



Portola Valley  
**Community  
Conversation**  
About Housing

March 3, 2018

# Summary Report

## Project Overview

The Town of Portola Valley adopted a draft Housing Options Strategic Plan in the fall of 2016. Supporting the Town’s housing efforts, Vice Mayor Ann Wengert and Council Member Maryann Derwin have been active members of Home for All (an initiative that grew out of the County’s Jobs/Housing Gap task force). Supported by Measure K funds, Home for All is a community collaborative addressing housing challenges in San Mateo County by convening the community, sharing information and promoting innovation.

The Town applied for and was awarded a grant to pilot new approaches to community engagement on the topic of housing. The grant involves technical assistance from Home for All and consultant Common Knowledge Plus as well as





The Portola Valley community is willing to work together to get the best solutions possible. - Participant ”



funds to help conduct engagement that is more inclusive, informed and more sustained than traditional civic participation activities. The first major effort under the grant was to plan and convene a community conversation with the following goals:

- Broaden who participates in the conversation about housing in Portola Valley
- Share the Town’s Housing Options Strategic Plan
- Connect community members who are interested in continuing the conversation

The Community Conversation was held on the morning of Saturday, March 3<sup>rd</sup> at the Community Hall. The event brought together 69 participants, including longtime residents, business owners, and people who work in Portola Valley but do not live in the town, representing a range of ages and perspectives. Attendees expressed appreciation for the mix of people while also hoping to have an even more diverse mix in the future.

As people walked in the room, they shared what they value about Portola Valley and placed stickers on a map, noting where they live and work in Town. The meeting format alternated between table discussions supported by trained facilitators and two short presentations by Town Manager Jeremy Dennis. All five council members attended as listeners. In their closing remarks, each council member shared their appreciation for the community’s participation. Input was captured by discussion notes from each the ten tables and 56 worksheet/feedback forms. Overall, the meeting was seen as informative and valuable by most attendees.

**Themes from Opening Dialogue**

**Rural Environment:** Many community members moved to Portola Valley for its beautiful rural atmosphere, open spaces and abundant hiking and horse trails. There was a strong sense that Portola Valley should strive to “balance open space and housing.”

- “There are ways to keep the rural character of Portola Valley that we love and still add housing.”



- We can “build creatively in harmony with nature.”
- “Well planned, green housing need not detract seriously from open space.”

**Family Connections:** People are concerned that they, their children, or other family members may not be able to stay in or return to Portola Valley. Community members expressed a desire to “age in place” and live near their children and grandchildren.

- “My neighbors and I are growing older and no young people are coming to join us.”
- “People who grew up here can’t live here.”
- 
- “Make it possible for multigenerational families to stay.”



People are more interested than I realized in creating a more diverse community in Portola Valley. I am encouraged!”

- Participant



**Maintaining Vital Workforce:**

Participants expressed concern that those who work in Portola Valley are unable to live close to Town. As a result, commute times increase and employers (business, school, public safety, health care) struggle to attract and retain employees.

- “My employees travel from the East Bay to work in Portola Valley. If we can provide housing for them, it will be a life changer.”
- “It is very hard to keep young people working in our community because it is so expensive.”
- “The commutes are getting horrible and we won’t be able to retain the best teachers.”



**Creative Solutions:** A recurring theme was the need to be creative, “think outside the box” and “try new things.” Community members called for housing solutions that emphasize innovation and reduce barriers (such as regulations and fees) to building more places to live in Portola Valley.

- “Empower our community to be innovative for our whole area preserving beauty, housing, and jobs.”
- “Ease building ordinance zoning regulation to allow owners flexibility to build/develop on property.”
- “Use and communicate smart design guidelines to preserve town character and reduce obstacles to building housing.”

**Housing Options Strategic Plan**

The meeting also included an overview of the Town’s Housing Options Strategic Plan, which was adopted in the fall of 2016. The plan includes six core elements:

## Housing Options Strategic Plan Elements

<p><b>Community Engagement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a variety of opportunities to have a Town-wide conversation about housing, both to educate community members about current conditions and to allow decision makers to hear about the community’s needs and the kinds of housing strategies that fit with the Town’s character</li> </ul>	<p><b>Second Units (ADUs)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make it easier for homeowners to propose and receive approval to build an accessory dwelling unit (ADU) on their property</li> <li>• Increase the number of locations where ADU construction is allowable to increase the supply of rental housing or units for additional family members</li> </ul>
<p><b>Affiliated Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Longstanding program in Portola Valley allowing three institutions (The Priory, The Sequoias, and Stanford) to build housing for their employees</li> <li>• Explore expansion of the program</li> </ul>	<p><b>Town-Owned Property</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore the potential of building homes on Town-owned land, as well as occupancy criteria for those whose needs the Town would prioritize (e.g., public safety officials, residents aging in place, etc.) – <i>Report completed in 2017</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>Shared Housing</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broaden the community awareness of HIP Housing, a nonprofit organization that facilitates home sharing for the benefit of both homeowners and those who need an affordable place to live</li> </ul>	<p><b>Affordable Housing Funds</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consider how to spend the Town’s existing funds for affordable housing (approximately \$3.5 million)</li> <li>• Uses of moneys to be determined after Housing Strategic Plan is fully implemented</li> </ul>

There was significant interest in all elements of the Town’s Housing Options Strategic Plan. Several participants felt that the Town could be doing much more to promote second units (ADUs) and shared housing. Many attendees also identified affiliated housing as an area ripe for creative solutions. Partnerships with Stanford or the Sequoias were seen as particularly promising. Others called for reviewing Town regulations and policies that present potential barriers to housing, which may include building codes, permit fees, property taxes and minimum size requirements. It was clear through the discussion that no one solution would be sufficient. Overall, people were ready to see the Town put more of this multi-part plan “into action.”

### Indicated Actions/Next Steps

- Community members greatly appreciated the chance to talk to each other. They would like the Town to continue promoting conversations and provide additional opportunities to be involved. Portola Valley has a long history of volunteerism; many residents are eager to help address the housing challenge.
- Increase awareness of Housing Options Strategic Plan elements, making information more accessible online.
- Reach out to people who were not able to attend.
- Connect with the Town’s business community, for example through a Business Roundtable.
- Offer additional support and education to community members interested in ADUs.
- Develop additional events/programs to keep the conversation going.

