



COMMITTEE FOR
GREEN FOOTHILLS

PRESS RELEASE

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Stanford: No negotiating on trails

University refuses to consider compromise on mitigation for development

PALO ALTO, CA – Leading environmental watchdog Committee for Green Foothills today announced Stanford had rejected efforts to compromise over the recreational trails the University had promised to build in its General Use Permit and Community Plan.

Two much-debated trails, required as mitigation for the huge development rights Stanford received from Santa Clara County in 2000, are intended to reduce or mitigate the impact of that development on the environment and the community.

However, the specific trail alignments proposed by Stanford fail to provide significant additional recreational opportunities for the public. These are Stanford's only offer, even after the university rebuffed attempts from Committee for Green Foothills to move the process forward with an offered compromise on the trail alignments.

“The biggest disappointment is what this shows about Stanford's attitude towards the community,” said Brian Schmidt, Legislative Advocate for Committee for Green Foothills. “Their approach to the public is that things will be done their way, and their way only. An array of community groups was willing to compromise, but Stanford would have nothing to do with it.”

University's firm offer fails to provide recreational opportunities required by county

When the Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors adopted the Stanford Community Plan and General Use Permit in 2000, they granted the university approval for some five million square feet of development rights. In exchange, Stanford committed to measures designed to protect open space and environmental resources. One of the five key environmental conditions included in these agreements was the dedication of two recreational trails for hikers, designed to reduce or mitigate the impact of that development on the environment and the community.

Stanford promised to dedicate two trails within the first year of the ten-year permit. The S1 Trail would run near the southern edge of the Stanford foothills, and the C1 Trail would run near the northern edge. However, over the past three years Stanford officials have strong-armed the process and provided nothing yet.

The community expected two new recreational trails, but the only alignments the university will consider

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generally involve widening existing trails and sidewalks, or dead-end or even lead away from appropriate trail connections.

“Stanford’s claim that these ‘non-trails’, or trails on others’ property constitutes fulfillment of their promise to provide new, alternative hiking routes shows a misplaced sense of entitlement,” said Schmidt. “Stanford is failing to follow through on its commitment to the community.”

Community’s attempts at compromise rebuffed

For years, it's been clear that the university and the community were at odds over the alignment of both the C1 and S1 trails. The County decided it would determine the S1 Trail alignment first, and initially considered five potential options for the trail, including some that went through the campus foothills and connect to Palo Alto’s Arastradero Preserve, without resolution.

When university officials made clear that they would not consider trails that passed through the center of campus, Committee for Green Foothills and other trail advocates proposed trail alignments that were towards the southern edge of campus, but were also flexible enough to move away in some areas and provide real recreational opportunities for hikers. In response, Stanford threatened Santa Clara County with a possible lawsuit if it even studied these alternatives in the Environmental Impact Report, and the county gave in to Stanford’s threats.

In the spirit of moving the process forward, Committee for Green Foothills and other community groups reached out to Stanford officials with a compromise offer on both the C1 and S1 Trails. A wide array of groups became involved in proposing a compromise, including neighbor groups and people concerned with protecting the historic Stanford Golf Course. For the C1 Trail, the community proposed a trail on Stanford property that would run between the Stanford Golf Course and the rest of the Stanford Foothills (as the community wanted), and then run a short distance in the Stanford Foothills before returning to Alpine Road just east of the Highway 280 intersection. From then on, the C1 Trail would connect to the existing Alpine Road Trail, as Stanford had wanted, but with no major expansion of the Alpine Road Trail.

For the S1 Trail, CGF and other groups simply issued an open invitation to Stanford to suggest how previous alignments proposed by community groups could be altered in order to resolve Stanford’s concerns, and to consider how to create the crucial trail connection to Arastradero Preserve. For both the S1 and C1 Trails, the environmental community emphasized that they were not locked into any particular outcome, and were willing to listen to counter-offers.

This compromise offer resulted in several months of intermittent communication with Stanford, and some new suggestions by the environmental community. In the end, however, Stanford did not make any concessions towards compromise.

“The key issue here is the lack of a counter-offer,” said Schmidt. “Stanford didn’t just reject our proposed compromise. What we learned is that Stanford rejected the idea of a compromise. That’s not the right way to work with a community.”

Environmental report fails to analyze recreational value

In response to Stanford’s threats, the county produced a draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) on the S1 trail that fails to analyze all of the potential trail routes, as required by state law.

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The report analyzes only three potential trail alignments, all Stanford-approved and all three of which pass through the southeastern portion of the campus between Junipero Serra/Foothill Expressway and I-280. None of these alignments offers significant additional recreational benefits to the community combined with a connection to Arastradero Preserve, so all of them fall short of what is needed.

Further, the report focuses on the trails' negative environmental impacts but completely fails to analyze the trails' beneficial role in mitigating impacts from Stanford's development and the resulting population pressures.

CGF has asked the county to fix these significant flaws in the report and analyze trail alignments for their mitigation value. Public comments on the Draft EIR are due this Friday, November 12.

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About Committee for Green Foothills

Committee for Green Foothills is a regional grassroots organization working to establish and maintain land-use policies that protect the environment throughout San Mateo and Santa Clara Counties. Committee for Green Foothills, established in 1962, is a Bay Area leader in the continuing effort to protect open space and the natural environment of the Peninsula, Coast, and south Bay. For more information about the Committee, visit www.GreenFoothills.org.