strict timeline for reevaluation.

Council Member Swan stated strong opposition to narrowing existing pathways to accommodate additional turn lanes, emphasizing that the current pathways are already limited in width and serve important uses for pedestrians, students, and equestrians. Swan underscored the importance of preserving these pathways for safety and accessibility and indicated that expanding roadway capacity should not come at the expense of these shared-use spaces.

Council Member Mok expressed the view that existing traffic issues are largely temporary and are likely to be significantly reduced once construction is complete and the new traffic flow plan is implemented. While acknowledging there may be limited opportunities to address current congestion in the interim, Mok did not see major mitigation options. Regarding construction impacts, Mok noted that noise is inevitable despite mitigation efforts, suggesting that the most practical approach would be to regulate construction hours, as fully shielding or eliminating noise is not feasible.

Council Member Tankha clarified that a construction management plan encompasses more than just noise, highlighting its broader scope. The Mayor and Council Members noted that existing conditions of approval already include a detailed grading and construction operations plan, covering aspects such as materials storage, parking, and construction logistics, as well as established construction hours. They generally agreed that construction-related traffic and operational impacts are adequately addressed under current conditions.

The discussion then shifted to post-construction traffic impacts, with the Mayor suggesting adding a condition to allow future review once the new facility is operational. **Council Member Swan** cautioned that some level of traffic congestion is inevitable around schools and typically limited to short peak periods, which communities learn to accommodate. The Mayor emphasized the value of retaining flexibility to reassess if impacts prove greater than expected.

School representative **Scott Richie** responded that existing conditions already require periodic review—typically every 10 years or sooner if issues arise—arguing that this provision gives the Town sufficient authority to revisit concerns like traffic or noise if they become problematic.

Council Member Tankha requested clarification on whether existing conditions adequately addressed post-construction concerns, prompting further discussion of specific provisions. The **City Attorney, Mattas**, explained that language from a prior 2004 condition regarding construction management (Condition 9) could be incorporated into the current approval, with a minor update to remove an outdated reference. **Mayor Bhateja** agreed to include this revised condition.

The discussion then focused on how to address post-construction traffic impacts. **Mr. Mattas** suggested adding a new condition requiring the applicant to conduct a traffic impact review within approximately six months of the new facility beginning operations, allowing time for real-world conditions to emerge. This review would include analysis and potential mitigation measures, to be presented to the Planning Commission (or another designated body), which would have the authority to act on any necessary improvements. The Mayor supported adding this condition to ensure a formal opportunity to reassess traffic impacts after the project is in use.

School representative **Scott Richie** expressed confidence that the new traffic plan would improve conditions but noted that based on past experience, it can take up to a year for families to fully adapt to new traffic patterns. He suggested a longer timeline for evaluation or initially routing the review through staff before escalating to the Planning Commission. The Mayor acknowledged this perspective but emphasized the importance of addressing any potential issues sooner, leading to agreement on a six-month review period. Council Member Tankha supported this timeline but specified that the review should go directly to the Planning Commission rather than staff.

Mayor Bhateja and **Council Member Tankha** both concluded by expressing strong appreciation for the school's collaboration and community engagement throughout the process, praising the project's thoughtful planning and outreach. They emphasized that while the Council's questions were part of due diligence, they view the school as a valued community asset and share a common goal of ensuring a successful project that benefits both the school and the broader community.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Mayor Bhateja moved to APPROVE the conditional use permit and the requested variances with two added conditions:

1. Include Article 9 from the 2004 document, with the deletion of Los Altos Garbage Company as the source of the debris box,
2. And 6 months after commencement of operations at the new facility, perform a review of the traffic conditions, which will be done by the Planning Commission.

Council Member Mok seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

At the conclusion of the vote, the meeting recessed for 10 minutes.

B. Waiver of Reading and Introduction of an Ordinance Amending Title 2, Chapter 1 "Council Member Salaries" of the Los Altos Hills Municipal Code to Increase the Council Members' Salaries to Nine Hundred Fifty Dollars a Month (Staff: J. Parcutilo)

Management Analyst Parcutilo presented Item 7B, proposing an ordinance to amend the Los Altos Hills Municipal Code to raise City Council Member salaries from $300 to $950 per month. The presentation highlighted that the authority for this increase comes from California Code 36516, updated by SB329 in 2023, which allows cities under 35,000 residents to raise council salaries. The rationale cited included the increased workload and complexity of governance, the desire to encourage broader participation, particularly by younger candidates, and reducing barriers to public service. The fiscal impact would raise annual Council Member salaries to $11,400 each, totaling $57,000 for all five members, with increases effective only for future terms. Staff recommended waiving the reading and introducing the ordinance as the first step in the two-meeting adoption process required under state law.

Mahor Bhateja OPENED public comments.

No comments.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED public comments.

Council Members discussed the proposed increase in Council Member salaries from $300 to $950 per month. **Council Member Swan** noted that the increase aligns with the cost-of-living adjustment from 1984 to today, suggesting that the figure is reasonable in today's dollars. However, **Mayor Bhateja** expressed concerns about the optics of Council Members voting to raise their own pay, noting that he would be comfortable only if current Council Members were ineligible to receive the increase until after leaving office. **Council Member Tankha** echoed this concern, citing ethical considerations over following precedent set by higher legislative bodies. **Council Member Mok** sought clarification regarding benefits, and **City Attorney Mattas** confirmed that any salary increase would take effect after the next election, meaning Council Members in year 1 or 2 of a four-year term and anyone elected or re-elected could benefit. Council Members in year 3 or 4 of their four-year term would not be affected. The discussion concluded with **Mayor Bhateja** indicating readiness to entertain a motion on the ordinance.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Swan moved to waive the reading, and introduce the Ordinance amending Title 2, Chapter 1 "Council Member Salaries" of the Los Altos Hills Municipal Code to Increase the Council Members' Salaries to Nine Hundred Fifty Dollars a Month.

Council Member Mok seconded the motion.

MOTION FAILED: 2-2

AYES:	MOK, SWAN
NOES:	TANKHA, BHATEJA
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

City Attorney Mattas clarified that the motion to introduce the ordinance to increase Council Member salaries failed on a 2-2 vote. He noted that, procedurally, a council salary ordinance requires two hearings: the introduction and a subsequent adoption. Since the introduction did not pass tonight, the ordinance cannot proceed to adoption. The Council could revisit the item at a future meeting, but any decision would still need to follow the required two-hearing process.

Council Member Swan proposed revisiting the council salary ordinance at a future meeting, noting that Council Member Tyson, who originally introduced the motion, was absent from tonight's meeting and had expected the item to be continued. Swan noted that the matter did not proceed as intended and should be brought back for proper consideration.

C. Consideration of a Waiver of Reading and Introduction of an Ordinance Amending Title 10, Chapter 1 of the Municipal Code Regarding the Town's Accessory Dwelling Unit Regulations (Staff: J. Bradford)

Director Bradford noted that the staff report would be provided by Project Consultant McBirney.

Mayor Bhateja paused the presentation to make a motion to extend the meeting past 10PM.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Mayor Bhateja moved to extend the City Council meeting past 10:00 PM.

Council Member Swan seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

Project Consultant McBirney provided background on the item, noting that state ADU laws have been in near-constant flux over the past five years, with updates occurring almost annually. In response, the Town's Housing Development Program (B6) includes a commitment to regularly review and update the local ADU ordinance to remain consistent with state law. In January 2026, the Town received a technical assistance advisory from HCD identifying necessary updates and corrections to ensure compliance with current state ADU regulations. These changes are mandatory rather than discretionary. Staff subsequently prepared an ordinance amending Title 10, Chapter 1, Article 14 of the Municipal Code, with all revisions reflected in the redline version included in the Council packet. The Planning Commission reviewed the proposed updates at its February meeting and again on March 5, at which time it recommended that the amendments be forwarded to the Council for consideration.

Key Updates (7 Areas):

1. Definitions: Clarifies primary dwelling unit and removes requirement to build the primary unit before an ADU; updates livable space definitions and unit count allowances.
2. Unit Allowances: Expands potential number of units on single-family lots (e.g., detached ADU, JADU, conversions, SB9 unit).
3. Multifamily ADUs: Allows conversion of non-livable space and up to 8 detached ADUs (or 2 for proposed developments), subject to setbacks.
4. Development Standards: Updates height limits (up to 18 ft) and clarifies no fire sprinkler requirement triggered for primary homes.
5. Sewer Policy: Adds flexibility—allows septic systems in certain cases instead of mandatory sewer connection.
6. Approval Process: Requires written approval/denial within 60 days of a complete application.
7. Technical Updates: Revises ADU amnesty date to January 2020 and clarifies exemptions for smaller ADUs (≤800 sq ft, ≤16 ft height).

Recommendation:
Staff recommends waiver of reading and introduction of the ordinance to bring the Town into compliance with state ADU law.

Council Member Swan requested clarification on the distinction between a state-exempt ADU and a standard ADU, particularly regarding sewer connection requirements.

Assistant City Attorney Lai explained that state-exempt ADUs are defined by state law and are exempt from local development and design standards, being subject only to building code requirements. These typically include detached ADUs up to 800 square feet and 16 feet in height, as well as conversions within an existing structure's footprint. Lai noted that such units are generally not required to connect to the sewer system unless constructed concurrently with a new single-family home. In contrast, attached ADUs or larger units that do not meet state-exempt criteria must comply with local standards and sewer connection requirements.

Council Members sought further clarification on eligibility, including whether detached or converted units qualify, and the relationship to JADUs. Staff clarified that both detached and conversion ADUs can be state-exempt if they meet size and height limits, while JADUs are a separate category.

Director Bradford added that applicants may choose between state-exempt and standard ADU pathways depending on size and design, with different standards applying, and noted that multiple unit types may be permitted on a single parcel under state law.

Council Member Swan inquired whether the Town could provide incentives for larger setbacks, such as allowing increased height limits in exchange for setbacks greater than the standard 4 feet, particularly for larger properties.

Director Bradford responded that the current ordinance updates are limited to state-mandated technical changes identified by HCD, while broader policy considerations, including potential incentives and development standard modifications, will be addressed in a future phase of ADU updates expected within the next three to four months.

Assistant City Attorney Lai added that the existing code already includes optional incentives allowing increased square footage in exchange for larger setbacks, noting that such provisions are discretionary and could be revised as part of future ordinance updates.

Mayor Bhateja sought clarification on whether a state-exempt ADU that is not required to connect to sewer would still be able to obtain County environmental approval. **Director Kim** responded that while the Town's ordinance may not require sewer connection, applicants must still comply with County Department of Environmental Health (DEH) regulations, including septic system requirements. **Assistant City Attorney Lai** clarified that state-exempt ADUs are not required to connect to sewer unless built concurrently with a primary residence, but this does not override septic regulations. Discussion highlighted that, in practice, many properties may face challenges upgrading septic systems due to stricter state and County standards, particularly related to leach field size and site constraints, which can limit feasibility. The Mayor noted this could be misleading to applicants, as exemption from sewer connection does not guarantee approval to use or expand septic systems. Staff acknowledged these challenges and indicated they would coordinate with DEH to clarify requirements and better guide applicants.

Mayor Bhateja OPENED public comments.

No comments.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED public comments.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Tankha moved to Waive Reading and Introduce an Ordinance Amending Title 10, Chapter 1 of the Municipal Code Regarding the Town's Accessory Dwelling Unit Regulations.

Council Member Mok seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

City Attorney Mattas clarified and confirmed on record the language of the motion.

8. NEW BUSINESS

A. Receive 2025-26 Mid-Year Financial Report and Adopt Resolution Approving Mid-Year Budget Appropriations (Staff: T. Leung)

Finance Director Leung presented the staff report. Highlights are listed below.

- FY 2024–25 closed strong: Fund balance rose by $1.9M due to higher property tax and investment revenue, plus lower spending; includes one-time transfers and reserve reductions.
- FY 2025–26 mid-year status: Revenues (38%) and expenditures (49%) are tracking as expected, with timing differences in property tax and strong investment returns.
- Mid-year adjustments: +$761K operating (legal, litigation, permit refunds) and CIP updates (HVAC project added, energy project removed, housing costs added).
- Net impact: –$560K to fund balance; staff recommends approval of the report and budget adjustments.

Council Member Mok asked for an estimate of the investment income for the coming year, and **Director Leung** responded that it is expected to be over the expected budget by a couple of hundred thousand.

Mayor Bhateja OPENED public comments.

No comments.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED public comments.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Swan moved to APPROVE the 2025-26 Mid-Year Financial Report and ADOPT a Resolution Approving Mid-Year Budget Appropriations.

Council Member Mok seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

B. Discussion on Next Steps for the Green Sheets Ballot Initiative Measure (Staff: S. Mattas)

City Attorney Mattas provided an introductory overview of the process for pursuing an initiative measure related to the "green sheets," noting that the discussion is focused on process rather than specific language. He explained that initiatives can be brought either by citizens, requiring a petition and signatures from 10% of registered voters, or by the Council, which can place a measure directly on the ballot. Citizen initiatives are exempt from CEQA review, while Council-sponsored measures require environmental analysis. He outlined key legal constraints, including consistency with state law, the General Plan, and Housing Element, and emphasized that any measure must be clear, non-arbitrary, and cannot simply direct future Council action. Mattas also reviewed timelines, noting that a citizen initiative would require an accelerated schedule, while a Council-sponsored measure must meet an August deadline for the November election. He concluded by highlighting the need for Council direction on which elements of the green sheets to incorporate if moving forward.

Council discussed initiative timelines, noting that a citizen-sponsored measure would require an accelerated schedule, making a Council-initiated measure more feasible. Mattas confirmed that a Council measure may require limited CEQA review if it maintains the status quo and does not conflict with housing requirements, though some analysis may still be needed. The Council discussed incorporating elements of the green sheets—such as preserving rural character, pathways, and allowances for animals—while ensuring consistency with state law and allowing flexibility (e.g., for easement adjustments). Cost estimates were reviewed, with approximately under $20,000 for preparation and roughly $30,000–$40,000+ to place a measure on a general election ballot. Members also discussed the scope of what should be included, with caution advised against overly restrictive provisions (such as mandating contracted services), and emphasis on focusing on relevant, modernized elements of the green sheets.

The Mayor emphasized that the "green sheets" cannot be adopted as-is due to outdated provisions and changing state laws, and that specific elements to include in a potential ballot initiative must be carefully identified and defined (e.g., limits on commercial uses, pathways, and residential character). The Council acknowledged that some concepts, such as one-acre zoning, may be constrained by state law and would need appropriate qualifiers. Members agreed that a citizen-sponsored initiative is not feasible within the timeline, and that a Council-sponsored measure would need to move forward quickly, likely by June. The Council discussed forming an ad hoc committee to review the green sheets and recommend applicable elements, with Council Members Swan and Tankha volunteering to serve.

MOTION MADE AND SECONDED: Council Member Swan moved to create an ad hoc committee comprising of Council Members Swan and Tankha to discuss and determine which items of the green sheets will be codified as a Council-initiated ballot measure.

Mayor Bhateja seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

Mayor Bhateja OPENED public comments.

<u>PUBLIC COMMENT</u>

1. **John O'Connell** questioned the practical benefit of codifying the green sheets into a ballot initiative, noting that many of the concepts discussed may already be addressed in existing zoning ordinances and land use policies. He raised concerns about whether the proposed measure would meaningfully change outcomes, particularly given state housing laws, and asked whether there has been analysis on its actual legal effect. He also cited a hypothetical scenario involving mixed-use development to question whether such a measure could limit projects requiring retail components, and emphasized the need to clearly understand the value and impact before proceeding.

2. **Jitze Couperus** recommended using the 1955 green sheets as a starting point, removing outdated provisions and adding new elements to reflect modern conditions and technological changes. In response to questions about the initiative's value, he cited a past example in which the Council moved to remove unused pathway easements, which was later reversed by voter

referendum, illustrating the potential benefit of voter-approved protections. He emphasized the importance of updating the green sheets to remain relevant, noting that original provisions—such as restrictions on retail—were created in a very different pre-digital context and may need reconsideration today.

3. **Rajiv Patel** expressed concerns about the purpose and value of pursuing a ballot initiative based on the green sheets, stating that the expected benefits have not been clearly communicated to residents. He raised questions about the non-monetary cost, particularly staff time and bandwidth, suggesting that resources could be better used on higher-priority work. He recommended that, if the Council proceeds, the green sheets should be thoroughly updated rather than adopted in their current form. He also questioned how other cities handle similar documents and whether such an approach is necessary or effective given ongoing changes in state law, which may reduce the long-term relevance of any adopted provisions.

4. **Carol Gottlieb** supported the idea of codifying selected elements of the green sheets, emphasizing that certain core community values should be protected from change by a small Council majority and instead require voter approval. She noted that while the green sheets must be updated to reflect current conditions compared to their original 1950s context, key principles remain important to preserve. She expressed the view that these foundational elements should be identified and formally adopted so they cannot be altered solely by future Council action without input from the electorate.

5. **Allan Epstein** expressed skepticism about proceeding with a ballot initiative based on the green sheets, noting that there has not been a clear explanation of what the measure would actually include. He suggested that once outdated provisions and those preempted by state law are removed, very little may remain worth codifying. He questioned whether the effort is justified, given anticipated costs in both staff time and resources and observed that the issue does not appear to be a high priority for most residents. He added that existing democratic mechanisms, such as referendums or future elections, already provide sufficient public oversight of Council actions, and therefore the initiative may not be necessary at this time.

Mayor Bhateja CLOSED public comments.

City Attorney Mattas advised the Council to re-entertain and vote again on the prior motion now that public testimony had been received.

Mayor Bhateja agreed and invited reintroduction of the motion.

Council Member Swan expressed concern about protecting community priorities, noting that a simple majority of three Council Members could later change zoning to allow projects—such as a large commercial development like Walmart—that would be difficult to reverse once permits are issued.

Council Member Tankha questioned how such changes would occur under existing residential-agricultural zoning and raised examples of evolving state policies, such as allowing home-based food sales, cautioning that overly rigid rules could limit future flexibility.

Council Member Swan responded that exceptions or "cutouts" could be created if needed.

Mayor Bhateja acknowledged both viewpoints, emphasizing the importance of being selective about what to codify: while certain protections are valuable, over-constraining future councils could impede their ability to respond to unforeseen circumstances. He urged a balanced, case-by-case approach before proceeding with the motion's reintroduction.

REINTRODUCTION OF MOTION AND SECONDED: Council Member Swan moved to create an ad hoc committee comprising of Council Members Swan and Tankha to discuss and determine which items of the green sheets will be codified as a Council-initiated ballot measure.

Council Member Mok seconded the motion.

MOTION PASSED: 4-0

AYES:	MOK, SWAN, TANKHA, BHATEJA
NOES:	NONE
ABSTAIN:	NONE
RECUSED:	NONE
ABSENT:	TYSON

Council Member Tankha stated that, although she was appointed to the ad hoc subcommittee, she was not strongly supportive of the underlying idea and had not voted in favor of it, questioning whether she was the appropriate person to serve.

Council Member Swan suggested that if she was not interested, another member could take her place, while Mayor Bhateja responded that her differing viewpoint was valuable and would foster constructive debate.

Council Member Tankha agreed to participate but clarified that her skepticism should be recognized, noting that subcommittee members typically share alignment on an issue.

Both **Council Member Swan** and **Mayor Bhateja** acknowledged the benefit of having differing perspectives, with the Mayor emphasizing that the ad hoc process should include that debate.

Council Member Tankha added that a clearer determination could be made after reviewing and refining the "green sheets," including whether specific protections could be achieved through alternative means.

The Council confirmed that the subcommittee would consist of Council Members Swan and Tankha.

9. REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES, SUB-COMMITTEES, AND COUNCIL MEMBERS ON OUTSIDE AGENCIES

Mayor Bhateja reported on the ad hoc Public Safety committee, noting that he and Council Member Swan have been meeting with representatives from the cities of Saratoga, Cupertino, and Los Altos Hills, including mayors, city managers, a Cupertino assistant city attorney, and consultants, to address the sheriff's service contract. He stated that the group recently submitted a counter-proposal to the county seeking a more moderate cost increase of approximately 12% for the first year, with remaining adjustments spread over the following two years, and requested a response by the upcoming Monday. He added that a multi-city town hall is being planned for April to update residents. For context, Mayor Bhateja explained that the current contract costs about $2.75 million annually, while the county's proposed contract would raise that to approximately $3.5 million in the first year, with additional increases over the next two years—amounting to an overall 20–24% increase—which the cities consider excessive and the basis for ongoing negotiations.

10. STAFF REPORTS

A. **City Attorney Steve Mattas** reported that the Council gave direction with regard to the exposure to the litigation item that was discussed, but no reportable action.

B. **City Clerk Arika Birdsong-Miller** provided an update on the records project at the Corporation Yard, stating that progress is underway and expressing optimism that staff will begin moving boxes by the end of the month or early next month. She noted that this marks a positive step forward in advancing the project.

Mayor Bhateja inquired if she was still working on the OurTown contract.

City Clerk Birdsong-Miller stated that yes, she was still working on that project.

C. **Community Development Director Jay Bradford** reported on follow-up actions related to the housing element amendment and multifamily zoning, noting that a February 10 letter from California Department of Housing and Community Development identified three items requiring Council discussion. Staff have since met with HCD and plan to bring these items to the Planning Commission, with the expectation of returning to the City Council shortly thereafter depending on progress. The Director also noted that, per Council direction, thank-you cards were sent to St. Nicholas School, Roman Catholic Archdiocese of San Jose, and Foothill College, and concluded that there were no further updates.

Mayor Bhateja followed up on the earlier discussion regarding thank-you cards, noting that consultants should also be recognized.

Director Bradford requested that any extra cards be sent to the design team at Michael Baker International and to Veronica Tam in appreciation of their contributions, which the Mayor approved.

Director Bradford also provided an additional update, stating that the closing date for the MEPs is scheduled for April 16.

Mayor Bhateja inquired about progress on efforts to better educate residents on accessory dwelling units (ADUs) and the broader building process, including a proposal to involve a fire department representative, noting that Chief Glass had expressed openness to participating.

Director Bradford reported that staff have already connected with Chief Glass, who referred them to another chief, and that coordination is now underway with fire district representatives. These stakeholders will be included in upcoming collaborative meetings, which will also address related Planning Commission requests concerning consolidation and the cataloging of alternative methods and standards. In addition, Bradford noted that design professionals will be brought into discussions with staff, the Planning Commission ad hoc committee, a Council Member, and the Mayor to ensure alignment on ADU processes. He indicated that these conversations are expected to take place within the next two to three weeks.

D. **Finance Director Thomas Leung** reported that staff is continuing to implement AI-based software to streamline bank and cash reconciliations and financial reporting. He noted that preliminary reconciliations for many accounts have already been completed using these tools, and accounting staff are refining the system with the goal of eventually achieving full automation. He also announced a joint meeting of the City Council and the Finance Committee scheduled for May 15 at 10 a.m. to review the FY 2026–27 proposed budget, with a preliminary budget presentation to the committee planned for May 4. Additionally, he stated that departments submitted their budget requests the previous week, and staff have begun reviewing them with the City Manager, with the budget review process continuing over the coming months.

Mayor Bhateja asked for an update on the long-awaited fee schedule, inquiring when it would be brought to the Finance & Investment Committee (FIC), the Planning Commission, and ultimately the City Council.

Director Bradford responded that staff is currently finalizing the underlying report, including departmental review of fee table modifications, allocations, and general overhead adjustments. He explained that once these updates are completed, the city's consultant, MBS, will be able to begin drafting the formal report. That report will then be brought forward, first to the next FIC meeting, for review as part of the broader fee schedule process before advancing through the remaining approval steps.

Staff confirmed that the next FIC meeting was scheduled for April 6, 2026.

E. Public Works Director WooJae Kim provided an update on the Town Hall emergency HVAC project, noting that, as approved by the Council, the emergency declaration has now been terminated. He reported that mini-split heat pump systems have been installed in the offices, lobby, conference room, and break room. Staff are currently working with the contractor, Fuse, to fine-tune control settings due to some ongoing performance issues, and are also awaiting completion of required engineering calculations and plans for building permit finalization. Of the $160,000 contract, approximately $145,000 has been expended under the base scope, with the $15,000 contingency still unused, though additional work may still be needed to fully complete the project.

Director Kim also noted that, following Council approval of the Town Hall and Council Chamber HVAC replacement as part of the mid-year budget adjustment, staff will proceed with replacing the two failed HVAC units in the Council chambers with upgraded heat pump systems, expected to be completed within the current fiscal year. He added that the city will continue advancing related electrification efforts at Town Hall as part of the broader project.

Mayor Bhateja joked about whether Council meetings would be uncomfortably warm in the coming months due to HVAC delays.

Public Works Director Kim responded that quotes are already in place to replace the Council chamber units, but because the work is no longer under an emergency declaration, it must go through the standard permitting process, which could take up to about two months.

The Mayor interpreted this as a likely “yes” regarding temporary discomfort, while Kim added that staff would try to make interim accommodations.

Council Member Swan remarked that unusually hot days were unlikely in the next few months, to which the Mayor replied that weather remains unpredictable.

Public Works Director Kim also provided an update on sewer charge negotiations, reporting that, in coordination with the Sewer Ad Hoc Committee, staff have begun discussions with both Palo Alto and Los Altos regarding existing sewer agreements and associated charges. He explained that key issues under review include predetermined effluent volume allocations, which are not currently favorable to the town, as well as surcharges related to operations, maintenance, and capital improvements at the treatment facilities.

Kim noted that Palo Alto wastewater treatment staff have expressed openness to revisiting the agreement and invoicing practices, and both cities are actively gathering data to support potential updates or amendments. With Los Altos, concerns have been communicated to their sewer program staff, and the next step will be to identify appropriate representatives from both sides to formally begin negotiations. He concluded that staff will continue coordinating with the Sewer Ad Hoc Committee as discussions and analysis progress.

Mayor Bhateja asked for an update on the completion timeline for the Heritage House project.

Public Works Director Kim responded that the target deadline remains at the end of March, although progress has been challenging due to recurring contractor issues. He noted that the building is currently tented for termite treatment, which will be completed over the weekend, and estimated that a few additional weeks of work remain. Despite the ongoing complications, staff are continuing to push toward the end-of-March completion goal.

Mayor Bhateja expressed skepticism that the timeline was realistic given the remaining work but acknowledged the update. He thanked staff and acknowledged positive public feedback regarding pathway maintenance. He noted that residents have been pleased with the work and congratulated the Public Works team for their efforts and results.

F. **Acting City Manager Cody Einfalt**
– Update on Emergency Management for the Town of Los Altos Hills

Acting City Manager Einfalt reported that the previously anticipated emergency manager item was not on the agenda because staff is exploring a shared services model with the fire district, identifying areas where the district could assume certain responsibilities, with further details forthcoming.

He then provided a public safety update, noting that throughout April—during varying school spring break periods—there will be increased patrols from the Sheriff’s Office and PAL American, and encouraged residents to submit patrol check requests as needed.

Mr. Einfalt also updated the Council on the Victoria Dye Concessionaire Agreement and Little League contracts, stating both are progressing with support from ad hoc committees and subcommittees of the Finance and Investment Committee (FIC) and Parks and Recreation. He explained that related supplemental agreements, including the Westwind Riding Institute agreement and a conditional use permit for barn operations, will go to the Planning Commission before final Council consideration.

He announced that Little League Opening Day will be held on Sunday at 12 p.m. and noted that the Town Hall was opened as a cooling center during a recent heat wave, continuing its role as a county support facility.

Einfalt also shared that he is meeting with committees to review their goals, including those not incorporated into the formal work plan, and is encouraging continued progress on those items.

Finally, he highlighted upcoming community events, including a drive-through shred event this Saturday from 8 a.m. to 11 a.m. at Town Hall, as well as Parks and Recreation events: "Hoppin' Hounds" on April 4 and the Pathway Run on May 9.

Mayor Bhateja asked for an update on the A-12 housing element item, emphasizing the need to move it forward quickly.

Director Bradford responded that staff has been heavily focused on the housing element, multifamily zoning, and related correspondence with the California Department of Housing and Community Development, including technical assistance memos. He stated that staff plans to begin engaging relevant committees over the next one to two months, with the goal of bringing the item forward for discussion with the Planning Commission around May.

11. COUNCIL INITIATED ITEMS

A. Consideration of a Town of Los Altos Hills Poet Laureate (Council Member Swan)

Council Member Swan shared an idea inspired by the State of the County address, proposing the creation of a local poet laureate program to highlight the arts alongside the town's technological focus. She suggested inviting residents, potentially including students and adults, to apply and create original poems for civic events such as the Fourth of July, the Hoedown, Veterans Day, and Council transitions, emphasizing that it would be unpaid but offer recognition and resume value.

Council Member Tankha raised concerns about the selection process and the potential volume of applicants, questioning how fairness and legitimacy would be ensured.

Mayor Bhateja responded that the approach to selection could be determined once the number of applicants is known, suggesting flexibility in process design.

Council Member Swan proposed using a small committee or ad hoc group to review submissions and noted she did not expect a large number of applicants.

Acting City Manager Einfalt indicated staff could assist by preparing and distributing an announcement through the weekly communications.

City Attorney Mattas confirmed that staff could be directed to work with a Council Member on the effort, and the Mayor formalized direction for Swan to collaborate with staff on drafting the application notice. Swan agreed to proceed.

Council Member Tankha further suggested clarifying eligibility, including whether the program should focus on youth participants, noting that poet laureate programs often involve students and referencing national youth poet laureate models.

Council Member Swan responded that she would be open to high school students and suggested eligibility could include resident students, including those attending nearby schools if they live in the town, and proposed potentially expanding eligibility to youth participants as appropriate.

11. ADJOURN

Mayor Bhateja adjourned the meeting at **11:23 PM**.

Respectfully submitted,

Arika Birdsong-Miller