

October 23, 2007

Camille Leung, Project Planner
County Planning and Building Department
455 County Center, Second Floor
Redwood City, CA 94063

Re: PLN 2007-00102: Stanford University's proposed ten-year grading permit for 300,000 cubic yards of soil deposition (fill) at the former "Christmas Tree" site.

Location: Sand Hill Road immediately southwest of the Junipero Serra Freeway (I-280) and bounded by Sand Hill Road and the Stanford Linear Accelerator (SLAC).

Dear Camille,

Thank you for referring this project to the Committee for Green Foothills. We have some preliminary comments, and would like to reserve the opportunity to comment further on the Initial Study and Negative Declaration when we receive responses to our initial questions.

Purpose and Need: What is the purpose and need for this site for the proposed 300,000 cubic yards of fill? Where specifically are the sources of excavated materials and earth/fill to be disposed of at this site? The Initial Study (page 1) states that the excess soil from construction projects from Stanford University are not the subject of this document and are subject to a separate environmental review. However, it is important to determine whether there is a specific need for this extensive amount of fill from identified projects. Specifically what projects or plans have received the referenced separate environmental review(s)? What are the calculations that are the basis for this project that in our experience is extraordinary both in proposed area and in its time frame?

Alternative Sites and On-Site Alternatives; Have alternative sites been evaluated, particularly in Santa Clara County (which is the likely source of the fill material), and if so, why were they rejected? Have alternatives such as a reduced scale project that avoids the most prominent hills or other important views (see comments on visual impacts below) been considered?

Visual Impacts: The entire site is lies within the Scenic Corridor of the Junipero Serra Freeway (I-280), a State Scenic Highway. Its rolling hills and valleys, with scattered oaks and grasslands that are now beginning to recover from the previous Christmas Tree Farm alterations, present an attractive natural area to motorists on I-280 and Sand Hill Road. The site forms the scenic foreground to the more distant views of Jasper Ridge and the Santa Cruz Mountains-Skyline ridge beyond. The project plans and Initial Study have a generalized map of the visual impacts, which shows a high degree of visual impact on the more prominent hills. The construction of roads, truck hauling, dumping, stockpiling, grading and compacting, fencing of prohibited areas around trees and wetlands and parking of equipment in the active areas of the site will alter these views for significant periods of time. We believe further review of the visual impacts is needed.

Comment Letter from Portola Valley: We have received a copy of the letter dated October 19, 2007 from the Town of Portola Valley. We strongly concur with the comments and concerns outlined in their letter, and incorporate them by reference.

Truck turning movements to access the site: The Negative Declaration does not adequately address the potential conflicts between truck turning movements entering the site from Sand Hill Road and the large horse trailers and trucks that enter and exit the Horse Park across from the proposed entrance to the site. The Conditional Use Permit for the Horse Park requires the construction of an acceleration/deceleration lane for safety. The Horse Park is requesting deletion of this requirement. The popularity of the Sand Hill/Alpine Road “loop” route for bicyclists and the fact that there is currently a 55 mile speed limit that vehicles regularly exceed add significantly to the potential hazards in the location of the site’s entrance. Similarly, the proposed exit from the site opposite Lawler Ranch Road and the proximity to the on-and-off-ramps for I-280 create significant potential safety issues. There have been two recent fatalities from cyclist collisions with vehicles in the immediate area. These serious safety issues must be addressed prior to the granting of any Grading Permit.

Haul Routes: The Negative Declaration states that the route used for hauling dirt will include Alpine Road. Yet the traffic analysis by Fehr & Peers did not analyze the impacts of trucks on the existing traffic and safety of Alpine Road. The segment of Alpine Road between Junipero Serra and I-280 is already heavily impacted by the non-construction traffic from Stanford, and is also heavily used by “road” bicyclists. Alpine Road should be specifically prohibited as a haul route.

Term of Permit: We support Portola Valley’s suggestion that the term of this permit be reduced from ten years to a term that will allow the completion of the first area. At that time, the county should schedule a public hearing to determine whether the project has complied with all conditions, and whether additional mitigation measures, monitoring and/or revisions to the project are needed. Success of revegetation of the disturbed areas will be critical to evaluate.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. Please feel free to call me at 650-854-0449 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Lennie Roberts, Legislative Advocate
Committee for Green Foothills
339 La Cuesta
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Cc: Jean McCown, Stanford University
Supervisor Rich Gordon