

## **Willow Commons: Proposal for a Residential Community for Adults with Intellectual or Developmental Delays (IDD)**

While there is general awareness and acceptance of a housing crisis in the San Francisco Bay Area and Peninsula, there is far less appreciation that the housing crisis is even more acute for individuals who require supportive services along with housing. A group that falls into this category are adults with intellectual or developmental delays (IDD). These individuals are eligible for supportive living services offered by California's network of Regional Centers. The Golden Gate Regional Center, which supports San Mateo County residents, reports that over two-thirds of adults with IDD in the county do not have independent housing. This figure includes 100% of adults with IDD who live in Portola Valley, a statistic that must be reported annually to the state for RHNA compliance. The attached proposal intends to assist in addressing this acute need because we believe these individuals deserve high-quality solutions that offer mutual benefits within the communities where they live and work.

We are proposing a thirteen unit residential community called Willow Commons. The proposal utilizes the legal provisions of California's Density Bonus and Supportive Housing Laws that have been put into place over the last several years to enable the creation of permanent and affordable supportive housing. This is a first for Portola Valley and involves a more streamlined approval process, a fixed timeline and entails satisfying only objective standards while offering several incentives and concessions if 100% of the units are deed-restricted for low income residents, which these will. As residents of Portola Valley for over two decades, we value the rural nature of our community and its environmental and historic heritage and so we have considered a number of factors, outlined below, when developing this proposal.



View of Willow Commons looking North from Alpine Road

**Location:** The site we have chosen, 4388 Alpine Road, is in a commercial corridor and part of the Nathorst Triangle, an area about which former planning commissioner Betsy Crowder penned an op-ed in the Almanac two decades ago, promoting the location as ideal for affordable housing. This location offers benefits to various constituencies within the Town. The intended residents, who for the most part will not have driver's licenses, will have multiple opportunities for employment within walking distance of their homes. Local employers such as The Woodside Priory, The Sequoias, Roberts Market and the Portola Valley School District, all of whom have provided supportive letters included in this proposal, will have the potential for a loyal, local labor force. The setting within a commercial corridor minimizes the impact of multi-unit housing on current residents of the Town.



**Design:** Appreciating the care that has gone into the Town's General Plan, the overall design guidelines that stress good environmental stewardship and "blending in," and recognizing that this type of project is a first for the Town, we have been intentional with all aspects of the design. We have assembled a team, including many Portola Valley residents who have worked on many projects in the Town for decades and have asked the architects to use the Portola Valley Town Center as the design inspiration. The architecture of Willow Commons aims to conserve Portola Valley's rural character while providing attractive, tranquil residences and support spaces for the residents. Acknowledging that the site is in the Alpine Scenic Corridor, we have protected and highlighted trees and other natural elements, and created spaces that preserve as much of the

existing landscape as possible, allowing and intending for residents and visitors to enjoy meaningful connections with Portola Valley's natural habitats.



**Residences:** The specific needs of the intended population have guided the decisions around the components of the proposed supportive housing community. The proposal includes eleven one bedroom apartment units each at less than 500 square feet in size, an attached ADU of similar size and design, and a second, slightly larger, detached ADU. The size of the apartment units is intentionally small, to be large enough for residents to have a space that is all their own, but not so large that they would prefer spending all their time there rather than interacting with others in the community. This is important because research has shown many adults with IDD who do not have adequate social interaction become isolated and may develop depression. The small unit size also serves to accommodate thirteen units on the site. Thirteen units are the maximum that are allowed “by right” (without a conditional use permit) per the Density Bonus Law. This number of units is a critical factor in ensuring a successful community dynamic and the operational economics for ongoing financial viability. Two units are intended as residences for staff so that we will be able to attract and retain quality support staff in a high cost of living area.

**Common Spaces:** Residents will enter the Willow Commons through a single, common entrance to a building housing a staff office, allowing for eyes on residents for safety and social interaction as they come and go. This common building will have a kitchen, dining and lounging areas where residents can prepare and share meals, and interact with one another. There will be a multipurpose room for hosting exercise classes, movie nights or other activities that the

residents and staff initiate. There will also be a vocational training room where residents will have the opportunity to interact with the broader Portola Valley community while developing the customer service and other skills associated with a training coffee counter.

**Sustainability Considerations:** The architecture of Willow Commons aims to preserve and enhance the native ecosystems and habitats of the site and the region. The residences are organized behind a main support building that fronts Alpine Road. Residences are oriented along an East-West axis to optimize daylighting. Photovoltaic panels on the residence roofs are oriented south for maximum solar power generation. Roof overhangs and louvers on residences and the support building reduce glare and provide shading during summer months, but allow light penetration for solar heat gain during the winter months, reducing demand from mechanical heating and cooling systems. Additionally, high clerestory windows in the support building and residences paired with sliding glass doors provide cross-ventilation allowing for a night-time cooling cycle.

#### **Impact to the Town:**

- The project provides the Town with a significant number of (and some of the first) deed-restricted, low or very low-income housing units. These housing categories are required by state mandates (RHNA) and identified as a priority for the Town.
- The project provides the Town its first example of a residential setting which provides Home Based and Community services (HBCS), dedicated to providing qualified individuals with successful community integration. This is currently an unmet need in the Town's General Plan/Housing Element.
- The project prioritizes and facilitates residents' initiative, independence, and integration in the larger community, providing the Town with a more diverse, inclusive, and equitable community, as identified by the Town's new Equity Committee.
- The location sits adjacent to a commercial corridor on a very accessible flat lot within the moderate zone in the 2008 Moritz Fuel Hazard Map, and has relatively lower risk to seismic activity. The location does not interrupt existing trail systems or wildlife corridors.
- Concerns about the impact of additional vehicles on emergency evacuation will be negligible since the significant majority of residents will not be drivers. The need for parking on a per unit basis will be low for the same reason.
- The project offers an example of intentional building and landscape design that reflects the stated mission and goals of the Town's Conservation and Sustainability Committees.
- Local employers will benefit from having a source of loyal, entry level employees. In particular, the project has the potential to benefit the local schools where, rather than presenting a potential drain on the school system, the residents are potential candidates for some difficult to fill staffing and/or volunteer positions.
- The project presents to the Town an ideal opportunity for appropriate use of existing Town funds intended for low-cost/supportive housing and that could provide meaningful assistance to this project.

**Architects**

[CJW Architecture](#) Carter Warr, Kevin Schwarckopf

[ABA Architects](#) Pamela Anderson-Brule, Daniel Ho

**Landscape Design**

[Cleaver Design Associates](#) Bob Cleaver, Loretta Drummond

**Construction**

[Tincher Construction](#) Rich Tincher

**Interior Design**

[Staprans Design](#) Lisa Staprans

**Legal**

[Meyers Nave](#) Jon Goetz

[Holland & Knight](#) Chelsea Maclean, Kevin Ashe

**Consultants**

[McClenahan](#), Arborists

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[Lea & Braze Engineering, Inc.](#), Civil Engineers, Land Surveyors

[Kavanaugh Real Estate Group](#), Real Estate

[Willow Commons](#), Executive Director [Brenda Bachechi](#)

Portola Valley Resident Proposers: [Jim White](#), [Patty White](#)