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County Pans Stanford's Draft Growth Plan Many key details said to be missing

By Bill Workman

Stanford University's draft proposals for campus growth over the next decade have been sharply criticized by Santa Clara County planners as too vague and often lacking in key details.

In their initial review of Stanford's so-called "community plan," submitted 10 days ago, planners came down hard on the what they said was a document seriously inadequate in several areas, including the land use, traffic circulation, safety and conservation elements.

"We feel there are some pretty big pieces missing," planner Sarah Jones said yesterday.

For example, she said, Stanford needs to produce much more specific details on what kinds of housing will go up and where it will be on campus.

"We just don't have enough information about what types of development are proposed and what the densities would be," Jones said.

Stanford has said it wants to build 2,780 more units of campus housing, in addition to more than 1,000 units that are already under construction or planned, in order to make housing more affordable for students, faculty and staff.

The planners' interim report also contended that the university has ignored the Planning Commission's request that an "academic growth boundary" be established to separate the main campus -- where Stanford has said the vast majority of new development would take place -- and the foothills that environmentalists have insisted should be designated as permanent open space.

Stanford has not been willing to go that far but insists that it plans only a "small" amount of development, about 20,000 square feet, in the foothill area west of Junipero Serra Boulevard.

Jones said a more complete report of the Stanford plan critique will be sent on to the Planning Commission later this week.

Larry Horton, Stanford's director of community and government relations, took the criticisms in stride. He argued that what the university had submitted was "a very good first draft. We are now going to roll up our sleeves and work with the county" on possible revisions.

The reason some areas of the draft are vaguely worded, he said, is that "we just don't know yet" what may be proposed for sites that will include a new 12,000-seat basketball arena and a performing arts center, as well as new laboratories and office buildings.

"It will take a lot of consultation within our own group before we will be able to present a plan that is finally acceptable to the county," said Horton.

For now, Stanford is scheduled to present its final draft to the County Planning Commission on November 15. Final approval of the plan by the county and renewal of a general use permit, first issued in 1989, has up to now been expected by late 2000 or early 2001.

However, county Supervisor Joe Simitian warned Stanford President Gerhard Casper in a letter during the

weekend that the supervisors' timetable for adoption of a plan could be delayed if the university does not move quickly to make necessary changes.

Right now, Simitian said, county planners "need more to work with if the plan is to comply with state law."

Meanwhile, both friends and foes of Stanford's plan were preparing for a public meeting on it to be held tonight by the county Planning Department. It is scheduled for 6:30 p.m. in multipurpose room T-2 at Cubberley Community Center on Middlefield Road in Palo Alto.