Infill Development: Transforming a Decaying Site in the Middle of a Rural Town – A Case Study of Portola Valley, California

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Importance of Infill Development

• Building/Developing in vacant areas in city centers
  – “The use of land within a built-up area for further construction”
• Promotes betterment of city centers while leaving rural areas undeveloped
• Benefits include:
  – Reduced traffic congestion
  – Preservation of open space
  – More livable communities
A Brief Background of the Site

• Portola Valley, California is a small town of about 4,000 located in southern San Mateo County

• Characterized by affluent residents and the green foothills of the Peninsula Coastal Range of the Santa Cruz Mountains

• 900 Portola Road – formerly known as Al’s Nursery
  – Across the street from the Town Center
  – Has been earmarked for an affordable housing development in the future
Site Location
Goals of the Town’s General Plan

• Land uses, services, and facilities that make the town a meaningful constituent of the Mid-Peninsula and the San Francisco Bay Area
• Forming a “comprehensive unit”
• A guide for physical development
• Housing Module explores the success of prior housing elements, requirements for/status of housing within the town’s boundaries, and sites presently available for housing
An Overview of Housing Developments in Portola Valley

• Research demonstrates there is a specific requirement for housing that is affordable to the elderly and to people who work within the town
• Census shows increasing senior population in the town
• Portola Valley provides housing for people who work elsewhere on the Peninsula (and the entire Bay Area)
• The community consists primarily of single-family residences, generally on lots ranging from one to two-and-a-half acres or larger
Proposal for Mixed-Use Development

- Rebuild the empty site as a mixed-use development
- Includes affordable housing
- Increased frequency of SamTrans buses
- Provide housing for elderly and town employees
Proposal cont’d

• Buildings would be modern but still emulate Town’s historical beginnings
• Commercial sections would improve economic vitality
• Redevelopment project would improve the region in ways specified by its General Plan-Housing Section’s main goals
Implementation Challenges

• Voters often object to the construction of low-cost housing in their neighborhoods
• Affordable housing proposal has already become a matter of contention the area
• Ensuring housing availability to the lower-income population has been a historically controversial subject in urban planning
• Concern that higher-density housing types will diminish the countryside feel of the area and could set precedents for future similar developments
Questions?
Thank you!