



Shaping Our Future Together

El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan



Frequently Asked Questions

What is a Specific Plan, anyway?

A specific plan is a comprehensive, action-oriented set of rules for a specific geographic area. For Menlo Park, the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan is setting the direction for the heart of the city over the coming decades. It builds on the successful 2007-2008 Vision Plan process, which established twelve key goals. The Specific Plan will define what our community desires for its future by regulating land use and defining other aspects of possible future public and private development.

Why do we need a Specific Plan? Aren't things fine as they are?

By having a specific plan, we as a community can control our future based on positive changes the community would like to see. Many of the current rules are several decades old, and don't necessarily reflect community values. The plan will help address long-standing concerns people have with the El Camino corridor – parking, blight, pedestrian access, traffic and vacancies. It will also help address concerns people have with downtown – parking, pedestrian access, inviting community spaces and increased vibrancy. At the same time, the plan will help maintain and enhance what we value most about these areas. We want our future choices to include information about impacts (both positive and negative) so we can make informed decisions about the area as a whole, not as individual projects are proposed. We also want to ensure public investment successfully leverages private investment and results in improved prosperity for the community overall. A specific plan helps achieve these important goals.



For more information or to sign up for project e-mails, please visit www.menlopark.org/specificplan or contact Thomas Rogers:

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How has the community been involved in the process so far?

The plan has included extensive opportunities for input in various formats, including eight citywide mailouts to all residents and businesses in Menlo Park, two community-wide surveys responded to by over 2,000 people, seven workshops, an email list of almost 900 people who get regular updates, one-on-one interviews with downtown business owners and other important stakeholders, two walking tours, regular Chamber of Commerce outreach, booths at all the Downtown Block Parties, and more. And the community input is still in process: we want to continue to see new faces and to get input to refine and improve the plan. The process has used detailed information to help people weigh alternatives and engage in dialogue with one another around the various choices.

How does the Plan support the Farmer's Market and other important community activities?

One important goal from the Vision step was to increase vibrancy – the number of people enjoying the downtown shops and eateries. The plan includes new public spaces for festivals and gatherings, including an enhanced, park-like space for the Farmers Market. These elements are based on extensive community input about the importance of preserving Menlo Park's special public attractions.

How would development occur once the Specific Plan is approved?

The Specific Plan establishes regulations and guidelines for development in the overall area, but does not include detailed development plans. Individual property owners will still need to propose specific development, which will be subject to appropriate review processes, including additional environmental review (such as traffic studies) as needed. We do not anticipate major changes right away, and in fact, development will probably occur at generally the same pace as in the past.



What are the next steps in the process?

Staff and the consultant are currently working on the *Draft Specific Plan*, which will be available for review in early/mid-spring 2010. The *Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR)* and *Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA)* will be presented for full public review and discussion in mid/late-spring 2010.

After the release of the Draft Specific Plan, EIR, and FIA, public meetings will be held by the project Oversight and Outreach Committee, Planning Commission, and City Council to review the documents and make changes, informed by public comments. The documents will then be revised and improved, and then presented in late summer/fall 2010 for final actions by the Planning Commission and City Council, again to be informed by public input.



Major Components of the Draft Plan

Eliminate blight and vacant parcels along El Camino Real

The plan promotes infill development of empty lots along El Camino Real through greater clarity and certainty with development regulations, while still maintaining our unique small-town feel.

Retain the "village" character

The plan retains the existing village character by keeping buildings low and pedestrian-friendly. Taller buildings would be required to be "stepped back" on upper levels and to vary the building massing and materials.

Retain and enhance downtown activity, vibrancy and community life

By increasing the number and amount of public spaces such as parks, plazas, and widened sidewalks, the draft plan seeks to enhance opportunities for community gatherings, both structured – such as concerts, festivals and block parties, as well as outdoor seating for restaurants – and unstructured, such as casual meetings with friends or enjoying the scene from a park bench.

Improve walkability and bikeability

Through enhancing east-west connectivity, especially across El Camino Real, with sidewalk extensions, bike and pedestrian connections and other improvements, the plan balances the need to manage traffic comfortably while promoting increased accessibility for non-motorized travel.

Info: www.menlopark.org/specificplan