

From: [Sylvia Sturges](#)
To: [Luis Topete](#); [Angela Montes](#); planningcommission@smcgov.org
Subject: Proposed fence around Woodland School (aka Ladera School)
Date: Monday, May 6, 2024 3:03:26 PM

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My name is Sylvia Sturges, my husband and I live across from Woodland school at 375 La Cuesta Drive, Portola Valley, CA 94028, Ph: 650-854-9583, email: sylsturg@yahoo.com. We have lived here for 32 years. I was raised in Ladera and attended Ladera School.

I am concerned about having "a new 6-foot tall fence along the perimeter" of Woodland School. What is the purpose of putting up such a fence? Have there been a lot of problems at the school necessitating such a barricade? I think such a fence would make the school lose it's rural/suburban appearance and make it inappropriate for our residential neighborhood. What is the nature of the fence...steel, wood, locking?

A lot of residents use the school to walk to the Ladera Recreation Center, to take their children to play at the school, to walk their dogs on lease during non-school time and to exercise their dogs in the field. The school is part of the Ladera community and is used as a resource. A number of Ladera families have their children attending Woodland school. Hasn't Woodland School leased the school property and doesn't own it?

Please advise.

Sincerely

Sylvia Sturges

May 13, 2024

Luis Topete
Planning and Building Department
455 County Center - 2nd Floor Mail Drop PLN122
Redwood City, CA 94063

In Reference to: PLN2000-00352 – Referral

Dear Mr. Topete,

This letter is meant to replace our letter of November 3, 2023 and accounts for changing circumstances over the past six months and additional information about which we've become aware since our original letter.

We offer two new suggested conditions in response to actions by Woodland School over the past six months and to mitigate negative impact to the neighborhood caused by ongoing violations of conditions of the expired Use Permit.

By way of background, we live at 321 La Cuesta Drive, immediately across the street from the field on the Woodland school site. We have lived here since 2010, and as such, have the history and perspective to understand the impact on the neighborhood by changes to Woodland's CUP in 2012 and 2017. We have significant concerns about Woodland School's impacts on traffic and parking which are exacerbated by the school's failure to follow all of the conditions imposed by the county in 2012.

We support Woodland's CUP renewal only if subject to conditions described below. The intent of these requests is not to hinder the educational pursuits of Woodland School but to ensure that its growth and operational conduct are compatible with the residential community. We urge the County to enforce the conditions set forth in the CUP for the benefit and safety of our children and our community.

1) Limit the extension of the current CUP to five years instead of ten years.

This is prudent and appropriate due to 1) the failure of Woodland to follow existing conditions over the past decade 2) the failure of Woodland to apply for an extension no later than six months prior to the expiration of the existing permit, 3) the failure of San Mateo County to conduct the conditioned Administrative Review in July 2019, and 4) failure to consult with the Ladera Community Association during Administrative Review (Conditions 2, 3). If after a five year renewal, the school demonstrates substantial compliance at that time, we would support a ten year extension.

2) Limit Hours of Operation to existing Conditions.

The school today operates in violation of both the purpose and Hours of Operation (Condition 1). Extended Care operates until 6 PM, while the Condition limits to 5:30 p.m. Further, the school operates summer programming which is not an activity of a "private elementary

school” as conditioned. This creates additional noise, traffic, and parking burden. Further, the school has begun telling the neighborhood that they may not use public recreation areas during the summer, during periods where the elementary school does not offer enrollment. As a response to Woodland conducting Use during portions of the year where it not authorized, we encourage the County to make explicit that Operating Hours are only during the regular school year.

3) Limit Expansion of School Facilities. Including the three new tent classrooms, Woodland has added 12 classrooms since 2012. This exacerbates traffic, parking, noise and other burdens on the community and may represent an approximately 50% increase in classrooms. We understand that Woodland wishes to build a parking lot on part of the public recreation area so as to support these buildings, some of which were built without authorization.

We oppose grandfathering of “tent” classrooms built in explicit violation of the existing Condition 6. Expanded facilities have enabled Woodland to increase enrollment from what we understand to be 275 in 2012 to 310 today which exacerbates traffic and parking problems.

Woodland School should remove the “temporary” classrooms that were installed on the tennis court prior to the construction of the additional classrooms at the northwest corner of the Woodland School site. These were promised (and permitted) to provide only temporary classroom capacity for the increased Woodland School enrollment until the additional classroom space was created. However, these have become a permanent part of the school site, the impact being the reduction of publicly available play-areas including the removal of the only publicly available tennis court within walking distance to the Ladera Community. Allowing both the temporary and permanent classrooms exceeds the CEQA 25% expansion exemption the county relied upon in Finding 1.

If the County will not enforce Woodland’s agreement with the County and the neighborhood to remove the “temporary” classrooms, we ask the county to require Woodland School to remove the temporary power pole across the street from 333 La Cuesta Drive that provides electricity to the “temporary” classrooms. This temporary power pole was not built with the intention or to the standards of being a permanent power-pole.

4) Limit Enrollment. We respectfully request that the county re-evaluate and consider reverting the enrollment cap from 325 to 275 students, in line with the conditions prior to the 2012 Conditional Use Permit (CUP). If not a full reversion to 275, hold enrollment at its current level to prevent further pressure on traffic, parking, and Woodland’s desire to pave our public recreation area. Woodland’s failure to abide by existing traffic and parking requirements, combined with

unauthorized expansion of facilities, warrants consideration of the change to the enrollment cap.

The increase to 325 students was conditioned upon Woodland School's adherence to regulations pertaining to traffic and parking. Regrettably, our observations as neighbors have led us to conclude that Woodland has not consistently met these conditions, specifically those mentioned in sections 5(a) and 5(d) of the CUP (although we noticed that they have improved quite a bit once the CUP renewal request was filed). The increased enrollment has resulted in parking and traffic issues that have placed a burden on a community infrastructure designed for a neighborhood school where the majority of students were expected to walk.

5) Do not grant fence height exception. We understand that Woodland has recently proposed to build a fence around school grounds and requested a fence height exception. They have not shared the fence design proposal despite our request, and I fear it will be an eyesore in our rural community. I hope that any perimeter fence will be limited to the school buildings and to standard height. There is no valid reason to build a fence higher than the standard or beyond the school buildings given that their lease does not extend beyond the classrooms.

6) Mitigate Parking and Traffic. Our requests and suggestions in 2-4 above are primarily to mitigate the impact of parking, traffic, and noise caused by a private commuter school using what was designed to be a neighborhood pedestrian school.

From our perspective across the street and walking our own children to the bus, we have witnessed repeated traffic violations by Woodland parents and staff, including illegal U-turns, crossing double yellow lines, and the particularly dangerous act of driving past school buses with stop-sign arms extended. These incidents raise serious concerns about child safety and adherence to traffic laws.

To that end, we ask:

a) Let the authorization to build a parking lot expire. We are strongly opposed to the construction of a parking lot. Any increase in parking will create a corresponding increase in traffic. The parking lot will permanently remove important public play areas and green space

b) Require addition of a sidewalk. This will reduce traffic and is consistent with SMC policies regarding walkability. SMC Public Works often requires this condition of homes in Ladera undertaking construction regardless of whether it is a high-pedestrian area.

This proposed sidewalk would extend from the existing sidewalk at Woodland to the north along the west side of La Cuesta Drive across from house numbers 309-333 where there is currently just a curb and dirt. Installing this sidewalk

would mitigate the significant and unsafe traffic during morning drop-off by allowing Woodland School to have parents drop their children off all along that sidewalk instead queuing up along La Cuesta Drive, which is on a very dangerous blind corner leading up to Berenda Way from Alpine Road.

c) Limit Traffic Count. Prior to 2012, Woodland operated with a condition that morning traffic count not exceed $\frac{1}{2}$ of enrollment (condition pre-2012). This outcome-based condition is prudent and necessary in the context of rising enrollment, expanded facilities, and a decade of following neither the letter nor spirit of the 2012 conditions.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. We are eager to see a resolution that maintains the quality of life in our community while supporting the educational needs of San Mateo County's children.

Sincerely,

Jason and Sandy Schroedl
321 La Cuesta Drive
Portola Valley, CA 94028
(650) 888-6298