
567 Maybell Avenue (Maybell Orchards)

Frequently Asked Questions

Prepared by City of Palo Alto Staff

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1. Will the project increase traffic on Maybell Avenue during peak school traffic? Will the Clemo barrier be moved? How do we know how many trips the senior housing will generate?

Response: The project will generate only about 10 new AM peak hour trips on Maybell (one per six minutes on average), and all but two of those are expected to turn right from the Arastradero Park Apartments driveway onto Maybell, away from the peak school traffic.

- The barrier on Clemo will not be moved and there will not be direct access from any homes to Maybell.
- Four existing driveways onto Maybell will be eliminated.
- The traffic generation rates used for the senior housing are conservative. Trips from 3 similar senior projects in Palo Alto and from traffic engineering rates nationally are about 30% lower. This is because seniors in affordable projects generally do not work, are less likely to afford their own vehicles, and travel at off-peak times.

2. Will the project increase bicycle and pedestrian conflicts with vehicles on Maybell Avenue?

Staff Response: No, again only two new trips are expected to be generated in the direction of the school traffic on Maybell during the peak morning school commute.

- The project will contribute to bicycle and pedestrian safety by adding sidewalks to the non-paved segments of Maybell Avenue from the school to El Camino Real.
- Four existing conflict points (driveways to existing homes) will be removed.
- Parking limitations along Maybell during these hours and other bicycle and pedestrian improvements are planned as part of the project and/or as part of the City's Maybell Bicycle Boulevard and Safe Routes to School projects.

3. Will emergency access (fire, ambulance) be impeded by the project?

Staff Response: No, the Palo Alto Fire Department has reviewed the project and does not anticipate any adverse impacts on emergency services. An additional access through the site is provided by the connection of the project site to the adjacent Arastradero Park Apartments and its driveway to Maybell Avenue.

4. Isn't the project density and height out of character with the surrounding area?

Staff Response: The density is higher than the single family residential area opposite Maybell Avenue, but that is primarily due to the higher density senior affordable units, which in most respects have lesser impacts than lower density, market rate homes.

- The height of the senior project is about 45 feet (with some equipment up to 50 feet), much less than the 100-foot high Tan Apartments immediately adjacent.
- The height steps down as a transition from the 6-story Tan Apartments at Arastradero to the 4-story senior housing to the 2-3 story Arastradero Apartments to the single-family homes along Maybell.
- The design of the homes along Maybell have been reduced in height to be more compatible with existing homes, as directed by the Architectural Review Board.

5. Is this site appropriate for affordable senior housing, given lack of proximity to transit and services?

Staff Response: Affordable housing sites are extremely difficult to obtain and equally difficult to finance, and no other suitable sites exist and are available in Palo Alto.

- The project is less than one-quarter mile from El Camino Real, which has (and will continue to develop) support services and has frequent bus service, at some point to be upgraded to Bus Rapid Transit with a stop in this area.
- The Palo Alto Housing Corporation is adept at providing transportation, recreational, educational and social services to its tenants, and does so currently at the adjacent Arastradero Park Apartments.

6. Why has traffic on Maybell increased? What is the City doing to minimize impacts of traffic increases?

Staff Response: Staff believes that a prime reason for the increase in traffic over the past couple of years is an increase in school enrollment of approximately 350 students at Barron Park and Juana Briones Elementary Schools, and that most of the new students are relocated from outside the prior school boundaries, meaning they are more likely to be driven to school. The striping of Arastradero Road may have contributed to a lesser degree as well, although the traffic counts during the trial didn't show reduced traffic on Arastradero Road, which would have indicated cut-through on Maybell or other streets.

7. How can the City assure that the senior housing units remain available for seniors only?

Staff Response: The condition of the loan requires affordability to be maintained for a 55-year period. This is also a condition of the Planned Community zoning, so a zone change would be required to convert the units to market rates.

8. What would be allowed if the site is not rezoned as requested? What project review would be required

Staff Response: If the site remains zoned as it is (R-2 and RM-15), staff believes that the resultant “market rate” housing would have a greater impact on both traffic and the generation of school-age children.

- The traffic study verifies that the proposed Maybell Orchard project would generate only 16 net new AM peak hour trips and 21 net new PM peak hour trips, whereas a 34 unit market rate single-family project under existing zoning would generate 22 net new AM peak hour trips and 32 net new PM peak hour trips.
- The student yield for a 34 unit market rate project would be a net increase of approximately 22 students, whereas the proposed development would yield an estimated net increase of 8 students.
- The review for a 34 unit market rate project would comprise design review by the Architectural Review Board only. No review would be required by the Planning and Transportation Commission or the City Council.

9. Can the property be preserved for a park or playing fields? What are the implications?

Staff Response: The property could be used for parks or playing fields if the City were to purchase the land (at an estimated cost of \$16 million+).

- The City would lose an opportunity to provide much-needed senior affordable housing.
- The site is too small to accommodate a full-size playing field, and would have significant traffic, parking and noise impacts to be considered.

10. What happens to the City’s loans to PAHC if the project is not approved? Isn’t the loan from taxpayer funds?

Staff Response: The City has included language in the loan documents to note that approval of the loans does not assure approval of the project.

- Extensive safeguards in the documents allow the City to recover its funds in the event the project is not approved, with multiple options for either purchasing the remainder of the site or assuming site ownership if necessary.
- The funds for the loan are derived from the City’s housing fund, comprised of “in-lieu” contributions from housing and commercial developments in the City. No general fund sources are used.