TO:              HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL
FROM:            CITY MANAGER
DEPARTMENT:      PLANNING AND
COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT
DATE:            MAY 24, 2005
CMR:             264:05
SUBJECT:         REVIEW AND DISCUSSION OF JUSTIFICATION FOR TRAFFIC
                  SIGNALS AT ARASTRADERO/DEER CREEK AND
                  ARASTRADERO/FREMONT-HILLVIEW

BACKGROUND
Among the issues discussed at the May 2 Council meeting, before the Council certified
the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Stanford Development Agreement
were two mitigation measures requiring Stanford to pay its “fair share” of the costs of
new traffic signals at two intersections of Arastradero adjacent to Los Altos Hills. In
exchange for Stanford’s commitment to build housing in the Research Park, the
Development Agreement allows Stanford to consolidate its commercial space in the
Research Park by relocating 300,000 square feet of office space from housing sites.

The City has received a preliminarily proposal to locate 100,000 square feet of this space
at 3401 Hillview. A preliminary application was reviewed by the Architectural Review
Board for the redevelopment of the 3401 Hillview /Roche site.

The proposed agreement would allow an additional 100,000 square feet on the site in
addition to the existing 330,000 located at 3401 Hillview. The addition of 100,000
square feet will generate new trips, but it is not the sole reason that a signal is necessary.
This is why the mitigation measure requires that Stanford pay a share, but not all, of the
signal costs when the signals are installed.

The FEIR points out that even without the project, regional growth from either new
construction or reoccupation of underused existing buildings would create a need for the
two signals.
Palo Alto Staff has met with Los Altos Hills staff to clarify various aspects of the agreement. Staff prepared the attached letter to Los Altos Hills addressing several common questions identified by Los Altos Hills. Staff will present the letter to the Los Altos Hills City Council, Thursday, May 19, 2005.

**DISCUSSION**

The Arastradero/Deer Creek and Arastradero/Hillview-Fremont intersections are currently controlled by stop signs on all approaches. They are not part of the countywide Congestion Management Program (for intersection monitoring), nor are they among the other intersections that the City monitors as part of its own Comprehensive Plan monitoring program.

It is City policy and practice, when possible, to keep intersections operating at Level of Service (LOS) D or better. In the draft EIR (DEIR), which was completed in 2004, Deer Creek is projected to operate at LOS E or F in 2005 and 2010, even without the Hillview site expansion. Hillview-Fremont is projected to operate at LOS D (morning) and E (evening) in 2005, and at LOS E (morning) and D (evening) in 2010, again, with or without the Hillview project. (See Stanford Development Agreement DEIR, December 2004, pp.3.7.38 and 3.7.52.) Additional traffic growth and congestion at those intersections, without the Development Agreement, will come from new developments outside of the city and from re-occupation of existing under-used buildings. Palo Alto controls neither of these sources.

As the Draft EIR was prepared, staff looked at ways other than signals to improve traffic flow at these two intersections. There were no other improvements identified for Hillview-Fremont, while two possible options were identified for Deer Creek. One of these two options involved the removal of stop signs on Arastradero at Deer Creek, which was rejected as undesirable because of poor sight lines. The other alternative involved adding a “through-lane”, which was rejected both because there is insufficient right-of-way and a City policy disfavoring road widening. While the City was also aggressive in requiring, transportation demand management to reduce traffic impacts, staff does not believe that TDM alone can be counted on to reduce traffic impacts at these two intersections to a level of insignificance. Similarly, modifications to driveways and local circulation patterns at 3401 Hillview are insufficient to eliminate the traffic impacts. This is why traffic signals were the adopted mitigation measure. Traffic signals are also thought to be a somewhat “greener” approach because they reduce the amount of exhaust fumes coming from cars idling at the intersection.

Forecasting is not an exact science, particularly as timelines are extended and regional growth must be taken into consideration. Therefore, before the City installs new signals, it will monitor traffic levels. It will be especially important in this case, because both
intersections currently operate safely and there is evidence that current traffic volumes are lower than were predicted by the DEIR.

More detailed design work is also required, which will provide an opportunity to work with Los Altos Hills, Stanford, and the neighborhood to identify the best alternative that mitigates the traffic impact to a level of insignificance while addressing local concerns.

With or without the Development Agreement, regional and local growth coming both from existing and new buildings will increase traffic on Arastradero to such a point that these intersections will operate at LOS E and F, well below the level the City has considered acceptable.

Palo Alto can and will work with Los Altos Hills, Stanford, residents, Research Park tenants, and other interested persons in designing and implementing traffic control devices to mitigate the delay to a less than significant level, insignificance. The City will monitor the situation and will not install signals until actual counts show that they are needed.

DEPARTMENT HEAD: ______________________________________________

STEVE EMSLIE
Director of Planning and Community Environment

CITY MANAGER APPROVAL: ________________________________________

EMILY HARRISON
Assistant City Manager

Attachments: Letter from Frank Benest, City Manager, City of Palo Alto, to Maureen Cassingham, City Manager, Town of Los Altos Hills, dated May 18, 2005.