

# FRIENDS OF THE HILLS

## HILLS 2000

### PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF LOS ALTOS HILLS

SUMMER 2001

Volume 3, Issue 2

## WHEN LAH SPEAKS –THE COUNCIL SHOULD LISTEN!

Survey results provide a decision-making template for the future of our Town.

The results of the Community Preferences Survey demonstrate that the majority of Town residents value Los Altos Hills' rural ambience and want its character to remain what Walter Stegner so aptly called, "God's Little Acre."

The result of the town wide survey is now available at Town Hall, or may be viewed graphically on the Hills 2000 website at [www.hills2000.org](http://www.hills2000.org).

Over 3000 surveys were mailed and 1145 returned.

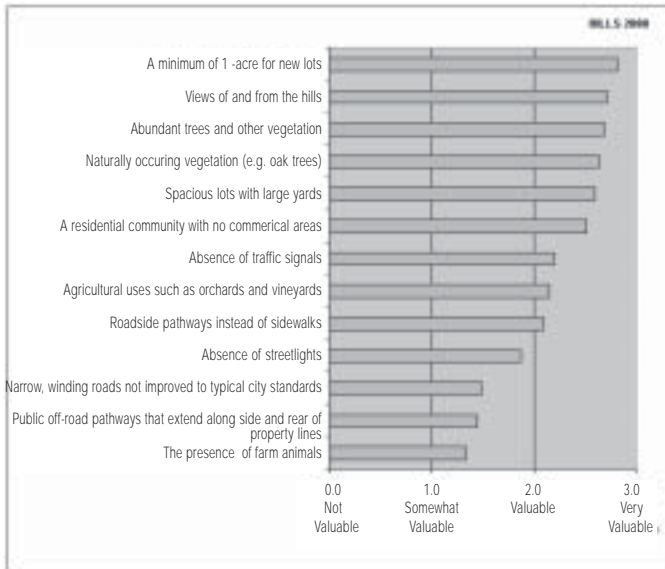
The survey culminates a year long effort by the Land Use Committee, together with guidance provided by outside consultants to develop a survey instrument that would serve as an assessment of what Town residents want and what changes should be undertaken by the City Council.

The adage, "If you love laws and sausage, watch neither being made" - couldn't be more applicable to the process that the committee went through in developing the survey.

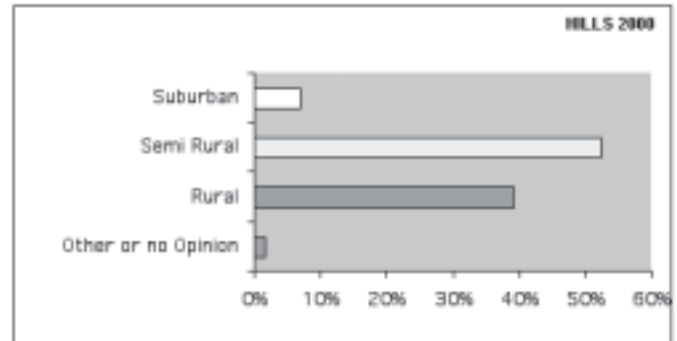
To top it off, after the consultants were terminated - many of the important questions originally included (e.g., basements, bulk, fences) were subsequently deleted. Note: The council is presently rewriting the basement ordinance without the input from the survey.

In spite of the messy process, the survey results can only be interpreted one way - the residents have spoken and the City Council should listen!

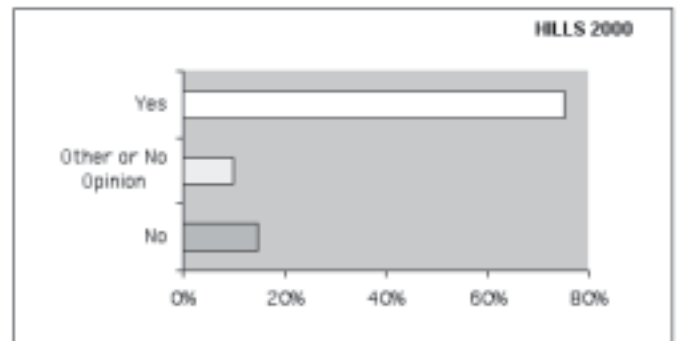
Examples of the results are displayed below (over 19 graphs are available on the website). Check it out! ★



1. What is it about the physical character and appearance of the Town that you value?



2. Would you prefer the Land Use Element of the General Plan to characterize the Town.



3. As the size of homes increase should they be set back farther from the roads and neighboring homes?

charts continued on page 3

# OUR VISION

*The Future of Los Altos Hills - projected to 2010*

As we go forward, Hills 2000 - Friends of the Hills wants our Town to maintain the beautiful legacy of open space and rural ambience for future generations.

We support the principles of the General Plan of Los Altos Hills, which we feel is being compromised by the builders, speculators and special interests.

The principles of the General Plan state our vision. In part, they are:

*"Uses of land should maintain the rural atmosphere, minimize disturbance to natural terrain, minimize removal of the natural vegetation and create the maximum compatibility of development with the natural environment through site design, architecture and landscaping."*

Our future goals are to represent the views and interests of the majority opinion as detailed in the Community Preferences Surveys in 1989 and 2001.

## Vision

Our vision for Los Altos Hills as we go forward, is a Town enriched by ethnic diversity and united in friendship and community spirit.

Our priorities for the future are to:

- Maintain the rural ambience - LAH is a transition town providing a buffer between the urban nature of Los Altos and open space in the Hills
- Support the pathways system linking the various sections of Town - pathways provide safe and convenient non-vehicular travel throughout the community, uniting neighborhoods through a series of connecting paths providing circulation for children, walkers, horseback riders, bicyclists - as well as opportunity for recreation and exercise
- Continue to support the work of the Friends of Westwind Barn and its 4H handicap-riding program as a contribu-

tion to the preservation of local history and for the disabled community

- Preserve the views of all residents from obstruction
- Support uses normally accessory to dwellings in a rural area: small-scale crop and tree farming, keeping of horses and other domestic animals, and other agricultural pursuits that are compatible with residential uses

## Governance

Maintain high standards of integrity for Town government and ensure that ordinances reflect the interests of the community and are evenly enforced.

- Encourage the Town Council to demonstrate commitment and connectiveness to regional governments by participating in planning process for the region
- Balance the property rights of owner-builders and existing neighbors, while preserving the right of architectural expression
- Ensure strong fiscal management planning for all future programs
- Provide periodic review and updating of planning and zoning ordinances to ensure appropriateness
- Organize and encourage a base of informed residents to contribute and participate in the decision-making process of the Town. ★

Hills 2000 - Friends of the Hills

*Acknowledgement: I wish to express appreciation to the many Hills 2000 members who contributed their perspective and insights in the formulation of this vision statement.*

# I HAVE A DREAM

*A Look Into the Future in 2010 - Can this be Los Altos Hills?*

Although many homes look like hotels, the landscaping, setbacks, and lack of fencing enable them to blend into their settings;

The city council is listening carefully to informed input and has preserved the beauty of the environment, including views, and natural habitats;

The Town is maintaining neighborhood pathways, which allow for efficient, safe travel, within the community;

The city council is making wise decisions and maintains good relations with our neighboring communities, specifically as regards limiting development on steep lots so that no drainage problems have occurred which would have affected them;

The Town sponsors bi-annual events for all residents, one is social and the other is a workday where the community helps with group clean up and restoration projects to benefit all who live in the Hills;

The Town supports walks along the pathways once a month for all residents;

The Town supports local artists and displays their works in Town Hall;

The Town is undergrounding utilities and is installing sewers throughout the community;

The new Town Hall is a model of energy efficiency and is landscaped with native plants;

It also has two boules (bocce) ball courts and play equipment making it a neighborhood center for young and old.

The Town of Los Altos Hills is the perfect buffer between the cacophony of the Silicon Valley and the respite of its beautiful open space in the hills.

***Tell me Toto, are we still in Los Altos Hills? ★***

*- Contributed by Diane Barrager*

# LUF Committee Completes Report

The LUF Committee was formed by the City Council February 1, 2001. Its purpose was to study the history of LUF and determine if it is applicable to development standards in LAH today and in the future. The report from this committee is critically important to everyone in Town because LUF is used to determine floor area and building area for every lot in Town.

LUF (Lot Unit Factor) is a slope-based way of determining the size of a lot that is the same as net acreage when the slope is less than 10% and drops to 57% of the net acreage when the slope is 30%. The majority of the committee accepted LUF, as applied to subdivisions. Tables that will show MFA/MDA are available on our web site.

A report is available at Town Hall that represents the results of the committee work as well as the individual reports of the committee members. Committee research included:

- Drainage and erosion as related to increased development and increased slope.
- Grading regulations as they apply to limiting development on increased slope.
- Analysis of surrounding communities Woodside, Portola Valley, Saratoga, Palo Alto Hills, and the County.

The report indicates that surrounding communities are also concerned about drainage and erosion problems, impact of grading on the natural environment, and the visual impact of development on the rural character. Most of these communities use a variety of methods to control development. They include caps on the floor size of homes, maximum lot coverage, decrease in coverage for steeper lots, increased setbacks, etc. In some areas, such as very steep lots, LAH is restrictive. But for the most part Newsweek got it right, we have justifiably earned the reputation as the best community to build your statement house.

The committee recognized problems in Maximum Floor Area (MFA) and Maximum Development Area (MDA) as computed for smaller or steeper lots. For example, a one net acre lot with a slope of 30% (about 10% of the Town) is restricted to 4000/5000. This translates to 4000 sq. ft. floor area and 1000 sq. ft. outside development area. The Town granted no variances for MFA, but granted MDA variances in the 6500 sq. ft. range. There is also a fairness issue with the larger steeper lots, where a flat lot is allowed a lot coverage of 34%, a steep lot may be allowed only 8% coverage. Tables are available on our website showing the MFA/MDA for various lot sizes and slopes.

The LUF Committee was not critical of the Council. The majority accepted the Fenwick formula, which would have tripled the MDA for steep lots. A minority noted problems with it, and research done by the Committee was instrumental in pointing out the problems with it. The Council subsequently tabled the Fenwick formula.

The new ordinance, passed on May 17, 2001 puts a floor of 5000 sq. ft. on MFA and 7500 sq. ft. on MDA. It solves the need for more development area on constrained lots, but in floor area it is too generous to lots that don't conform to the Town's founding principles of one acre. It generously grants 5000 sq. ft. to one-half acre lots. Two half-acre lots side by side can have 10000 sq. ft. of floor area whereas a one-acre lot is granted 6000 sq. ft. ★

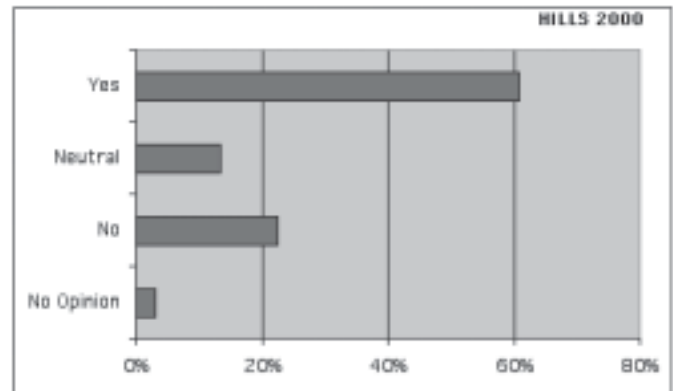


## Hills 2000 website Makes Available Town Council Meetings

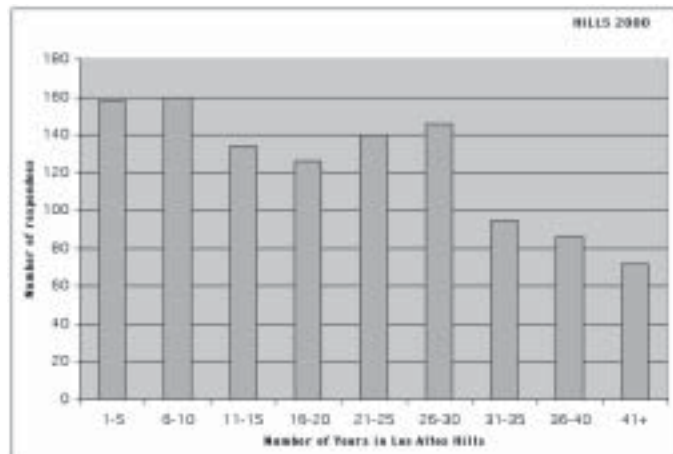
Scott Vanderlip, Hills 2000 volunteer is pictured demonstrating that the Hills 2000 website ([www.hills2000.org](http://www.hills2000.org)) makes available

the Town Council meetings in streaming video, with both 56k and DSL speeds supported. Additionally, LAH residents can calculate for their lot Maximum Floor Area (MFA) and Maximum Development area (MDA). The entire Town Community Preferences Survey is also provided in raw numbers and easy to read graphs. ★

Survey results charts continued from page 1



5. Should the allowed size of a house be reduced as lots become more steep?



15. How many years have you lived in Los Altos Hills?

# Opportunity Missed - LAH Council Fails the Town Residents

Councilmember Emily Cheng is to be commended for her effort to bring a compromise resolution to the sticky issue of the proposed change in minimums for MFA/MDA (Maximum Floor Area / Maximum Development Area).

We all learned a little more about the history and purpose of LUF (Lot Unit Factor used in LAH to determine allowable development areas) when council member Cheng took the microphone to address a proposed change in MFA/MDA. She then courageously argued for 4500/7500 as a compromise with the 4000/6500 originally proposed by the LAH Planning Commission and the Casey proposed 5000/7500.

The results of the recent Townwide Community Preferences Survey, most certainly gave credence to Cheng's efforts to strike a compromise.

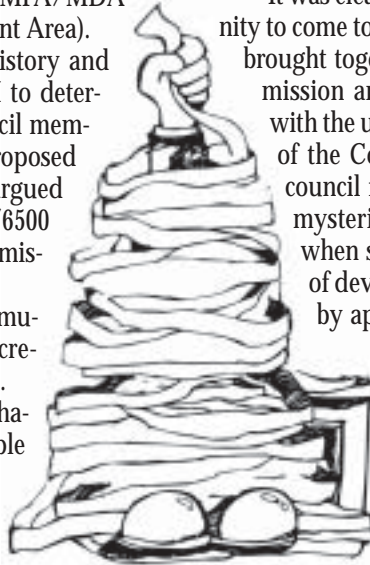
Council member Mike O'Malley also emphasized an incremental approach is more reasonable than an extreme approach of 5000/7500.

Council members Casey, Fenwick and Finn effectively ignored the minority position and voted to stick with their proposal - thereby

denying the Town of a reasonable compromise that was supported by both Cheng and O'Malley.

It was clear to many of us that the council had the opportunity to come together for a 5-0 vote on this issue. It would have brought together Cheng's experience on the Planning Commission and O'Malley's conservative approach balanced with the un-researched position of the remaining members of the Council. This opportunity was missed when the council failed to support Cheng's proposal. Particularly mysterious was council member Fenwick's comment, when supporting 5000, that he felt the 5000 square feet of development probably couldn't or wouldn't be used by applicants.

We elected the members of the council to represent us all of us. We were not expecting to see them accept a 3-2 vote when they could listen to each other and come to a reasonable compromise and support a measure providing a 5-0 vote. Our high expectations for the council to be able to work together and listen to each other and reach a compromise - was a lost opportunity. ★



## Former Mayor Dauber Tells Us Like It Should Be!

*(Ed. note: The city council will be selecting a new mayor in June. Hills2000 has asked ex-mayor Elayne Dauber if she would comment on what the actual job of being mayor of Los Altos Hills.)*

Every June, the Los Altos Hills City Council selects a new mayor and mayor pro-tem. The change is timed to coincide with a new budget and a new set of priorities for the upcoming budget year. If this year's transition follows the protocol that has been used since the Town's inception, Toni Casey, the current mayor pro-tem will be our new mayor, and Emily Cheng, the councilmember with the longest tenure who has not yet been mayor, should become the next mayor pro-tem.

In retrospect, it's with some disappointment that we note Emily did not accept the position of Mayor Pro Tem in June 2000. A position that, as noted by Bob Johnson when nominating Emily, has been traditionally offered to Council members that have not previously held the position. It provides an excellent way to help develop our newer Council members. We now have three Council members that have never held the position, all of which would greatly benefit from the experience.

I must admit, I thoroughly enjoyed being mayor of Los Altos Hills. The job comes with an incredible amount of prestige, which is far beyond the authority that the mayor wields. The mayor has few additional powers than other council members. But he/she does represent the city at events, is the "first" spokesperson for the council, and conducts the business meetings.

The major role of the mayor is as the council's communica-

tor with the city manager. It is the responsibility of the mayor and city manager, together, to develop the agendas for city council meetings. At the weekly (or bi-weekly) meetings of the mayor and city manager they set agendas, review the activities in the city, review progress on problems, discuss responses to letters to the council, and monitor progress on goals. The mayor and city manager work as a team to ensure that the staff and the city council work as a team. Often, the mayor pro-tem is invited to attend the meetings. This portion of the job is the most rewarding, and the most fun.

The mayor is also the city council's liaison with the various town committees. Traditionally, the mayor and city manager meet quarterly with representatives of the town committees. These "mayor meetings" always follow the same format. Each committee representative describes what his/her committee has been working on for the past quarter and the plans for the future quarter. These meetings not only keep the mayor and city manager up to date on the committee activities, but also enable the committees to communicate among themselves and help each other. Many joint projects have developed from well-attended mayor's meetings.

The most attractive part of the job of mayor is that, it is for exactly one year. This time limit is the reward that encourages every mayor to give the job his/her all, because he/she knows that it will come to an end in June. Each newly retired mayor exults in a glorious past year, and breathes a sigh of relief that it is over. ★

# Public Hearings - Observations of a Member of the Public

I received in the mail a public hearing notice “cordially request ling resident input” on the amount of allowable development area and floor area for lots in Los Altos Hills. So I decided to attend. Here’s what I saw.

First of all, Mayor Steve Finn called the meeting to order and explained that the Council was not going to address the ordinance everyone thinks is on the agenda, but instead an earlier version of the ordinance that had already had public input. Furthermore, the Council was going to immediately make a motion to adopt this other ordinance and the negative declaration and vote on it - and then open the public hearing after the vote. So Council member Toni Casey, who has been on the Council for many years, starts to make a motion, until she is interrupted by the Town attorney who said the Council needed to open the public hearing on at least the ordinance before taking a vote. I was amazed at the Council’s action because I thought the idea was to obtain public input before making a decision. They seemed to say, “who cares what the public has to say or what the correct order of business is, we know what we want to do - let’s just vote on it.”

The ordinance they decided to vote on was the one proposed before the Fenwick Formula appeared, and after one that was carefully studied and recommended by the Planning Commission. It was the 5000 maximum floor area/7500 maximum development area that Toni Casey had proposed in an off-the-cuff manner at an earlier Council meeting.

So the public hearing was opened and the first person to speak was an official from the Santa Clara Valley Water District. He spoke two sentences before Mayor Finn told him he was commenting on the wrong item and that he should “come back in the fall”. Whoa! Did Mayor Finn and all the Council members know what he was going to say? What about the audience (us townfolk), don’t they get to hear what the District has to say? Did anyone know whether or not the comments were germane?

The District does, in fact, have some concerns relative to the environmental effects of this ordinance, primarily because not enough data have been presented for the District to make an assessment of the possible impact of this ordinance on downstream flooding.

Several people spoke; it seems that opinions were split about 50/50. A lot of people cited the Community Preferences Survey; a few people spoke in support of the original Planning Commission recommendation; several people spoke about the need to do something for the steepest lots; and a number of people told disaster stories about drainage.

In the end the ordinance passed 3-2 (ayes Casey, Finn and Fenwick; nays O’Malley and Cheng). Council member Cheng spoke to support the Planning Commission recommendation or, based on her own research and analysis, she said she could support the 7500 MDA but not the 5000 MFA. She stated her support

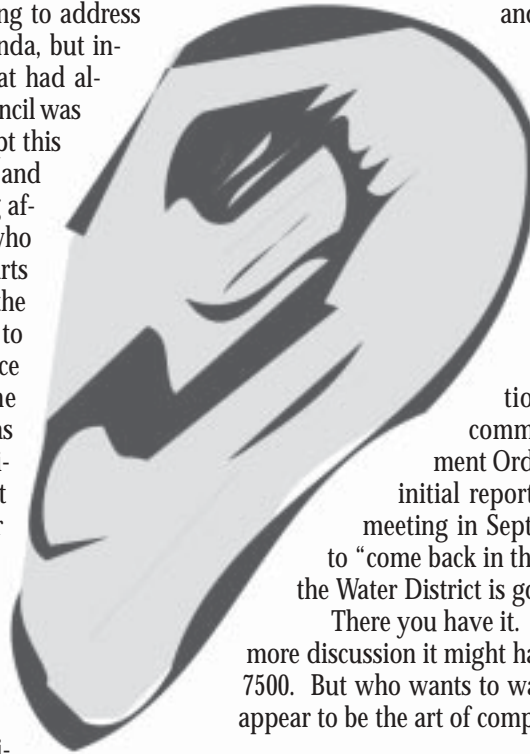
for 4500 MFA because it is more realistic and would cause fewer headaches in the future. She also wanted to pass the ordinance on a 6-month trial basis while a new LUF formula was developed. Council member O’Malley felt that the Planning Commission recommendation made a lot of sense, and that the results of the survey should

be considered. Council member Fenwick felt that the 7500 MDA was easily supportable, but that the 5000 MFA was probably excessive and it will be difficult for people to attain it, but that there was probably no harm in passing it. Council member Casey felt that the survey did support a vote for this ordinance.

Then Mayor Finn made a motion to appoint a new “blue ribbon committee” to review the Site Development Ordinance. It passed unanimously. The initial report is due to the Council by the first meeting in September (hence the cryptic reference to “come back in the fall” is explained, but by this time the Water District is gone).

There you have it. If the Council had continued a little more discussion it might have had a unanimous vote on 4500/7500. But who wants to waste time on that? Politics does not appear to be the art of compromise in LAH. ★

—Town Observer



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# FRIENDS OF THE HILLS

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Los Altos, CA 94023-0031  
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**Friends of the Hills**  
Newsletter

### Statement of Purpose

*To provide well researched and unbiased communications on significant issues to all residents of Los Altos Hills. The Friends Newsletter is published with assistance from members of the Friends of the Hills.*

### Hills 2000 Steering Committee

Diane Barrager	Sandy Humphries
Jitze Couperus	Barbara & Richard Lamparter
Nancy Couperus	Bob Lefkowitz
Colette Penne Cranston	Duffy Price
Elayne Dauber	Bill Riffle
Nick Dunckel	Dot Schreiner
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## Hills 2000 Welcomes New City Manager

**M**aureen Cassingham, the new city manager has been on the job for 4 months and already we note that there is a steady hand at the helm. Maureen has over 30 years experience in public service. First and foremost she possesses excellent communication skills and real professionalism. Hills 2000 supports her efforts to work with the Town Council in implementing the Town's goals and objectives. ★

## Join Hills 2000 Friends of the Hills

**Membership dues are \$25 for your family. New members are welcome. Please fill out and return the form below or contact Barbara Vetterlein at (650) 941-7471 and visit our website at www.hills2000.org**

NEW MEMBERSHIP OR CHANGE OF ADDRESS FORM

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ADDRESS .....

CITY/STATE/ZIP .....

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Please fill out the form above, make checks payable to:  
**HILLS 2000**

and mail them both to the address below. Thank you.