COUNTY OF SAN MATEO
PLANNING AND BUILDING DEPARTMENT

DATE: February 8, 2023

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Planning Staff

SUBJECT: Consideration of a request pursuant to Government Code Section 65402 for determination of whether the City of Menlo Park's proposed construction of a 50-foot aluminum lattice telecommunication tower in unincorporated County territory within the Sand Hill Road Reservoirs easement, on land owned by Stanford University, in order to implement a smart water meter program for the Menlo Park Municipal Water District, conforms to the County's General Plan.

County File Number: PLN 2022-00381

PROPOSAL

Consideration of a request pursuant to Government Code Section 65402 for determination of whether the City of Menlo Park's proposed construction of a 50-foot aluminum lattice telecommunication tower in unincorporated County territory within the Sand Hill Road Reservoirs easement, on land owned by Stanford University, in order to implement a smart water meter program for the Menlo Park Municipal Water District, conforms to the County's General Plan.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Planning Commission find that the City of Menlo Park's proposed construction of a 50-foot aluminum lattice telecommunication tower in unincorporated County territory within the Sand Hill Road Reservoirs easement, on land owned by Stanford University, in order to implement a smart water meter program for the Menlo Park Municipal Water District conforms to the County's General Plan.

BACKGROUND

Report Prepared By: William Gibson

Applicant: City of Menlo Park

Owners: Leland Stanford University

Public Notification: 10-day advance notification of the hearing was mailed to property owners within 300 feet of the project and a notice of hearing was posted in the San Mateo Times.

Location: 3650 Sand Hill Road, Unincorporated County (Stanford Lands)

APN: 073-250-160

Size: 0.945 acres

Existing Zoning: RE/S-11

General Plan Designation: Mixed/Institutional/Open Study/Future Study

Existing Land Use: A portion of the parcel contains part of the Sand Hill Road Reservoirs, and the rest is undeveloped with varied tree cover and scrub.

Flood Zone: X (Area of Minimal Flooding); FIRM Panel 06081C0311E

Environmental Evaluation: A determination that the proposed project conforms to the County General Plan is exempt from environmental review under the "common sense exemption" that the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment (CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3)). Any future action on the subject property would be subject to applicable CEQA requirements.

Setting: The project is in the Sand Hill Road Reservoir easement, and the portion to be built on is characterized by varied tree cover and scrub.

DISCUSSION

A. KEY ISSUES

1. Project Description

The proposed project is the installation of a 50-foot aluminum tower, base station, radio frequency antenna, and solar panels in the Sand Hill Reservoirs Easement in the unincorporated County, on land owned by Stanford University. The project building permit is BLD 2022-02645.

Per the submitted project description:

"The City of Menlo Park is embarking on a Smart Meter Project to replace/retrofit every water meter in Menlo Park Municipal Water. The project will decrease the time for meter data collection, improve the efficiency of billing operations, proactively alert customers of potential leaks or high water usage, reduce water loss and enhance customer service. It

will use radio frequency communication technology to read meters (referred to as “smart meters”) on an hourly basis without requiring a physical read from the meter or entry into the meter box, thus providing the ability to remotely monitor and manage the water utility infrastructure. It requires installation of a transceiver at the meter to transmit the data, a fixed base station antenna to collect radio meter reads, and a data management system to store and interpret data. Many water agencies in San Mateo County have already implemented or are in the process of implementing similar water conservation programs […].”

“The aluminum lattice-type 50-foot tower will be triangularly shaped with each side 1-foot and 1-1/4-inch in length. Other components will consist of a Sensus M400 base station, an antenna to be placed at the top of the tower, and solar panels at the base of the tower. The footing of the tower will be approximately 25 sq. ft. and the overall footprint will not exceed 75 square feet. The tower will be constructed within the existing Sand Hill Road Reservoirs easement, which is the highest elevation within the Menlo Park Municipal Water service area. The City has already received approval from the property owner, Stanford University.”

Per California Government Code Section 65402, prior to construction of a project in another jurisdiction, the jurisdiction sponsoring the project must request an analysis of the proposed project’s conformity with the General Plan of the jurisdiction in which the project is located.

2. Analysis

The subject parcel is outside of the County’s coastal zone, on the urban side of the County’s urban-rural boundary, is not zoned or usable for agriculture or resource conservation, contains no sensitive habitats, resources, or other environmental constraints, and is not subject to notable hazards. The project involves no removal of trees or vegetation.

The project site is within the Scenic Corridor for the State-designated Junipero Serra Highway scenic route (Route 280). Various General Plan Visual Quality policies regulate the design and placement of development within scenic corridors to limit the visibility and visual impact of structures from the relevant public right-of-way. However, the proposed antenna will not be visible from Junipero Serra Highway.

Sand Hill Road is a County-designated Scenic Route. The project site is not visible from Sand Hill Road, but the highest points of the antenna will be briefly visible extending above a hilltop from the stretch of Sand Hill Road most immediately adjacent to the project site, which is approximately 400 feet from the road. This viewshed is already partly obstructed by a variety of farm-related structures, a parking lot, and other development already located adjacent to Route 280, between the Highway and the project site.

Various General Plan Visual Quality Policies address mitigating the visual impacts of development visible from County-designated scenic routes. These include:

- 4.28 Ridgelines and Skyline.

    a. Discourage structures on open ridgelines and skylines, when seen as part of a public view in order to preserve visual integrity.

    b. Allow structures on open ridgelines and skylines as part of a public view *when no alternative building site exists*.

The antenna will be briefly visible above the line of hilltop adjacent to Sand Hill Road. However, given the nature of the proposed development, the location of the antenna at the point of highest available elevation is necessary to achieve project objectives.

- 4.51 Stack, Vents and Antennae. Group stacks, vents, antennae, satellite dishes and other equipment together, to the extent feasible, and place them in the least viewable location. Where appropriate, screen antennae and satellite dishes from view.

    The various components of the project, including the antennae, solar panels, and other equipment, are clustered, and directly adjacent to the existing above-ground reservoir structure. The location of the antenna is necessary to meet project objectives and is only viewable from one brief stretch of Sand Hill Road.

- 4.59 Views To the extent practicable, locate development in scenic corridors so it does not obstruct views from scenic roads or disrupt the visual harmony of the natural landscape.

    Given the nature and extent of the project, the extension of the antenna above the profile of landscape is the only practicable project design.

The only other General Plan policies implicated by the project are the County's water supply policies:

- Water Supply Policy 10.12, (*Coordination of Water Suppliers*), states "Encourage water providers to coordinate the planned capacity of their facilities commensurate with the level of development permitted by adopted land use plans and wastewater management plans."

- Water Supply Policy 10.25, (*Efficient Water Use*), states "encourage the efficient use of water supplies through effective conservation methods."

The proposed project will allow Menlo Park to better coordinate water capacity with existing and planned development and will directly facilitate more conservation and efficient use of water. The project complies with the County's Water Supply policies, and the project's briefly visibility from the County-designated scenic route conforms to the conditions described in the Visual Resource policies, as well as being located in an area in which visual quality is already compromised by intervening development. The project conforms to the policies of the County General Plan.

B. ALTERNATIVES

The alternative to a finding of conformity with the General Plan is for the Planning Commission to find that the proposed project does not conform to the policies of the County General Plan.

C. ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A determination that the proposed acquisition of property conforms to the County General Plan is exempt from environmental review under the "common sense exemption" that the CEQA applies only to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment (CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3)). Any future action on the subject property would be subject to applicable CEQA requirements.

D. REVIEWING AGENCIES

County Attorney

ATTACHMENTS

A. Recommended Findings
B. Location and Site Map

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County of San Mateo - Planning and Building Department

ATTACHMENT A

Attachment A

County of San Mateo
Planning and Building Department

RECOMMENDED FINDING

Permit or Project File Number: PLN 2022-00381 Hearing Date: February 8, 2022

Prepared By: William Gibson
Project Planner

For Adoption By: Planning Commission

RECOMMENDED FINDING

That the Planning Commission find that the City of Menlo Park's proposed construction of a 50-foot aluminum lattice telecommunication tower in unincorporated County territory within the Sand Hill Road Reservoirs easement, on land owned by Stanford University, in order to implement a smart water meter program for the Menlo Park Municipal Water District conforms to the County's General Plan.

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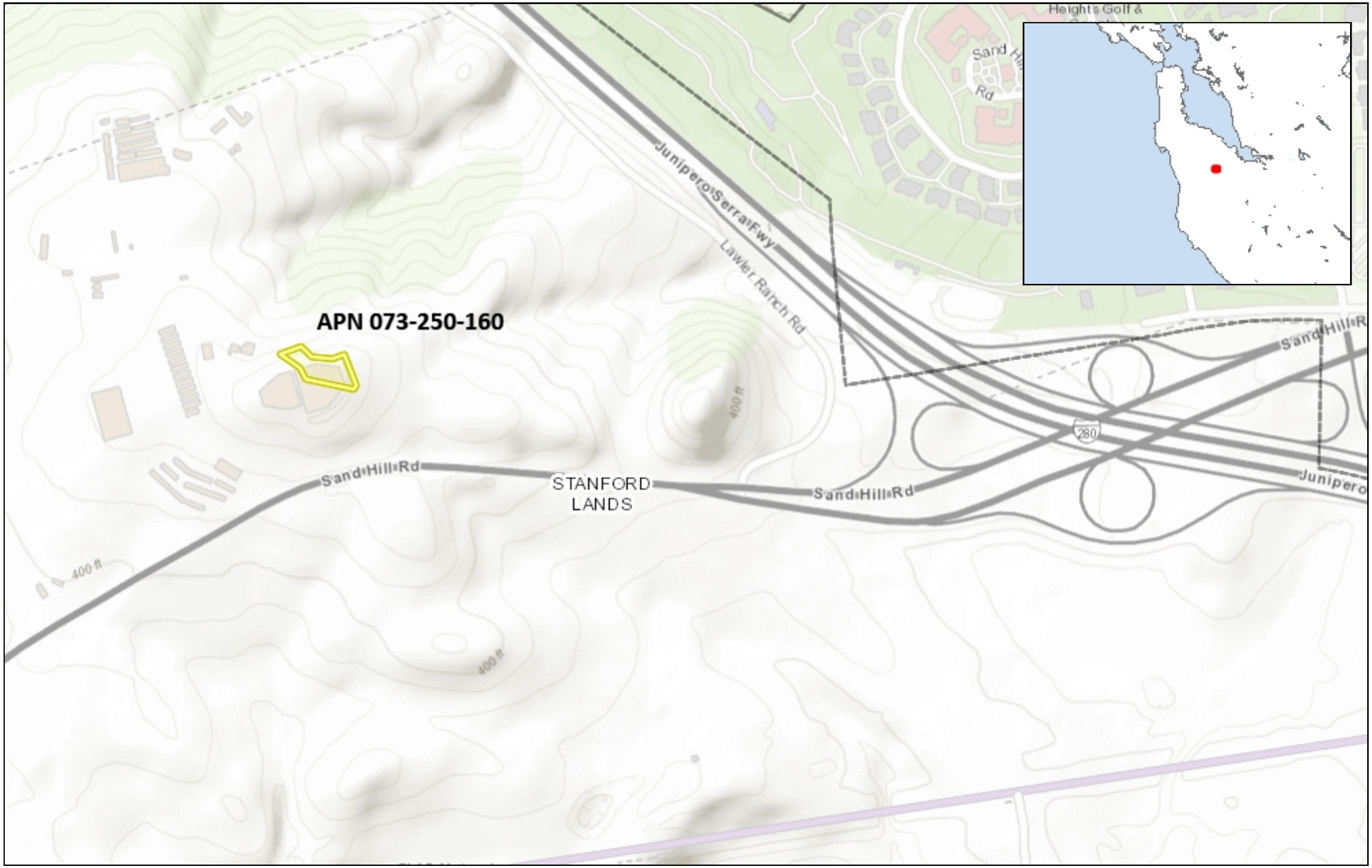
County of San Mateo - Planning and Building Department

ATTACHMENT B

San Mateo County

PLN2022-00381 ATTACHMENT B: Location Map - 3650 Sand Hill Road



0.28 0 0.14 0.28 Miles

WGS_1984_Web_Mercator_Auxiliary_Sphere

1: 9,028

This map is a user generated static output from an Internet mapping site and is for reference only. Data layers that appear on this map may or may not be accurate, current, or otherwise reliable.

THIS MAP IS NOT TO BE USED FOR NAVIGATION