

March 5, 2010

Town of Truckee
Planning Commission
10183 Truckee Airport Road
Truckee, CA 96161

Dear Commissioners,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit comments regarding the Pollard Station project proposed for Hilltop. The Mountain Area Preservation Foundation is committed to assuring that decisions regarding Truckee's built environment support and facilitate the preservation of the community's small town character, are in balance with protecting our mountain landscape, and contribute to a sustainable local economy.

Our organization participated fully in the public meetings that began years ago and eventually led to the final adoption of the Hilltop Master Plan in August of 2008. We advocated for many of the environmental policies that are reflected in the plan including restoring and preserving wetlands, preserving as much existing vegetation as possible including trees, and preserving the historic ski hill as open space and a park. We also worked diligently to reduce the overall square footage of commercial space from a high point of 75,400sqft to approximately 52,000sqft.

Now with the very first project to be brought forward under the Hilltop Master Plan, the project proponents, who gave their approval and support to the Hilltop Master Plan, are already looking to bend the rules by seeking amendments on land use, height, density, community character, grading, tree removal and infrastructure improvements.

If the Planning Commission chooses to entertain amending the Hilltop Master Plan, despite the eight years of planning work and public comment that went into creating it, Mountain Area Preservation Foundation urges the Planning Commission to conduct an expanded public outreach process that would also require the project proponents to provide more detailed information on the project before being allowed to proceed in the community planning process.

It would be helpful to have a detailed tree inventory, a topographical map of the site showing slopes greater than 30%, more information on grading, hydrology, storm water management and impacts of road cuts.

The 8.08-acre parcel is located on a north facing heavily treed slope that is zoned for detached single-family dwellings, attached dwellings and co-housing. On first glance we question placing a senior living project on a north-facing slope where limited sun exposure could contribute to dangerous pedestrian conditions, especially for seniors.



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We believe the mass and scale of the Lodge as well as the use would be better served if the project were located on a flat parcel with good sun exposure where tree removal and grading would be limited.

Potential alternate locations include the Barsell property where both K-Mart and a Marriott have been proposed in the past. Most of the trees on the site have already been removed, it is within minutes of downtown and has spectacular south facing views of the Martis Valley and Martis Peak. The Reynolds property could also have potential depending on the delineation of wetlands on the site. This flat and relatively treeless parcel is across from both the Regional Park and 7-11 and fills the area between Palisades and Brockway Road.

The Hilltop Master Plan allows for, but does not guarantee a maximum of 94 units to be built in the Medium Density Residential (DRM) area where Pollard Station is being proposed. Project proponents are asking for 136 units, 94 for the Lodge and 42 for the condominiums. We strongly urge the Planning Commission to abide by the Hilltop Master Plan and cap the Pollard Station project at 94 units or less. This could mean either the condominiums or the Lodge go forward, but not both as proposed. Or the project is re-configured and downsized.

Should only the Lodge go forward with 94 units or less, Mountain Area Preservation Foundation may be able to support mass pad grading, especially if the proponents could demonstrate that the large, but compacted use would protect more open space, provide more trees for visual screening and leave much of the site undisturbed. We would oppose an outright lifting of the ban on mass pad grading throughout the Hilltop Master Planned area.

The Lodge is clearly out of character with the original “village” concept described in the Master Plan whether it is the sole building on the site or is surrounded by condominiums. Due to the slope of the site, the building will appear much taller than 35ft even though most of the rooflines do not exceed 35 ft. So the “human scale” desired in the Master Plan is unlikely to be achieved with the existing architecture.

The building appears to be a standard model for the industry that was plopped down in Truckee and doesn't integrate well with the location. However, we do appreciate the proponent's efforts to include subterranean parking and recognize that this feature may contribute to the height of the building.

With a large lodge style building and people residing on multiple floors, there will be no way to control the impacts of internal lighting. Only the screening of trees will help alleviate the visibility of such a large building at night.

The Master Plan notes the value of Green design “...it is the intention for development in the Hilltop Master Plan Area to incorporate non-traditional options to encourage sustainable design techniques...” (p4-16, F.2.). We would like to know more about how the proponents would satisfy this intention.

With respect to infrastructure, we do not support deferring the following Phase 1 infrastructure requirements: Class 1 Bike trail, Brockway Road sidewalk and stairway. We do support reconfiguration of the main road if the overall effect is to reduce road cuts within the overall Hilltop planned area.

In summary, the Mountain Area Preservation Foundation discourages development projects that do not comply with the Hilltop Master Plan and urges the Planning Commission to uphold the environmental policies contained within the plan. The proponents of the project knew full well the rules of developing at Hilltop, but chose to bring in a project that ignores those rules. We encourage the proponents to seek an alternate site for this worthy and much needed use in Truckee.

However, if the Planning Commission chooses to consider a “congregate senior use” for the Hilltop location, the Mountain Area Preservation Foundation urges the Commission to conduct an extended public outreach process that also requires additional information to be provided by project proponents.

Thank you for your consideration,

Kaitlin Backlund

Executive Director
Mountain Area Preservation Foundation

cc Fitch & Cooke, Truckee Town Council