

Stanford Coalition for Planning an Equitable 2035
Facebook post, November 1, 2019

We are saddened and frustrated to learn that Stanford has decided to withdraw its General Use Permit application.

To be clear, the goal of our activism was never to stop this project— our demand is that any development Stanford undertakes support the most impacted communities on and around our campus— namely, workers and neighboring communities like East Palo Alto. We want Stanford to be able to grow AND do so in a way that benefits everyone. We want EVERYONE to be included in this expansion.

It is shameful that Stanford would rather throw away its entire plan, rather than engage in substantive discussion on what providing housing for workers on campus could look like.

In his email to the University, President Tessier Lavigne claimed that the University finally agreed just this week to provide the full amount of housing (including affordable housing) requested by the county, the minimum required by law. Our question is, why did it take this long for Stanford to arrive at this basic stage? And after finally getting serious about what equitable development could look like, why did they abruptly withdraw the expansion?

Their reasons for withdrawing the permit are excuses disguising their true motive.

Their arguments regarding “certainty” with a Development Agreement were obfuscations of what regulatory certainty actually means— in reality, the Conditions of Approval provide just as much certainty as a Development Agreement would. Furthermore, the COA framework was perfectly fine in providing certainty for Stanford 20 years ago during the last GUP approval process— they accepted them with no complaints.

Stanford’s claims of being unable to meet traffic requirements while building new housing are false. The County loosened requirements to make them easier to meet and gave Stanford multiple options and flexibility to meet standards, including unlimited trip credits. Furthermore, Stanford said during the last GUP that the traffic standards then were impossible to meet. 20 years later, they boast about their TDM programs. In the same breath, they complain that these NEW standards are impossible, despite County studies backing their feasibility.

We believe that Stanford is still not serious about creating equitable outcomes. This is a stalling tactic.

Stanford refuses to accept anything other than getting exactly what they want.

They are waiting for student activists to graduate, for County Supervisors to term out or be up for re-election, for the community to forget.

Once that happens, they will submit their application again with nothing changed and expect to get away with providing the bare minimum for their community.

They take constructive criticism and demands to do better as a Public Relations or communications challenge, instead of an opportunity for growth. This shows a lack of self-reflection or ability to value and integrate feedback on the University’s failures. The people advocating for Stanford to do better were not strangers. They were students sitting beside you at the dining table, graduate students

working as TAs in your classes, groundskeepers maintaining the lawn next to your dorm, dining staff preparing and serving your meals.

In his email, President Tessier Lavigne said “We have learned much from this process, and we intend to lean into the task of listening, learning and engaging.”

We doubt it.

We have been asking Stanford to listen for three years now. Members of the community have been showing up, speaking at hearings, planning protests, and challenging Stanford to do better.

The Board of Supervisors listened and incorporated this feedback into their proposals.

In response, Stanford walked away from the table— a final failure to support the needs of their students, postdocs, staff, workers, and community members in this process.

Even though the GUP process appears to be paused right now, our goals are unchanged. If Stanford comes back to negotiate, we will continue to demand equity for workers. If Stanford refuses to negotiate, we will push for an inclusive community regardless. Stanford's failure to execute an equitable plan for future development does not absolve it of its responsibility to do right by its workers and local community members who have been and continue to be impacted, ignored, and marginalized by Stanford today.

Sincerely,
SCoPE 2035