



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: June 9, 2009
Staff Report #: 09-077

Agenda Item #: A

STUDY SESSION: Review of El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan Project Status and Opportunity for Council Member Feedback

The purpose of this item is to be a regular 'check-in' that allows the City Council to review the status of the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan project and to provide feedback that can be incorporated into the process.

BACKGROUND

Menlo Park is developing a long-term plan for the El Camino Real and Downtown areas. The completed visioning process (Phase I) has led into the preparation of a Specific Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report (Phase II). Environmental and fiscal reviews are being integrated into this process, so that potential benefits (such as tax revenue) and impacts (such as traffic) of different scenarios will be considered as the community develops the long-term plan. The completed Specific Plan will contain elements such as detailed land use regulations, design guidelines, infrastructure plans, and implementation measures. Broad public outreach and participation continues to be a key element of the project. This process will continue to engage a wide range of community members, including those who may not currently be involved in civic activities.

The project is being guided by the planning and architecture consulting firm Perkins+Will ("the consultant"), with the close assistance of City staff. The project is currently in the "Development of Framework, Concept Plans, Programs and Guidelines" stage, having completed the project initiation, existing conditions analysis, and vision refinement tasks. A key milestone for the earlier work was the first Community Workshop, which took place on April 16, 2009. At this workshop, the community looked beyond the Vision Plan goals to understand existing opportunities and constraints and the inherent trade-offs (e.g., traffic/parking and pedestrian space) when considering a vibrant downtown appropriate for Menlo Park. Approximately 100 community members attended the first workshop.

The current stage involves developing, reviewing, and refining concept plans and strategic approaches for the Specific Plan project area. The work currently being conducted will inform the second Community Workshop, which will take place on Thursday, June 18, 2009. This workshop will primarily involve the review of alternative

scenarios for achieving the Vision Plan goals. The overall task will result in a preferred direction and strategic plan for El Camino Real and Downtown.

ANALYSIS

This meeting of the City Council is one of three working sessions on the project that precede the Council's formal review of the Draft and Final Specific Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The working sessions are intended to be regular 'check-ins' that allow the Council to review the status of the project and to provide feedback that can be incorporated into the process. The Council's sessions are complemented by similar meetings of the Planning Commission, the most recent of which took place on Monday, June 1. The current Planning Commission and City Council working sessions dovetail with a meeting of the project's Oversight and Outreach Committee, which took place on Thursday, May 21.

This meeting will involve a presentation by the consultant consisting of the following topics:

1. Project Schedule
2. Review of Community Workshop #1
3. Preliminary Alternatives and Evaluation Criteria
4. Community Workshop #2 Process

Hard copies of the presentation will be available at the meeting for the City Council and the public, and an electronic version will be posted on the project web page after the meeting.

Staff recommends that the meeting follow the outlined procedure:

1. Consultant Presentation
2. City Council Detail/Clarification-Type Questions of the Consultant and Staff
3. Public Comment
4. City Council General Feedback

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES

The Specific Plan will require both staff resources dedicated to the project, as well as appropriations of \$830,550 from the General Fund Reserve for consultant services, \$78,400 for transportation and traffic analysis contingency, and \$25,000 for related City

costs, for a total appropriation of \$933,950. At the City Council meeting of December 16, 2008, the Council approved the overall scope of work and made a General Fund Reserve appropriation of \$380,000, which represented an estimate of the cost for the first year of the project (fiscal year 2008-2009). Future appropriations will be required as the project progresses. Based on the approved scope of work, \$450,000 for consultant costs is included in the proposed 2009-2010 budget and \$100,000 is projected for fiscal year 2010-2011.

The City Council prioritized planning work on the El Camino Real/Downtown areas during the project priorities process. Planning fee changes approved by the City Council on November 25, 2008 include overhead allocations for General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Amendments, which could be applied to this project. In addition, costs for the Specific Plan preparation could be applied directly to future development in the project area through fees, although this would require future study to allocate the costs appropriately.

The Vision Plan (Phase I) required both staff resources dedicated to the project as well as a General Fund reserve appropriations of \$176,500 for consultant services and \$50,000 related City costs (initial outreach, speaker series, printing and mailing of the project newsletters, meeting documents and refreshments, and contingencies).

POLICY ISSUES

The El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan will result in policy clarifications or changes related to land use and transportation issues.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The Vision Plan (Phase I) was a planning study and as such was not a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Specific Plan (Phase II) will include the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. In addition, the City has prepared a project page for the proposal, which is available at the following address: <http://www.menlopark.org/specificplan>. This page provides up-to-date information about the project, allowing interested parties to stay informed of its progress. The page allows users to sign up for automatic email bulletins, notifying them when content is updated or meetings are scheduled.

ATTACHMENTS

None

EXHIBITS TO BE PROVIDED AT MEETING

Consultant Presentation