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Housing, open space debated

By Chris Crowell

Housing shortages, open space and the University's right to expand were all debated in a well-attended meeting held yesterday evening in the Palo Alto City Council Chambers.

Santa Clara County Supervisor Joseph Simitian mediated an open-forum discussion of the Stanford Draft Development Plan and General Use Permit Application. Together, these documents lay out Stanford's plans for expansion, and are subject to approval by the County.

In the next 10 years, Stanford intends to add 4 million square feet of academic, athletic and housing facilities to its current 12 million. Most agree that Stanford needs to grow to maintain its premier status, but critics worry that Stanford is expanding in the wrong way and for the wrong reasons.

Peter Drekmeier of the Stanford Open Space Alliance feels that expansion plans are being orchestrated not by the administration but by the Stanford Management Co., whose "mandate is (not education but) to turn real estate into profit."

Drekmeier pointed out that only seven of Stanford's 34 Trustees live in San Mateo or Santa Clara Counties, and accused the Board of Trustees of being "absentee landowners" who were uninformed and unwilling to listen to community input regarding land use issues.

Trustee T. Robert Burke, who serves on the Land and Buildings Committee, agreed that trustees could not be equally informed about all issues. But Burke rejected the notion that Stanford's Trustees, who represent such a diverse community of students and alumni, could be expected to live locally.

Larry Horton, Director of Government and Community Relations for Stanford, also disputed Drekmeier's contentions. "We think we are good neighbors," Horton said, "and we will continue to be one of the best preservers of open space in Northern California." Horton also cited Stanford's victory in a 1997 vote over the Sand Hill Road building project as evidence that the public is behind Stanford.

Drekmeier is unconvinced. He wants a permanent guarantee that Stanford will not expand into the foothills, a development strategy focused on increasing the density of the existing core campus, and an emphasis on building housing before commercial structures.

Students and faculty were divided on the issue. ASSU President Mike Levin, a junior, spoke at the meeting to "defend Stanford's right to prosper."

History Prof. Paul Robinson identified housing shortages as an impediment to recruiting junior faculty, but supported efforts to increase density within existing faculty neighborhoods.

Caneel Fraser, a sophomore, argued that Stanford's decisions set a precedent for urban sprawl issues and urged more students to educate themselves about land-use issues. "I love Stanford and I want Stanford to expand. But it's not if we expand, it's how we expand," she said.