

Melissa Thurman

From: Nuria Bertran <nuriabertranortiz@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, June 6, 2025 3:45 PM
To: Public Comment
Subject: PUBLIC COMMENT – NOT ON THE AGENDA

Re: Traffic Calming/Speed Limit Enforcement on Streets Leading to High School (Alvarado Avenue/Panchita Way/Los Ninos Way/Casita Way/Alicia Way)

The current traffic situation around Los Altos High School is not conducive to elementary aged kids biking/walking to their neighborhood school. There is simply too much traffic chaos and speeding especially on the streets coming from San Antonio or El Camino Real (as listed above). Can the Town please find a solution for this? Here's a few I can think of:

1. Make sure the High School's schedule does NOT coincide with the elementary school schedule in the morning or at dismissal time.
2. Install traffic cameras on those streets and simply mail tickets to any car exceeding the speed limit. Make the fines hefty so it sticks.

I think the elementary aged kids have a right to gain some independence by going to school on their own without it being too risky due to irresponsible driving from parents or kids going to/from the High School.

Thank you in advance for your consideration in this matter.

Best;

Nuria Bertran-Ortiz
(Arbuelo Way resident)

Melissa Thurman

From: Anne Paulson <anne.paulson@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 9, 2025 12:51 PM
To: Public Comment
Subject: Agendizing a fee holiday for small housing projects
Attachments: Impact fee holiday.pdf

Dear Mayor Dailey and Councilmembers,

The City needs small housing projects of 2-10 units, the kind of projects that could be built by the same people who now build large single family houses. But we haven't been seeing these projects come forward. One reason could be our impact fees and (for projects of 5 to 10 units) our inclusionary fees, which are very high.

Please agendize a discussion about a short "fee holiday" to incentivize projects of 2-10 units. Attached is a discussion about this issue.

It would be great if a Los Altos resident who wanted to downsize, or a new family wanting to move to our City, could buy a townhouse or a small detached house here!

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-- Anne Paulson

A Fee Holiday for Small Residential Projects

Los Altos Affordable Housing Alliance

June 3, 2025

Executive Summary

The City of Los Altos recently rezoned a number of small parcels for housing, but we haven't seen any housing built in any of the parcels. Our impact and inclusionary fees on small multifamily housing—\$366,000 for one townhouse!—are one reason why developers might find it infeasible to build small multifamily projects like townhouses; three-, four-, five-, and six-plexes; and small detached houses. Our current system charges more than six times as much in fees to build one townhouse on a lot as we charge for a maxed out house. And that's preventing us from building the housing we need. To encourage building small multifamily projects at the scale of single family homes, we propose a pilot project of an 18 month fee holiday on projects of two to ten units, to encourage small-scale builders to build small projects.

The Problem

These are uncertain economic times. But people still need a place to live. We need more homes in Los Altos, and to accomplish that we need to make it easier and cheaper to build them.

In the last few years, what we've seen being built and offered to the public is large and expensive single family homes¹, and condos. We at LAAHA are always happy when someone gets their new dream home in Los Altos, but we'd like to see a greater variety in home types available in our city.

In particular, our city needs homes for young couples starting out, empty nest couples wanting to downsize, families with school-aged kids wanting to take advantage of our excellent schools, and community members who through divorce or loss of a spouse need to find a smaller home. Right now the City offers few options for those households. That's why we need to see some smaller, naturally more affordable projects of two to ten units: townhouses, small detached houses on small lots, and small apartment or condo buildings.

Being shorter and less dense, these little homes would fit more unobtrusively in our neighborhoods. They are the kinds of projects that could be built by builders who now build big single family houses. Our recent rezoning of parcels on Altos Oaks Drive, Loyola Corners, and small parcels around Luckys should have enabled small projects like these, but we have not seen any proposals on the newly rezoned sites or on other sites.

One reason we haven't seen small projects is our large fees. A small-scale builder could build a large house on a lot in Los Altos, or on the same sized lot² they could build five townhouses or

¹ New construction single family homes are averaging around \$7 million in Los Altos.

² Or on the same exact lot, if they used SB 1123, which comes into effect in July

five small SB 684 houses. The large house would pay about \$55K in inclusionary and impact fees. The five townhouses would pay \$366K each, for a total of \$1.8 million. Faced with those gigantic fees for a small multifamily project, the builder is going to choose the single house instead. The City should not put its thumb on the scale to favor giant houses over more modest-sized homes for our own neighbors who want to downsize as they get older, for our neighbors whose family circumstances, like divorce, force them to find a smaller place, or for other families looking for homes. The City should not welcome people who can afford \$7 million homes, while making Los Altos unaffordable to young couples wanting to start out here and young families wanting their children to enjoy our great schools and terrific community.

The City charges more in impact fees for a townhouse than for a huge single family house. But the real hit for townhouses comes from our inclusionary in-lieu fee, which applies to townhouses but not mansions. A quarter of a million dollars in inclusionary fees per unit in these small developments—plus almost another hundred thousand in impact fees—renders them almost impossible to build (see Appendix 1).

The way bigger, taller projects can pencil under our inclusionary requirements is by using the State Density Bonus to add more units, and add another story to put them in; the density bonus units partially offset the cost of building the inclusionary units. Without the bonus units, the big projects wouldn't be feasible either.³

But the State Density Bonus can't grant an applicant more land to put another townhouse in. There's no room for density bonus townhouses on a small parcel. So the builder of the five unit project has to pay our inclusionary fee—\$272K for a typically sized three bedroom townhouse—but has no offsetting revenue from density bonus units. The same is true for small SB 684 houses, and small apartment or condo buildings; the developer is forced to pay the fee or build the inclusionary units,⁴ but cannot build bonus units to offset the cost.

Even for smaller projects of two to four units, our impact fees are huge. A townhouse in a project of four townhouses pays about twice as much as a giant new single family house. Almost \$100K per townhouse, for these smaller projects, is an enormous fee.

The current fees are too high, pushing builders to build large single family houses instead of the smaller homes we also need. By removing these fees we can kickstart the building of the kind of housing we are lacking. San Jose recently enacted a wildly successful fee holiday for large

³ Rather than use the State Density Bonus Law to get more units, a developer can instead use it to waive our ordinance that inclusionary units have to be the same size as market rate units. It amounts to the same thing; a smaller part of the project floor area is devoted to inclusionary units, whether because of density bonus units or because of tiny inclusionary units, and therefore the cost of the inclusionary units is reduced.

⁴ Parking is a big problem. Even when there's room for another unit, or two or three, there's not room for surface parking for the units. And underground parking is so expensive builders avoid it. Even for big projects, underground parking is crippling expensive, which is why the developer of the new 95 First Street project is planning surface parking for his midrise. So even when it seems like more units can fit in a parcel, once surface parking is taken into account, no more units can fit.

multifamily projects.⁵ A small-scale developer suggested that we emulate San Jose's fee holiday not for large multifamily projects, but for small multifamily projects instead, and we enthusiastically agree.

The Solution: A Fee Holiday

We propose Los Altos incentivize small projects of more affordable housing by offering a "fee holiday" pilot program: for the next 18 months, developers of projects of 2-10 units would not be charged impact fees or inclusionary fees/requirements. We'd evaluate this pilot program by seeing how many projects of 2 to 4 units and how many projects of 5 to 10 units were approved.

Eighteen months is long enough to see if the fee holiday makes a difference. Since we're getting no projects of 2-10 units right now, if we saw three or more projects, that would look like a success, and look like the fees we have now are too high. If we saw no projects or just one during the fee holiday, we'd learn the useful albeit depressing fact that even a \$1.8 million (for five units) to \$3.6 million (for ten units) reduction in the cost of building a small project doesn't make it feasible. If the fee holiday didn't generate more housing, we could re-institute the fees. If we got dozens of projects, we could ratchet the fees up. If we institute a fee holiday, we can find out if our fees are too high, and potentially get some more infill housing that's affordable to more families.

⁵<https://www.mercurynews.com/2025/05/14/san-jose-incentive-program-spurs-multifamily-development-economy-interest-rate-construction-costs/>

Appendix 1: Impact Fees in Los Altos

Impact fees and inclusionary fees for small projects in Los Altos									
	Total fees per unit	Total fees per project	Units in project	Size of unit (sq ft)	Impact fee (per sq ft) ⁶	Arts fee per unit (estimated)	Total impact fees per unit	Inclusionary in-lieu fee (per sq ft) ⁷	Inclusionary fee per unit
Single family house	\$55,560	\$55,560	1	4000	\$13.89	\$0	\$55,560	\$0	\$0
Four townhouses	\$94,016	\$376,064	4	1600	\$51.26	\$12,000	\$94,016	\$0	\$0
Fiveplex (rental)	\$150,534	\$752,670	5	900	\$51.26	\$9,000	\$55,134	\$106	\$95,400
Fiveplex (for Housing typesale)	\$176,260	\$881,300	5	1000	\$51.26	\$10,000	\$61,260	\$115	\$115,000
Five townhouses	\$366,016	\$1,830,080	5	1600	\$51.26	\$12,000	\$94,016	\$170	\$272,000
Five little houses (SB 684)	\$335,808	\$1,679,038	5	1750	\$13.89	\$14,000	\$38,308	\$170 ⁸	\$297,500

⁶ Impact fees from City Council Resolution 2024-54:

https://www.losaltosca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/public_works/page/39101/reso_no_2024-54_adopting_development_impact_and_li-li-eu_fees_-_signed.pdf

⁷ Inclusionary fees from City Council Resolution 2024-04:

https://www.losaltosca.gov/sites/default/files/fileattachments/ordinance/86211/reso_no_2024-04_inclusionary_housing_in-lieu_fee_-_signed.pdf

⁸ Los Altos planning staff told us small houses using SB 684 would be subject to the same inclusionary in-lieu fee as townhouses

Melissa Thurman

From: PALLA <pallalosaltos@gmail.com>
Sent: Monday, June 9, 2025 1:46 PM
To: Public Comment
Subject: Public Comment June 10, 2025: Items Not On Agenda- Actions Needed for Los Altos Heritage Orchard Failure
Attachments: Actions Needed for Los Altos Heritage Orchard Failure .pdf

Dear City Council,

Attached please find a Public Comment letter dated June 9, 2025, regarding Actions Needed for the Los Altos Heritage Orchard Failure.

Please acknowledge receipt with a response to this email from both the City Clerk and the City Manager.

Please provide notice of any future agenda items related to the Los Altos Heritage Orchard.

Thank you for your consideration.

June 9, 2025

Los Altos City Council
1 N San Antonio Road
Los Altos, CA 94022

Subject: Actions Needed for Los Altos Heritage Orchard Failure

Dear City Council,

For the past year, Preservation Action League Los Altos (PALLA) has been sounding the alarm that the Los Altos Heritage Orchard is failing. We've independently sought the input of regional orchardists and historical landscape experts, have had continuous meetings with the director of the Los Altos History Museum and alerted the City Manager as recently as Friday, April 18, 2025.

We now write to express our grave concern and utter dismay at the ongoing deterioration of the public lands that are the Los Altos Heritage Orchard, an irreplaceable cultural landscape and historic resource and historic landmark. The orchard's collapse is the result of the City's failure to uphold its duties under Los Altos Municipal Code 12.44.200 and its public trust function, and the unacceptable performance of its contracted maintenance entity the volunteer-led Orchard Commons Committee under the direction of the Los Altos History Museum.

Despite the City's public assurances, the facts are undeniable:

- Orchard trees are dying at an alarming rate: at least 147 trees since September 2024. The LAHM Blog, dated March 29, 2025, identifies 92 additional trees that have died since the Historical Alteration Permit was issued for the removal of 22 separate trees in January 2025. A near 30% tree loss within 18 months is an abject failure.
- The contractor has not fulfilled basic duties and obligations violating both the terms of the City's maintenance contract, historic preservation ordinance requirements and accepted historic preservation standards, demonstrating a lack of understanding of regional and historical agricultural principles and practices.
- Public communications by the contractor have misled the public, laying blame on climate and disease when in fact experimental irrigation practices were untested and schedules altered; soil compaction was increased with no understory, no nutrient amendments and no disking; and potentially productive trees were neither treated for optimal health with allowable spraying or pruned to standard practices. Of note, nearby Sunnyvale and Saratoga Heritage Orchards are anticipating abundant harvests this season per their orchardists.

- Extensive utility boring and construction related to adjacent projects was undertaken with neither environmental impact studies nor tree protection, and orchard trees were repositioned with no historic alteration permits. Mapping shows a predominance of tree loss in construction areas.
- Neither a cultural landscape assessment nor an orchard management plan have been completed. A qualified historical arborist has not been engaged and no public oversight sought as is best practice for preservation under State Office of Historic Preservation (OHP) and Secretary of the Interior Standards.
- Repeated PRA requests, and emails and orchard walkthroughs with OCC, LAHM and the City Manager have yielded no records: health reports, irrigation plans, monitoring plans, etc. An inclusive arborist report dated May 23, 2025, also omits a health report on remaining trees.

This is more than negligence. This is a clear breach of the public's trust and a dereliction of the City's duty to safeguard historic public resources for current and future generations.

Please add to the next City Council agenda, the following discussion and actions:

1. Reassessment of the current maintenance contract for failure of contractor and City staff to comply with contract terms, substandard performance and material damage to a protected resource.
2. Formation of an emergency task force composed of independent historic preservation experts, community stakeholders, and certified arborists and orchardists with historic and cultural landscape expertise.
3. Allocation of emergency funding for an independent study and full condition assessment of the remaining orchard with findings, and further funding as determined.
4. A public hearing and study session to present study results, assess project history and outline corrective actions.
5. Enforcement of all applicable local, state, and federal standards related to the preservation of public historic resources including the Los Altos Historic Preservation Ordinance, Certified Local Government responsibilities and CEQA mandates.

The Los Altos community cannot stand by as our public lands are mismanaged, misrepresented and irreparably harmed. The Heritage Orchard will not become barren land or a "memorial garden" for convenience or development. The Heritage Orchard is a living testament to our agricultural history, a recognized regional historic resource, and together with the J Gilbert Smith House, the last remaining orchard farmstead in the Valley of the Heart's Delight. Our Heritage (Civic Center) Orchard is a cultural landscape and landmark that has been at the heart of our city and a cherished part of the Los Altos identity for nearly 125 years.

We urge City Council to act swiftly, and with the integrity and transparency the Los Altos Heritage Orchard deserves.

Please acknowledge receipt of this letter. Again, we request a formal and timely response to this serious and urgent matter.

Sincerely,

Maria Bautista and Catherine Nunes for PALLA,
Preservation Action League Los Altos