Planning Commission Agenda Report

October 25, 2017
Item 6.b.

SUBJECT: **Mapping of the Southeast Hills**

APPLICANT: City of Pleasanton

PROPERTY OWNER: Various

PURPOSE: Provide comments on mapping of the Southeast Hills pursuant to Measure PP (the "Save Pleasanton's Hills and Housing Cap Initiative").

LOCATION: An approximately 1,520-acre hillside area in southeast Pleasanton and unincorporated Alameda County known as the Southeast Hills, consisting of the Lund Ranch II, Oak Grove, Spotorno, and Foley Properties.

GENERAL PLAN: Public Health and Safety, Parks and Recreation, Rural Density Residential, Low Density Residential, Medium Density Residential (in Pleasanton)

ZONING: Planned Unit Development-Medium Density Residential (PUD-MDR), Planned Unit Development-Semi-Rural Residential (PUD-SRDR), Planned Unit Development-Agriculture, Open Space (PUD-A/OS), Planned Unit Development Low Density Residential, Rural Density Residential, Open Space, Public Health and Safety, Wildland Overlay (PUD-LDR/RDR/OS-PHS/WO), and Planned Unit Development Rural Density Residential, Open Space (PUD-RDR/OS) (in Pleasanton)

EXHIBITS:
A. Measure PP Text from 2008 Voter's Guide
B. Project Location Map
C. Slope Map
D. Ridgeline Map
E. Development Potential Map

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Recommend that the City Council approve the mapping of the Southeast Hills as implementing and illustrating Measure PP, along with the underlying methodology discussed in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2016, out of a desire to "minimize future land-use conflicts by providing clarity to property owners and the City on issues related to slope and ridgeline setbacks" consistent with Measure PP restrictions, the City Council adopted Southeast Hills Mapping as a Work Plan Priority.

The Southeast Hills, comprising approximately 1,520 acres located within and outside City limits (see Exhibit B, Project Location Map), is a landform that functions as an open space boundary and important visual feature to the southeast of the developed portion of the City. Although the Southeast Hills have a long history of livestock grazing, they have been subject to limited development, contain large expanses of native vegetation, and serve as a wildlife corridor between Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park and the wildlands around Del Valle Regional Park. In response to the interest of limiting "growth and the impact it has on ridgelines and hillsides", Pleasanton voters in November 2008 passed Measure PP, the "Save Pleasanton's Hills and Housing Cap Initiative" (see Exhibit A, text of Measure PP). Measure PP states in part that: "No grading to construct residential or commercial structures shall occur on hillside slopes 25 percent or greater, or within 100 vertical feet of a ridgeline." Measure PP issues (including definition of key terms in the measure) were at the forefront of discussions related to the Lund Ranch II Project, which was approved on January 5, 2016, and was followed by a referendum (Measure K) seeking to halt the project. Measure K was approved, meaning that the Lund Ranch II project was able to proceed as approved.

The methodology and mapping presented in this report comprise the mapping requested by City Council. Staff acknowledges that due to the language of Measure PP there are multiple ways of approaching the mapping, but believes that the mapping presented in this report employs reasonable and replicable means of defining slopes, ridgelines, and vertical ridgeline setbacks, resulting in mapping of Measure PP provisions that is consistent with the intent that "Ridgelines and hillsides shall be protected."

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

With the stated purpose to "…protect our city from uncontrolled growth and the impact it has on ridgelines and hillsides, traffic, schools, water supply, and our overall quality of life," Pleasanton voters in November 2008 passed Measure PP, the "Save Pleasanton's Hills and Housing Cap Initiative."[1] Measure PP resulted in the addition of Land Use Element Program 21.3 to the General Plan, which reads:

> Program 21.3: Ridgelines and hillsides shall be protected. Housing units and structures shall not be placed on slopes of 25 percent or greater, or within 100 vertical feet of a ridgeline. No grading to construct residential or commercial structures shall occur on hillside slopes 25 percent or greater, or within 100 vertical feet of a ridgeline. Exempt from this policy are housing developments of 10 or fewer housing units on a single property. Splitting dividing, or subdividing a "legal parcel" to approve more than 10 housing units is not allowed (Measure PP, Nov. 2008).

After Measure PP qualified for the ballot, the City Council commissioned a report about the effects of the initiative, which noted that some key terms in the initiative, including "structure", "ridgeline" and "slope" were not specifically defined. The ballot materials submitted to the voters

[1] The provisions of Measure PP related to the City's Housing Cap were invalidated by the Alameda County Superior Court as being in conflict with State law mandating that communities meet regional housing requirements.

preceding the November 2008 election, including the City Attorney's Impartial Analysis, also highlighted that such key terms could be subject to differing interpretations.

Measure PP issues (including the interpretation of key terms in the measure, particularly "structure") were at the forefront of discussions related to the Lund Ranch II Project, which was approved on January 5, 2016, and the subsequent referendum (Measure K), which sought to halt the project. Measure K was approved by the voters, meaning that the Lund Ranch II project was able to proceed. In 2016, out of a desire to provide clarity regarding hillside considerations on lands in the Southeast Hills, the City Council placed slope mapping of the area on the City Council work plan as a priority project.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The Southeast Hills, comprising approximately 1,520 acres within the City and just outside City limits in unincorporated Alameda County, is a landform that functions as a visual boundary and important feature to the southeast of the developed portion of the City (see Exhibit B, Project Location Map). Ridgeline elevations tend to increase as one moves towards the southeastern portion of the area, ranging from about 500 feet in the southwestern portion of the area to approximately 1,170 feet in the extreme southeast corner of the Foley Property. Although the Southeast Hills have a long history of livestock grazing, they have been subject to limited development, contain large expanses of native vegetation, and serve as a wildlife corridor between Pleasanton Ridge Regional Park and the wildlands around San Antonio Reservoir. The Southeast Hills, for the purpose of this mapping priority project, consist of four properties, all formerly or currently uses for livestock grazing:

- Lund Ranch II (196 acres)[2]
- Spotorno Property (158 acres)
- Oak Grove Property (560 acres)
- Foley Property (606 acres)

As shown in Exhibit B (Project Location Map), the Lund Ranch II, Spotorno, and Oak Grove properties are all within City limits, while the Foley Property is located entirely in unincorporated Alameda County. The City's Urban Growth Boundary (UGB; affirmed by Measure FF in November 1996), beyond which urban development is not permitted to occur, bisects the Spotorno, Foley, and Oak Grove properties. Lund Ranch II is encompassed entirely within the UGB.

POLICY CONTEXT

The General Plan identifies protection of the open space character of the Southeast Hills as an important planning consideration, stating: "Consideration should be given to preserving large open-space acreage in South Pleasanton and in the Southeast Hills by a combination of private open space and a public park system."

Policies related to protection of the Southeast Hills, which incorporates the hillside protection elements of Measure PP and promotes the preservation of hillside areas, are excerpted below. These policies were taken into account in developing the hillside mapping methodology

[2] The Lund Ranch II site was mapped pursuant to Measure PP as part of the evaluation leading up to the entitlements for that project, and is excluded from the mapping contained in this report.

described in this report. Generally, the methodologies selected would be protective of steep slopes in the Southeast Hills, consistent with the spirit of the following policies.

Land Use Element

Policy 21: Preserve scenic hillside and ridge views of the Pleasanton, Main, and Southeast Hills ridges (Measure QQ, Nov. 2008).

Program 21.1: Continue to implement the land-use and development standards of the Pleasanton Ridgelands Initiative of 1993 (Measure F).

Program 21.2: Study the feasibility of preserving large open-space areas in the Southeast Hills by a combination of private open-space and a public park system (Measure QQ, Nov. 2008).

Program 21.3: Ridgelines and hillsides shall be protected. Housing units and structures shall not be placed on slopes of 25 percent or greater, or within 100 vertical feet of a ridgeline. No grading to construct residential or commercial structures shall occur on hillside slopes 25 percent or greater, or within 100 vertical feet of a ridgeline. Exempt from this policy are housing developments of 10 or fewer housing units on a single property. Splitting dividing, or subdividing a "legal parcel" to approve more than 10 housing units is not allowed (Measure PP, Nov. 2008).

Open Space and Conservation Element

Program 6.7: Continue to restrict private development in areas designated as Public Health and Safety and Wildlands Overlay to a single-family home on existing lots of record as of September 16, 1986.

Policy 12: Protect the health and safety of the community by excluding development in hazardous or environmentally sensitive areas.

Program 12.1: Land containing no slope of less than 25 percent should be limited to one single family home per existing lot of record.

Community Character Element

Policy 20: Preserve scenic hillside and ridge views, and other natural features in the hills.

Program 20.1: Continue to support the Pleasanton Ridgelands Initiative of 1993 (Measure F).

Program 20.2: In new developments, preserve scenic hillsides and other hillside features including ridges, plants, streams, and wildlife.

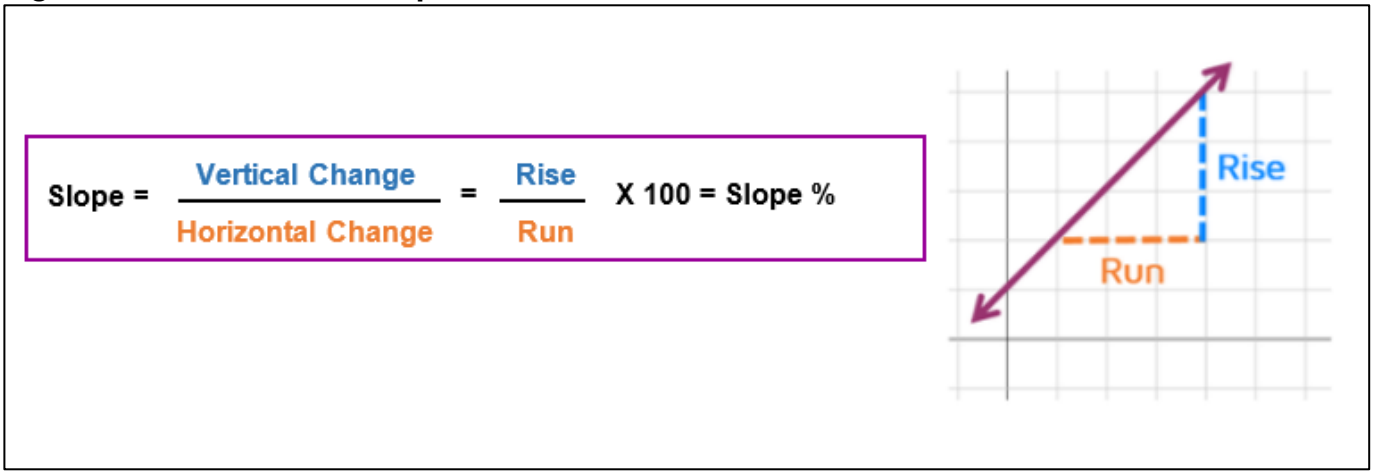
Program 20.3: Discourage grading on slopes of 25 percent or greater.

DISCUSSION

As noted above, while Measure PP included a specific purpose and General Plan Policy, it does not have technical definitions for terms involved in mapping hillsides, such as "structure," "ridgeline" and "slope." Furthermore, while many cities in the Bay Area have hillside protection ordinances, Measure PP's restrictions more uniquely apply to large hillside areas. For instance, Danville, Moraga, San Ramon, and Orinda all have hillside protection ordinances, but those apply to specific mapped areas, minimizing difficulties in defining where ridgelines begin and end (discussed further below). Nevertheless, in preparing the mapping for the Southeast Hills, the methodology developed by staff incorporates the most current and detailed mapping resources to be most reflective of the purpose of Measure PP's interest in protecting ridgelines and hillsides extending over a long distance. The following discussion presents a step-by-step summary of the methodology and techniques the City used to undertake the mapping priority project presented in this report.

1. *Identify 25 Percent Over/Under Slopes*. An initial task involved mapping slopes over and under 25 percent. Slope is generally defined as rise (vertical distance up a hill) divided by run (horizontal distance across the landscape), multiplied by 100 to generate a percentage (see Figure 1). Most local communities with hillside protection ordinances recommend using mapping with contour intervals less than 5 feet. The City has very granular topographical mapping of the Southeast Hills that uses 1-foot contours, dating from 2014, which was used as part of the mapping presented in this report. The granularity of the topography was next averaged-out over 3-foot by 3-foot areas, consistent with standard Geographic Information Systems (GIS) slope mapping protocol. This approach is thus protective in that even small variations in slope using 1-foot contour intervals are mapped, but the "noise" of minor variations in topography is reduced by averaging out slopes over 9-square-foot areas. Exhibit C is the resultant map of slopes over and under 25 percent using the methodology described above. Figure 2 illustrates sample slopes on Longview Drive, a road that climbs steeply west from Foothill Road, up Pleasanton Ridge.

Figure 1: Calculation of Slope

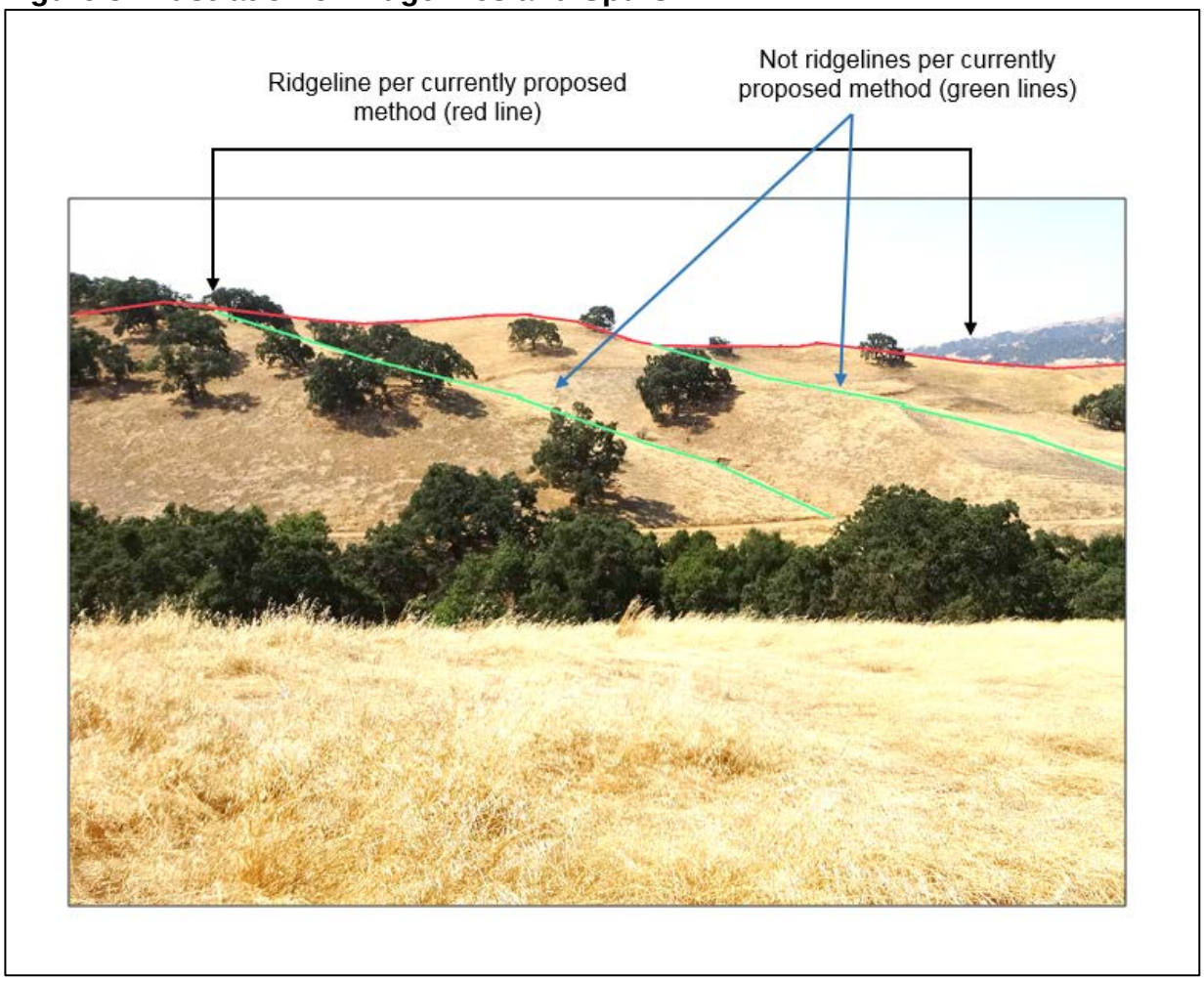


2. *Define Ridgeline*. There is no formal definition of "ridge" or "ridgeline" in Measure PP or the General Plan, but Chapter 18.76 of the Municipal Code for the Hillside Planned Development District defines ridge as "a connected series of major and minor hills" and a ridgeline as "a ground line located at the highest elevation of the ridge running parallel to

the long axis of the ridge." This latter definition is useful in the Southeast Hills, which is characterized by long ridgelines running in a generally northerly or northwesterly direction. While the long ridgelines in the Southeast Hills seem to obviously meet the definition of the landform, many ridges contain short "spurs" that extend in a perpendicular fashion off the main ridge. These spurs, likely created by two parallel drainages flowing down the side of the ridge from the ridgeline, typically fall steeply to the valley floor. If portions of these spurs fell within the horizontal area already encompassed within the 100-foot vertical setback (and exhibited the drainage-derived topography described above), they were not considered ridgelines. This approach eliminated from Measure PP spurs and secondary ridges subservient to the main ridgelines (see Figures 3 and 4 for examples of ridgelines and spurs).

Figure 2: Slopes on Longview Drive

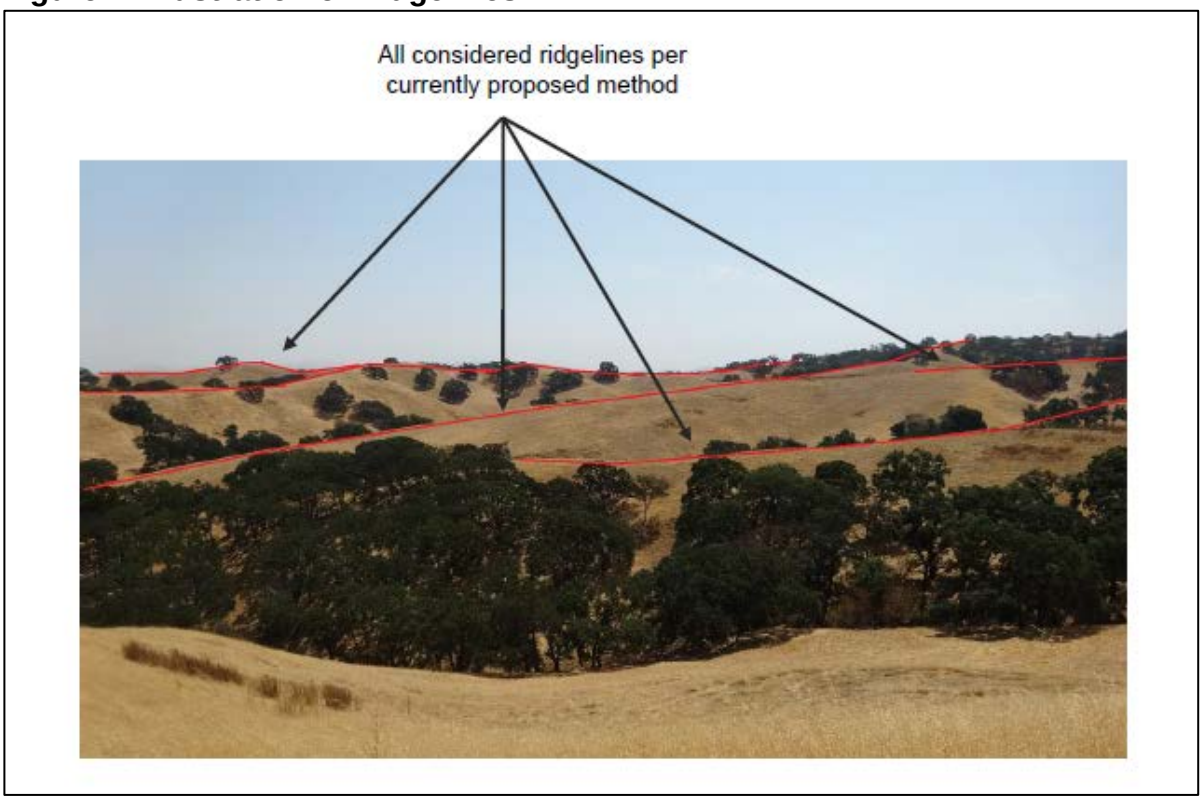
Figure 3: Illustration of Ridgelines and Spurs



3. *Define Where a Ridgeline Ends*. Previous mapping identified the ends of a ridgeline as the "last hill," or the two points at which a ridgeline no longer rises in elevation. Although the last hill method would protect the most prominent upper part of a cone-shaped hill, it could leave unprotected a long ridgeline that rises to a high point, and then gently and uniformly slopes down to the valley floor, similar to Pleasanton Ridge or Sunol Ridge. Therefore, staff considered all landforms with obvious high ground more than 200 feet above the valley floor to be ridgelines. The 200-foot criterion is related to Measure PP's protection of a 100-foot vertical setback below the ridgeline, described below. Because of the 100-foot-setback provision of Measure PP, ridgelines must end at least 100 feet above the valley floor (otherwise, a ridge could end 100 feet above the valley floor, and the 100-foot setback would encompass the entire valley floor). Cognizant that there are many options for determining where a ridgeline should terminate, staff selected a 200-foot rule for the mapping as a reasonable means of allowing development in the flat areas near hillsides while ensuring that structures are limited to lower elevations. In this mapping, ridgelines also terminate at the boundaries of the Southeast Hills, regardless of whether the 200-feet-above-valley-floor rule has been met. Figure 5 illustrates the

difference between the “last hill” approach and the 200-foot rule, as applied to Sunol Ridge.

Figure 4: Illustration of Ridgelines

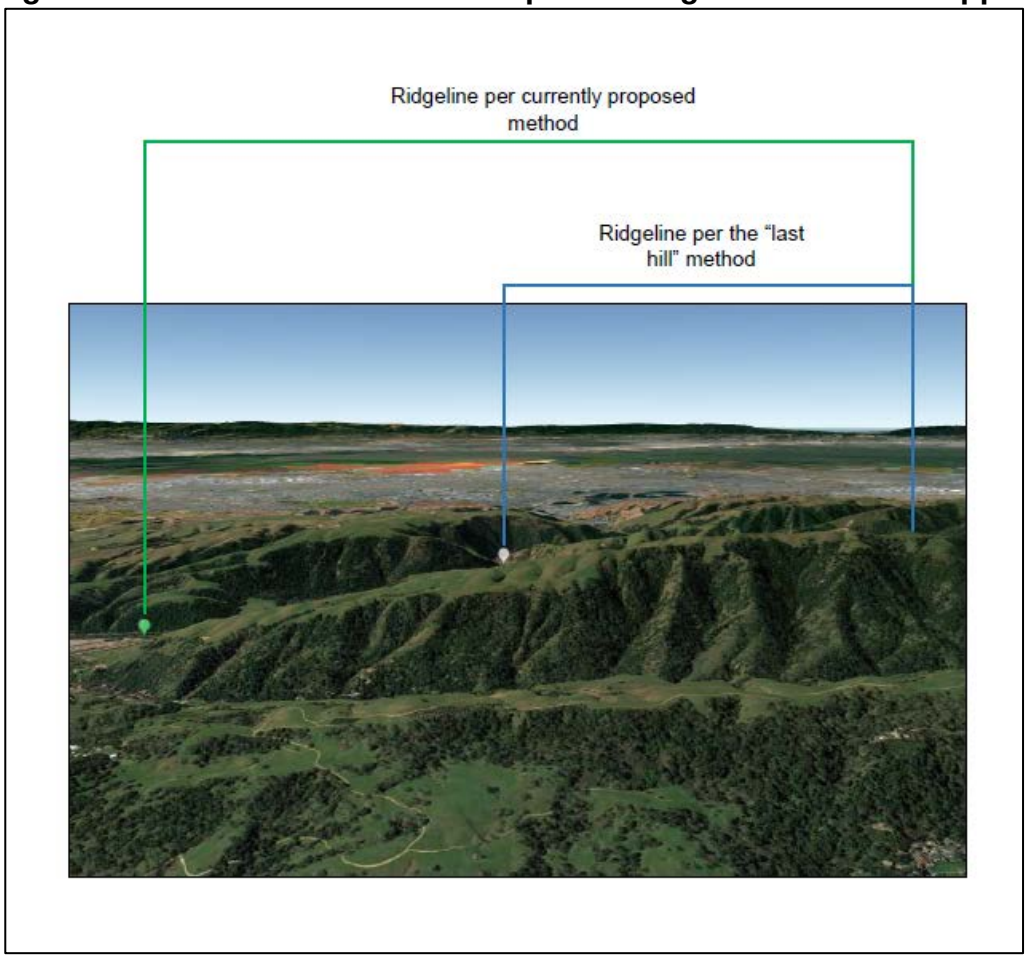


4. *Identify 100-Foot Vertical Setback*. Measure PP prohibits development within 100 vertical feet of a ridgeline. For the mapping presented in this report, this setback is defined as the horizontal line measured 100 vertical feet below the ridgeline, which is then plotted on a topographic map. Note that in the Southeast Hills, there are many closely-spaced ridgelines, meaning that some of the ridges have overlapping 100-foot vertical setbacks. Similar to the rule regarding termination of a ridgeline, vertical setbacks also terminate at the boundary of the mapping area for the Southeast Hills. For purposes of mapping clarity, these 100-foot vertical setbacks were combined, allowing for a contiguous polygon setback area around the ridgelines in the Southeast Hills project area. Exhibit D is the resultant map of ridgelines and 100-foot vertical setbacks using the methodology described above.

5. *Field-verify*. After undertaking preliminary mapping of slopes, ridgelines, and vertical setbacks, staff visited and hiked through the Southeast Hills, generally focusing on the northern and western reaches closest to existing development. The primary purpose of the visit was to better understand the distinction between ridges and spurs on the landscape, and to confirm that all obvious ridges were identified as such on the mapping. After the field visit, staff made relatively minor adjustments to the mapping to better reflect the observed landforms. The final composite map, included as Exhibit E, shows areas protected by Measure PP (areas that contain slopes over 25 percent and/or are within the 100-foot vertical ridgeline setback area) and areas that would not be protected

by Measure PP. Areas protected by Measure PP would be off limits to development of more than 10 residential units per legal lot.

Figure 5: 'Last Hill" Method vs. Proposed Ridgeline Definition Approach



The mapping contained in this report is intended to provide City decisions-makers and the public with a birds-eye view of Measure PP-related development constraints in the Southeast Hills. When individual projects are proposed in the area, project applicants would be expected to conduct Measure PP mapping of their specific development sites, allowing for more fine-tuned development proposals reflecting the actual topography of project sites at the time of any proposed development. This mapping of individual project sites will be required to use the methodology identified in this report, and be generally consistent with the mapping provided in this report, but could show a finer-grained pattern of areas subject to Measure PP (and areas not subject to Measure PP). The ultimate objective of each project-specific mapping would be to follow the restrictions of Measure PP while allowing for development of those areas not subject to Measure PP, General Plan, or other environmental considerations. In addition, definition and consideration of other concepts related to Measure PP (e.g., the definition of "structure" and whether artificial slopes should be excluded from Measure PP restrictions) would be undertaken at a project-specific level, per Council direction.

Individual development projects (whether comprising 10 or fewer units on a legal lot and not subject to Measure PP, or more than 10 units on a legal lot and subject to Measure PP) would be subject to environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act

(CEQA), other applicable State laws regarding natural resource protection (i.e., laws concerning creek/stream preservation, and protection of sensitive plant/animal habitat), the General Plan, and other local policies and ordinances related to environmental protection and suitable locations for urban growth. While the mapping contained in this report identifies where development may and may not occur pursuant to Measure PP, it is likely that developable areas would be further constrained once other environmental protection laws and policies are applied.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice of this project was published in *The Valley Times* and the *Pleasanton Weekly.* Staff also sent letters regarding the mapping to the property owners within the Southeast Hills. Staff met with one interested party to review the mapping and methodology. At the time that the Planning Commission staff report was written, staff had not received any public comments on this mapping project.

ALTERNATIVES

Alternatives that could be explored would involve changes to the methodology underlying the mapping presented in this report. For instance, the "last hill" approach could be used to determine the termination of ridges, or the mapping could be undertaken with 10-foot contours or 5-foot contours instead of 1-foot contours. Ridgelines could also be determined to end at 150 feet (or 300 feet) above the valley floor instead of 200 feet. As discussed in this report, these and other alternative methodologies have merit, but would not likely result in substantially different mapping outcomes, or would not be as protective of some hillsides as the approach used in this report. In addition, the methods and rules identified in this report would be easily transferrable to the mapping of other hillsides areas elsewhere in the City. A "last hill" approach to defining where ridgelines terminate, for instance, may be subject to much debate, as natural hillsides exhibit a great deal of topographic variation.

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

This project is categorically exempt from environmental review pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act Guidelines, Section 15308, Actions by Regulatory Agencies for Protection of the Environment. Therefore, no environmental review document accompanies this report.

SUMMARY/CONCLUSION

Staff believes that the mapping of the Southeast Hills presented in this report is consistent with Measure PP, and can be employed in other parts of the City, where mapping of hillsides is desired. The mapping of the Southeast Hills contained in this report indicates limited development potential in the area, and supports the protection of much of the area in its existing natural state. The Planning Commission's comments and recommendation on this mapping and underlying methodology will be presented to the City Council.

Primary Author:
Adam Weinstein, Planning Manager/Deputy Director of Community Development, 925-931-5606 or aweinstein@cityofpleasantonca.gov

Reviewed/Approved By:
Megan Canales, Assistant Planner
Larissa Seto, Assistant City Attorney
Brian Dolan, Assistant City Manager
Gerry Beaudin, Community Development Director