Open Space and Recreation Element

INTRODUCTION

401. Residents of Los Altos Hills accord the highest value to the Town’s open space and recreation areas. These areas help maintain the unique character and semi-rural atmosphere of Los Altos Hills and provide important balance to the more densely urbanized areas of the San Francisco Bay region. In addition, these areas provide significant opportunities for the conservation of natural resources and scenic views as well as the enjoyment of outdoor recreation.

402. The Open Space and Recreation Element addresses the management and use of open space lands in the Los Altos Hills planning area. It also addresses recreation programs and provides guidelines for meeting the recreation needs of Town residents. The element is organized into three sections:

- Open Space
- Recreation Areas and Facilities
- Recreation Programs

Each section provides an inventory of resources and includes goals, policies and programs related to the specific topics addressed.

403. Under California law, open space is a mandatory element of the General Plan. Open space also is addressed in other elements of the General Plan including the Land Use Element, the Conservation Element, and the Pathway Element. Public health and safety issues related to open space are addressed in the Safety Element.

404. Recreation is an optional element of the General Plan. However, the Quimby Act (Section 66477 of the State Government Code) requires cities to have an adopted plan containing policies and standards for park and recreation facilities in order to require the dedication of land or payment of fees for park or recreation purposes.

OPEN SPACE

405. Open space resources in the Los Altos Hills planning area include public open space preserves; public and private parks and recreation areas; off-road pathways; and conservation and open space easements on private land, primarily along portions of creek corridors and steep slopes. In addition to providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and the conservation of natural and scenic resources, open space enhances the semi-rural character of the Town and the quality of life for local and regional residents.
ACCESSIBILITY

406. Publicly owned open space preserves such as Byrne Preserve are accessible to the public. Private lands protected by conservation and open space easements are not accessible to the public unless they include a dedicated off-road pathway. Off-road pathways allow the public to cross through private property; public access is limited to the dedicated pathway and does not extend to other portions of private land even when it is protected by a conservation or open space easement that has been dedicated to the Town of Los Altos Hills.

THE TOWN’S OPEN SPACE LEGACY

407. Los Altos Hills has a long history of protecting open space, a history highlighted by acts of generosity on the part of conservation-minded individuals as well as the continued efforts by the Town and groups of dedicated residents. These efforts have resulted in the permanent protection of several local treasures, including Byrne Preserve and Westwind Community Barn.

408. Byrne Preserve was originally established in the mid-sixties through the generosity of Dr. Albert Byrne, who donated a scenic 55-acre parcel of open grassland to the Nature Conservancy. The Town then voted to increase property taxes in order to purchase the property from the Nature Conservancy. Additional fundraising efforts aided by generous contributions from prominent individuals later allowed the Town to expand the preserve. Today Byrne Preserve comprises 88 acres of grassland and woodlands that are permanently protected as Town-owned open space used by the public for horseback riding, hiking and outdoor education.

409. Adjacent to Byrne Preserve, Westwind Community Barn is another Town-owned treasure that has been preserved through individual generosity and public foresight. In 1975, the Town purchased a portion of the 15-acre property and the Countess Margit Bessenyey donated to the Town the remaining land and the 24,000-square-foot barn. The Town now leases the barn to the Friends of Westwind, a private non-profit organization that manages the facility.

Westwind Community Barn

The facility is used for:

• Stabling of horses
• Riding instruction
• 4-H therapeutic riding program for disabled children
• Town Parks & Recreation Programs
• Horse management classes
• Summer riding camp
• Home to the Pacific Ridge Chapter of the U.S. Pony Club
REGIONAL OPEN SPACE DISTRICT

410. The Town of Los Altos Hills was one of the first cities to support the creation of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District, a special district formed in 1972. Supported by property tax monies, MROSD is responsible for the acquisition and protection of open space in the undeveloped area surrounding Los Altos Hills.

OPEN SPACE INITIATIVE

411. On December 19, 2002, the City Council unanimously adopted an open space initiative that reaffirmed the community’s commitment to the preservation of open space as stated below.

Residents of Los Altos Hills accord the highest value to the Town’s open space and recreation areas. These areas, many of which are owned by the Town itself, help supply and preserve the unique character and semi-rural atmosphere of Los Altos Hills, provide important balance to the more densely urbanized San Francisco Bay plain, and provide numerous recreational, scenic, open space, and conservation resources and opportunities for the Town and its residents.

Open Space Initiative, 2002

412. With adoption of the Open Space Initiative, the General Plan was amended to add Policy 1.10, which ensures that Town-owned open space and recreation properties will not be sold or developed for other uses without a vote of the people. In addition, the Land Use Diagram was amended to designate additional Open Space Preserves and Public Recreation Areas.

OPEN SPACE PRESERVES

413. The Town of Los Altos Hills is surrounded by large expanses of open space to the west and south. Constraints to development in this area include steep slopes and geologic hazards such as landslides, earthquake faults and other areas of extreme relative geologic instability, inaccessibility due to ridge alignment; difficulty in providing water and other services; and fire hazard including limitations to fire equipment response. The ridges are also important for their scenic qualities visible from many vantage points within the Town and the Mid-Peninsula region. To protect these areas and ensure that they remain free of development, local residents and public agencies have worked to establish open space preserves.

414. Open space preserves are undeveloped, natural areas that provide wildlife habitat, scenic views, and opportunities for nature study and low-impact outdoor recreation. These lands are owned by various public agencies including the Town of Los Altos Hills, the City of Palo Alto, and the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD).
415. A large area south of Moody Road and southwest of Interstate 280 has been designated and protected as open space through the acquisition of land by public agencies. MROSD has purchased most of this area, including Rancho San Antonio, the Neary Quarry Ridge area, and the Windmill Pasture area. In addition, the Town has acquired an area on the upper slopes of Murieta Lane. The steeper slopes below the ridge areas are under private ownership, but conservation or open space easements have been placed over much of the land. Hidden Villa also is in private ownership and should be encouraged to remain as open space. The Town should also encourage the cities of Palo Alto and Los Altos to keep open space lands in their undeveloped, natural condition because they enhance the semi-rural, open character of Los Altos Hills.

Approach to Windmill Pasture
from Rancho San Antonio

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416. **Town-owned Open Space Preserves**

The following open space preserves are owned and managed by the Town of Los Altos Hills:

- **Byrne Preserve** is the largest and most significant open space area in Los Altos Hills. The area consists of 88 acres of grasslands and woodlands located along the upper length of Altamont Road and adjacent to Westwind Community Barn. The land was purchased by the Town in 1968 from the Nature Conservancy. Under the purchase agreement, the Town is required to keep the land in open space. Byrne Preserve is used for horseback riding, hiking and outdoor education, as well as grazing horses.

- **Juan Prado Mesa Preserve** consists of 13 acres located between Dawson Drive and Neary Lake. The area can be reached by off-road pathways leading from Dawson Drive, Kate Drive and Stonebrook Drive. The area features a pathway through the Hale Creek canyon and provides a number of scenic, open space and recreation opportunities.

- **Murietta Ridge Preserve** consists of 14 acres located south of Moody Road. This area serves as a valuable open space buffer between Hidden Villa and the adjacent MROSD open space preserve, and provides a heavily wooded refuge for a variety of animals, birds, and native plants and trees. This area is relatively inaccessible and is considered to be more appropriate for conservation than for recreation use.

- **O’Keefe Lane Preserve** consists of 8 acres located north of Interstate 280 along O’Keefe Lane. This beautiful area includes two recreational pathways, a magnificent Heritage Oak, and shady, creekside thickets that provide shelter for both land animals and pond-dwellers. Access is provided by a footbridge off O’Keefe Lane.

- **Rhus Ridge Preserve** consists of approximately 5 acres located south of Moody Road. This area provides access to MROSD open space preserves via the Rhus Ridge pathway and a scenic pathway that connects the off-road trail from Hidden Villa to the Rhus Ridge hiking area and Summit Road.

- **Central Drive Preserve** is a narrow, 1-acre strip of undeveloped land adjacent to the western boundary of Byrne Preserve and provides an extension of the larger preserve.

- **Saddle Mountain Preserve** is 3 acres located near the junction of Arastradero and Page Mill Roads, between Saddle Mountain Drive and Stirrup Way, and includes a walking path.
417. **MROSD Open Space Preserves**

In addition to the Town-owned preserves listed above, several open space preserves owned and managed by the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (MROSD) are located adjacent to or near the Town:

- **Rancho San Antonio Open Space Preserve** is a 3,800-acre preserve located to the south of Los Altos Hills. The preserve has 23 miles of trails for hiking, bike riding, or horseback riding. Rancho San Antonio can be accessed by off-road pathways on the Los Altos Hills borders.

- **Foothills Open Space Preserve** consists of 211 acres located in the Adobe Creek watershed above Hidden Villa Ranch and adjacent to Palo Alto's Foothills Park.

- **Monte Bello Open Space Preserve** consists of 2,943 acres that encompass the upper Stevens Creek watershed from Monte Bello Ridge to Skyline Ridge. The Stevens Creek riparian corridor is considered to be one of the finest in the Santa Cruz Mountains.

- **Los Trancos Open Space Preserve** is a 274-acre area located in the foothills off Page Mill Road. The preserve is split by the San Andreas Fault and is an excellent place to study earthquake geology.

Photos courtesy of Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District

Adjacent MROSD lands provide many recreational opportunities for Los Altos Hills residents.
418. **City of Palo Alto Open Space Preserves**

- **Enid W. Pearson-Arastradero Preserve** is a 609-acre open space preserve located in the foothills on the west side of Highway 280. The preserve is owned and maintained by the City of Palo Alto and can be accessed by off-road pathways in Los Altos Hills.

- **Foothills Park** is a 1,400-acre recreation area located 2.7 miles west of Highway 280 at 3300 Page Mill Road. The park is adjacent to the Town of Los Altos Hills and within its planning area, but the park is open only to residents of Palo Alto.

### Planning and Zoning

Open space preserves are designated **Open Space Preserve (OSP)** on the Land Use Diagram and zoned Open Space Reserve (OSR). Permitted uses in the OSR zoning district include agriculture, forestry, and low-impact outdoor recreation such as horseback riding, hiking and bird watching. No buildings or other development are allowed.

Steep canyons and creek corridors that should be protected are designated as **Open Space Conservation Areas** on the Land Use Diagram. Development in these areas is generally limited to off-road pathways; no structures are allowed. In addition to canyons and creek corridors, visually important open space lands associated with major religious and educational institutional facilities or with Stanford Industrial Park are designated Open Space Conservation Areas.

Other open space lands that are used primarily for recreation are designated **Public Recreation Area** or **Private Recreation Area** on the Land Use Diagram. These recreation areas are protected from other types of development and uses.
GOAL 1

Protect and preserve open space lands for future generations.

Policy 1.1 Provide, during the development process, for the maximum feasible preservation of open space in and adjoining the Town, with spaces ranging in size from regional scale to small-scale open space on individual lots.

Policy 1.2 Protect and maintain those areas necessary to the integrity of natural resources and processes, with special emphasis on, but not limited to, the groundwater recharge and drainage system, open spaces vital for wildlife habitat, open spaces suitable for agriculture, and other areas of major or unique ecological significance.

Policy 1.3 Provide open space for outdoor recreational needs and for the preservation of sites of historical and cultural significance.

Policy 1.4 Preserve the natural beauty and minimize disturbance of the natural terrain and vegetation.

Policy 1.5 Preserve the important vistas, such as Monte Bello, Kaiser, Neary and Ewing Hill Ridges, and the hillsides leading to these ridges.

Policy 1.6 Preserve open space where necessary for the protection of public health and safety.

Policy 1.7 To the extent possible, link open spaces together visually and physically to form a system of open spaces.

Policy 1.8 Ensure that land uses and structures are compatible with the general open space quality of the planning area.

Policy 1.9 Actively support, to the extent possible, the efforts of Palo Alto residents to preserve their open space lands.

Policy 1.10 The lands owned by the Town of Los Altos Hills commonly known as Byrne Preserve, Central Drive, Juan Prado Mesa Preserve, O’Keefe Property, Rhus Ridge Properties, Murietta Ridge, Little League Fields on Purissima Road, Westwind Community Barn, and Edith Park shall not be conveyed, sold or abandoned in whole or in part for any purpose, except pursuant to a vote of the Town electorate; provided, however, that this paragraph shall not require a vote of the electorate for any conveyance by the City of a leasehold, easement, or other property interest in these lands for a use consistent with the property’s General Plan designation.

Policy 1.11 Encourage the use of Murietta Ridge Preserve as a conservation area, rather than a recreation area, in order to protect the existing vegetation and wildlife habitat.
Policy 1.12 Ensure that open space lands achieve the following objectives:

- Preserve visually and environmentally significant open space resources; and
- Provide for recreation activities compatible with the enjoyment and preservation of each site’s natural resources, with pathway linkages to adjacent and nearby parks and open space preserves.

Program 1.1 Continue to encourage the voluntary grant of conservation easements on open space and environmentally sensitive areas. For example, the Crozier-Hogle conservation easement was voluntarily granted to protect 11 acres that abut Stanford University open space lands.

Program 1.2 Continue to require the dedication of open space easements as a condition of approval for development of parcels in designated Open Space Conservation Areas in order to protect steep slopes, canyons and ravines, generally in excess of 30% slope, as well as areas with Heritage oak trees, or other environmentally sensitive areas such as along creeks and riparian corridors.

Program 1.3 Continue to require the dedication of pathway easements and the construction of pathways or payment of in-lieu fees when development is proposed on parcels that include portions of on-road or off-road pathways designated on the Pathway Master Plan.

Program 1.4 Encourage the cities of Palo Alto and Los Altos to keep open space lands that are within their city limits or spheres of influence (such as the Upper Foothills, Arastradero Preserve, Foothill Park, Stanford University Lands, Esther Clark Park, the El Retiro Retreat Site and Redwood Grove) in their undeveloped, natural condition because they enhance the semi-rural, open character of Los Altos Hills.

Program 1.5 Explore and encourage tax relief programs such as the Williamson Act, income tax allowances for land gifts, and other kinds of financial rebates that can provide effective incentives to property owners interested in protecting their land.

Program 1.6 Not all lands with significant open space value, whose maintenance may be essential for preservation of the area’s atmosphere and character, are identified in this element. Other open lands of various scales exist that the community may feel deserve preservation, including open hillsides adjacent to major corridors of movement such as Interstate 280, which has been designated as a State scenic highway. It is especially important, therefore, that the Town inventory and analyze medium and small-scale open spaces in the Town and add recommendations to this plan to ensure that all land significant to the maintenance of community character will be preserved.
Conservation and Open Space Easements

State law enables the Town to accept or acquire easements from private landowners for open space and resource conservation purposes. The grant of conservation and open space easements is, in effect, a transfer of development rights. The deed granting an easement to the Town restricts the use of the transferred property to open space or resource conservation activities. Lands subject to conservation or open space easements are still under private ownership; the easements are held by the Town, but the public does not have access to the property.

Conservation and open space easements provide a form of tax relief to property owners. For property tax purposes, the value of lands subject to conservation or open space easements is established on the basis of the easement restrictions rather than potential development uses. This form of tax relief provides landowners with an incentive to grant easements.

There is a subtle distinction between conservation easements and open space easements as defined by state law. Under the Conservation Easement Act (Civil Code sections 815-816), a **conservation easement** is voluntarily created and is perpetual in duration. Pursuant to the Open Space Easement Act of 1974 (Government Code section 51070 et seq.), an **open space easement** can be required by the Town as a condition of approval for site development permits and other entitlements. The Town must have an adopted open space element as a prerequisite to acquiring an open space easement, and the easement must be consistent with the Town’s General Plan.

In establishing conservation and open space easements, landowners and the Town agree upon the permitted land uses within the conservation area. The easement is binding upon successive owners of the land.
The following parks and recreation areas are owned and managed by the Town of Los Altos Hills:

- **The Little League Fields and Town Riding Arena** on Purissima Road are home to the Town’s Parks and Recreation Department programs as well as the local Little League program and various horsemanship programs. The Town has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with the Little League, which uses the fields on a regular basis. In addition, the Town rents the fields to individuals and groups. The Town Riding Arena provides equestrian facilities for Town residents and is co-managed by the Los Altos Hills Horsemen’s Association.

- **Westwind Community Barn**, located at Black Mountain and Altimont Roads, is a 24,000-square-foot, “U” shaped barn on approximately 15 acres. The facility is leased to the Friends of Westwind, a private non-profit organization that has managed the facility since 1978. The facility is used for riding, boarding and pasturing horses, as well as equestrian events. Residents of the Town have priority for membership. Westwind Barn and its adjacent facilities currently house the Westwind 4-H Riding for the Handicapped program, the Pacific Ridge Chapter of the United States Pony Club, and various recreation programs sponsored by the Town’s Parks and Recreation Department. Originally constructed in the 1940’s, Westwind Barn needs restoration and seismic updates.

- **Edith Park** is located at Edith and Fremont Roads along Adobe Creek and serves as a gateway to Los Altos Hills. The park features a plaque commemorating the Juan Bautista de Anza National Historic Trail, which is used as a route to the Bullis-Purissima school grounds.

In addition to the Town-owned facilities listed above, several other publicly-owned recreation facilities are located in or near the Town and would benefit residents if greater access were made available:

- **Publicly owned school facilities** such as **Bullis-Purissima School, Pinewood School, and Foothill Community College** can potentially serve as a vital supplement to the Town-owned Little League Fields and Riding Arena.

- **Esther Clark Park** is located at the end of Old Trace Road off of Arastradero Road in the northeast portion of the Town’s planning area, adjacent to Los Altos Hills. The park is an undeveloped nature preserve that offers opportunities for hiking, riding and nature study. The park is owned by the City of Palo Alto and is accessible to residents of Los Altos Hills via the Town’s pathway system.
420. **PRIVATE RECREATION FACILITIES**

- **Hidden Villa** is a 1,600-acre open space preserve that is owned and operated by a private non-profit corporation known as the Trust for Hidden Villa. Located on Moody Road, Hidden Villa consists of an educational farm, wilderness area, visitor center, nature shop, trails and a youth hostel. The hostel is available for day or overnight use, and the farm and hiking trails are open to visitors on a limited basis.

- **Fremont Hills Country Club** is located in Los Altos Hills and provides swimming, tennis and horseback riding opportunities.

- **The Palo Alto Hills Golf and Country Club and the Los Altos Country Club** supply private golfing facilities, as well as large, attractive open spaces near Town boundaries.

- **The University Club of Palo Alto and the Foothills Tennis and Swim Club** in Palo Alto provide swimming and tennis opportunities close to Los Altos Hills.

- **Stanford University lands** are located in the foothills west of Interstate 280, adjacent to the Arastradero Preserve, and provide trails that are accessible to the public from Junipero Serra Boulevard.

- **Private boarding stables** provide other important private recreation facilities.

421. **PATHWAYS**

The Town of Los Altos Hills has a unique system of public paths that meander across hills and valleys, connecting various parts of the community. This network of roadside and off-road paths is a valuable recreation asset for residents, providing non-motorized access to the Town for walkers, runners, bicyclists and equestrians. Additional information about pathways is available in the Pathway Element and the Pathway Master Plan.

422. **HISTORIC SITES AND STRUCTURES**

Historic places, buildings and landmarks can provide significant recreation and education resources. Historic preservation is addressed in the Conservation Element, and an inventory of historic sites and structures is provided in Appendix A.
GOAL 2

Provide recreation areas and facilities that meet the neighborhood and community needs of Town residents.

Policy 2.1 Open space preserves shall provide a variety of recreational experiences such as hiking, riding and free play, as well as visual pleasure.

Policy 2.2 Recreation activities requiring organized and developed spaces such as basketball and soccer shall be accommodated at public recreation areas and school sites rather than in open space preserves.

Policy 2.3 Public recreation areas shall be specifically adapted to meet local needs and interests.

Policy 2.4 The private sector shall be encouraged to supply specialized recreation facilities that are not deemed a Town responsibility.

Policy 2.5 Trails and paths shall continue to be a major recreation facility in the Town and should link all recreation areas.

Policy 2.6 New residential subdivisions shall provide open space for recreation in order to meet their appropriate share of local recreation needs.

Policy 2.7 Park and recreation areas shall be utilized, and uses controlled, so as to not adversely affect the surrounding residential areas.

Policy 2.8 The acquisition and development of new parks and recreation areas shall be pursued when necessary to meet the recreational needs and interests of Town residents.

Program 2.1 Continue to require subdividers to dedicate land for parks and recreation or, in the alternative, pay fees through which residential developments might facilitate park land acquisition. The standard for park and recreation dedications or in lieu fees established under the Quimby Act is a maximum of 5 acres per 1,000 population.

Program 2.2 Continue to require the dedication of pathway easements as a condition of approval of tentative maps and site development permits for new residences and major additions, consistent with the Pathway Element and the Master Pathway Plan. Where deemed appropriate, the actual construction of these pathways will be required as per Town standards.

Program 2.3 Continue to evaluate the recreation needs of the community and the availability of resources.

Program 2.4 Study and establish mechanisms for funding and maintaining new park acquisitions.
Program 2.5  Consider acquisition of parkland under any of the following conditions:

- Where community need or use demands.
- Where the acquisition can provide greenbelt connections between open spaces.
- When acquisition opportunities arise.

Program 2.6  Individual citizens, community organizations, and businesses should be encouraged to aid in parkland acquisition, development and maintenance.

**PARKS AND RECREATION STANDARDS**

1. All residential areas should have public land available for recreation within approximately one-half to one mile distances. This requirement may be met by Open Space Preserve land in public ownership and by public recreation areas.

2. The acreage of public land available for recreation shall be not less than five percent of the residential area of the Town. These areas should be located or distributed as equitably as possible throughout the Town.

**THE QUIMBY ACT**

Section 66477 of the Government Code provides local jurisdictions with the authority to acquire parkland in association with new land divisions. Commonly referred to as the Quimby Act, this provision of state law allows a city, by ordinance, to require the dedication of land, payment of an in-lieu fee, or a combination of both, for park and recreational purposes as a condition of approval for a subdivision map. Local ordinances must establish specific standards for determining the proportion of the subdivision that must be dedicated and the amount of fees to be paid.

Los Altos Hills has adopted such an ordinance (included in the Subdivision Ordinance) to require the dedication of land and/or the payment of in lieu fees for the purpose of providing park and recreational facilities. Revenues generated under the Quimby Act cannot be used for operation or maintenance of park facilities.
423. Historically Los Altos Hills preferred not to spend the Town’s scarce resources on recreation programming, opting instead to invest in open space, pathways, and recreation facilities, horse facilities and similar amenities. Town residents who sought recreational programs found opportunities in adjacent cities. However, as it became increasingly difficult for Town residents to participate in other recreation programs, the need arose for programs within Los Altos Hills. Started originally with volunteer labor, the Los Altos Hills recreation program has grown, and there is now a full-time staff position devoted to developing and maintaining recreation programs.

424. The Los Altos Hills Parks and Recreation Department provides or facilitates a variety of activities and programs that serve the needs of Town residents of all ages. These programs include the following:

- Youth camps such as Ohlone camp, summer riding camp, and various sports and non-athletic camps.
- Fitness and yoga classes.
- Pet programs such as the annual community dog walk and the Hoppin’ Hounds Easter Egg Hunt.
- Equestrian programs such as horseback riding at Westwind Barn and the Town’s public riding arena.
- Special events such as the annual Pathways Run.
- The annual Town Picnic sponsored by the Community Relations Committee.
GOAL 3

Provide recreation programs that meet neighborhood and community needs of Town residents.

Policy 3.1 The Town shall support continued and expanded recreation programs for Los Altos Hills residents of all ages.

Policy 3.2 Recreation activities and programs shall be located and designed to be compatible with the long-term sustainability of each site’s natural resources, with particular attention to the preservation of unique, rare, or endangered resources (including historic and archeological sites, as well as plant and animal species).

Policy 3.3 The Town shall continue to develop partnerships with local school districts and community organizations to expand recreation programs and facilities.

Program 3.1 Continue to implement and update the Strategic Action Plan.

Program 3.2 Support and coordinate with organizations such as the Los Altos Little League, the Los Altos Hills Horsemens’ Association, the Friends of Westwind Barn, and other groups involved in recreation activities in the community.

Holiday Barn Lighting Festivities