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Photo -- EMILY YATES-DOERR/The Stanford Daily

Caption -- The Stanford Open Space Alliance held a "Save the Foothills" rally yesterday morning outside Memorial Church.

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Campus rally addresses concerns over the University's open spaces

By Udara Fernando, Contributing Writer

Spelling out "Save the Foothills" in four-foot letters, students, faculty and alumni led by the Stanford Open Space Alliance gathered yesterday morning outside Memorial Church to launch a rally protesting the newly proposed Stanford General Use Permit, which includes new construction in the foothills area south of Junipero Serra Boulevard.

Following the demonstration in the Main Quad, representatives of the alliance delivered a letter to the Board of Trustees that explained their position on the Stanford General Use Permit. This letter was published in The Daily yesterday.

The letter called for Stanford to "act with integrity for the long-term good of the community, exemplifying the values it seeks to impart to its students."

The University's draft plan allocates approximately two million square feet for new housing units targeted to accommodate the burgeoning demand for graduate and faculty housing.

The plan also apportions land for more than a million square feet of "academic space," including a new basketball arena that would seat 12,000 fans and a possible Palo Alto-Stanford performing arts center.

In total, Stanford plans to increase its physical plant by about 4 million square feet over the next decade, which translates to a one-third increase of its current size. This increase would be equivalent to three Stanford Shopping Centers.

Upon receiving the letter, the Secretary of the Board of Trustees ensured alliance representatives that a copy of the letter would be distributed to each member of the board and that it would be filed under the formal minutes of the board meeting. The board is holding a regularly-scheduled meeting yesterday and today.

Representatives of SOSA were given a statement from President Gerhard Casper, which responds to some issues raised by critics of the General Use Permit and outlines the University's general position on the issue.

Lynn Stewart, the alumni outreach coordinator for the alliance, was instrumental in obtaining over 200 alumni signatures in support of the petition.

"I love this university deeply," Stewart said, "and I believe that Stanford can maintain its academic excellence without destroying the Foothills."

The alliance's letter points out that many other academic institutions have effectively maintained their reputation without large-scale physical expansion.

Alliance spokesman Peter Drekmeier said the organization's primary objection to the draft of the General

Use Permit was the lack of permanent open-space protection.

Stanford's current land use proposal would reclassify the Stanford Foothills as "Academic Reserve," meaning that they would be open to future development.

The alliance requests that "all the lands southwest of Junipero Serra Boulevard – the Foothills, which are priceless to both the University and the region - as permanent open space."

"If the Trust is believed not to permit permanent dedication," the letter continues, "a 99-year commitment would be a good start."

The alliance also calls for the University to protect as much open space as possible in other areas of the campus, "recognizing that open space is not a 'frill' in comparison with the 'basics' of bigger labs and sports facilities."

Casper's statement maintains that Stanford "welcomes the opinions of its alumni in issues of importance to the university" and recognizes that the Foothills area is "an important habitat for wildlife and an area of great rustic beauty."

However, Casper regrets that "it is disheartening to see Stanford's position on the Foothills and the General Use Permit so thoroughly distorted by our critics."

Casper's statement points out that the University's lands are held in trust to further its academic mission, and "to permanently designate any lands for any other purpose would be contrary to the Stanfords' Founding Grant.

"Stanford has been a more responsible steward of its lands than virtually anybody else on the Peninsula," Casper said. "The preservation of open space did not happen by accident; it results from careful planning."

However, Drekmeier accuses the University of renaming areas that they want to develop in order to dupe the public.

"Casper says that there will be no development in the Foothills area," Drekmeier explains. "But what he does not mention is that the region that is termed the Foothills keeps on decreasing every year."

Critics of the General Use Permit proposal like Stewart and Drekemeier continue to be very vocal and successful in generating community support for their campaign to preserve open space

"The place I grew up in Washington D.C. now has a sixteen lane highway running through it," said Jeb Eddy, an '73 alumnus of the Graduate School of Business.

Eddy was a member of the inaugural class of Public Management Program of the GSB, a program oriented towards applying traditional business practices to the public sector.

Eddy criticized the supporters of the General Use Permit for putting their short-term interest before the desire of the alliance and its supporters to create a legacy. "There's got to be a limit to the extent to which land is eaten up for buildings in the name of 'development,' " he said.

Freshman Rebecca Katz, one of the few undergraduates at the rally, has been attempting to generate support from the student body for the cause.

"One of the reasons I chose to come to Stanford was because I'd have lots of space to frolic in," she said. Katz expressed concern that this space was being lost, piece by piece, and cited this as her reason for getting involved with the alliance.