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Editorial: Stanford plan ready for careful study

Revised plan is more detailed and will calm some critics, but calls for unprecedented growth on the central campus over the next 10 years

Stung and almost offended at the harsh treatment it received from some in the community in September after the release of its initial draft land use plan for the next 10 years, Stanford University officials say their final draft responds to almost all the concerns raised during a series of public meetings over the last few months.

Yes and no.

To be sure, the new 100-page document provides much greater detail and specificity than any previous plan that has guided Stanford development in the past.

It establishes, for the first time, more detailed land use designations and limitations, including clearly defined areas of open space on the core campus, residential density limits and protections along streams and in some foothills areas. These are not insignificant improvements.

In addition, the final plan identifies two possible locations for a new middle school: at the corner of Junipero Serra Boulevard and Page Mill Road and off of Deer Creek Road in the foothills.

Neither site is very appealing to school officials, since they are somewhat isolated and in a heavily congested traffic corridor. And they will not easily be embraced by open space advocates who want to see the hills beyond Junipero Serra preserved from any kind of development. But they are, in our view, viable sites worthy of consideration.

On the touchy subject of open space protections for the foothills, Stanford boasts that its final draft establishes an "academic growth boundary" similar to the county's "urban growth boundaries" which will provide significant new protections from development beyond Junipero Serra.

This falls way short of the demands of some for a 25-year or even permanent commitment to open space on some lands, but it will make it difficult for Stanford to do anything in the foothills for the next 10 years and sets up an expectation for open space beyond that.

Ironically, however, as the plan has become more detailed, potential new controversial issues emerge.

In documenting its commitment to focusing future development on the so-called core campus, for example, it is significant to note that the entire golf course has now been designated as a part of the core campus. This change could foretell a time when the golf course either closed or moved further into the foothills and the current course was developed for housing or other academic purposes. The portion of the golf course beyond Junipero Serra should not, in our opinion, be considered part of the central campus.

Despite the vocal concern over middle school sites and open space protections, the real story of Stanford's 10-year plan is the amount of development proposed on the core campus. As many as 3,000 new housing units and more than 2 million square feet of academic and cultural facilities are proposed, far more in total than what has been built in the last 10 years.

Can the region's transportation infrastructure handle this much in-fill development? On the one hand, the on-campus housing offers potential huge benefits by reducing the number of commuters. On the other hand, all the new academic buildings will employ more people--Stanford is estimating a population

increase of about 2,200 over 10 years.

The proper time for these and other concerns to be raised will be when the environmental impact reports are completed next year and the county proceeds to decide exactly what level of development is appropriate and what mitigation measures should be required.

For now, Stanford's final draft plan provides the most detailed picture the university has ever produced of its land use goals for the future and, once completed, an essential tool for the public to hold it accountable.