



## COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT



Council Meeting Date: July 15, 2008  
Staff Report #: 08-099

Agenda Item #: F2

**REGULAR BUSINESS:** Review and Acceptance of the El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan (Phase I), and Approval of a Scoping and Consultant Procurement Process for Implementation of the Vision Plan (Phase II).

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### RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council review and accept the El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan (Phase I), and approve a scoping and consultant procurement process for implementation of the Vision Plan (Phase II). The draft Vision Plan is included as Attachment A.

### BACKGROUND

At the City Council workshop on January 6, 2007, the Council identified a goal to set a clear long-term plan for the El Camino Real and Downtown areas. Over the following months, the Council discussed various options for realizing this goal, establishing a Council Subcommittee of Council Members Boyle and Cline and reaching general agreement that a broad and inclusive community visioning process (Phase I) was needed prior to creation of a Specific Plan, Zoning Ordinance Amendment, or equivalent implementation strategy (Phase II).

During the latter part of 2007, the City conducted a public, multi-phase consultant review and project scoping process, ultimately selecting Design, Community & Environment (DCE) to manage the community visioning process. The project commenced in December 2007, although City staff conducted some initial outreach tasks during the consultant selection and project scoping stages.

The visioning process has consisted of extensive public outreach and participation, including events such as walking tours, educational forums, and community workshops. An advisory body, the Oversight and Outreach Committee, has provided input into the process and has reached out to encourage participation by the broader community, supplementing other publicity sources such as a regular citywide newsletter. A detailed project history is available as part of the June 10, 2008 City Council Study Meeting Staff Report (Attachment B). That report does not include the full list of attachments, although these are available for review on the project web page and at City offices. At

the June 10 meeting, the Council Members provided individual comments on the draft Vision Plan and directed the consultant and staff to revise the draft accordingly and return to the Council for its acceptance, along with a recommendation for the Phase II implementation stage. These topics are discussed in more detail in the Analysis section.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Vision Plan**

The objective of the visioning process has been a general one: to develop a long-term vision for the El Camino Real and Downtown areas. The Vision Plan is not meant to be as detailed as a Specific Plan or equivalent planning document, but it is intended to set the stage for a Phase II implementation strategy. The Vision Plan should be broad and inspirational, not shying away from consideration of “big ideas,” but it should ultimately identify goals that are achievable.

From the beginning, the key guiding principle of the visioning process has been an emphasis on broad public outreach and participation. The process has engaged a wide range of community members, including those who may not have previously been involved in civic activities. The goal has been to create a guiding plan that truly represents the community’s vision. In a project like this, the establishment of community consensus is not a matter of simply averaging out the most extreme viewpoints, but rather identifying goals and objectives that have the support of the majority of the community.

The draft Vision Plan is included as Attachment A. At the core of the Revised Draft Vision Plan is the set of 12 detailed goals and corresponding objectives, organized by topic area. Each topic includes a detailed background statement, which describes the community input that led to the formulation of the particular goal and associated objectives. The plan includes graphical elements such as a conceptual illustrative map and artistic perspective renderings. In addition, the plan has been revised to incorporate a recommendation for Phase II (implementation) of the overall project, which is discussed in more detail in the following section.

A working version of the Vision Plan that shows the text changes made in response to City Council direction is included as Attachment C. Underlined text represents new additions, and strikethrough text represents deletions. For example, Goal #2 (“Provide greater east-west, town-wide connectivity”) has been revised to not specifically call for grade separation of Oak Grove Avenue (while not precluding it), reflecting the direction of individual Council Members. Some of the June 10 Council direction was not necessarily directly voiced by community members during the workshops and other public workshops, but staff believes that all comments were consistent with the spirit of earlier community input, and they have been incorporated accordingly. None of the goal statements have been amended from the earlier draft.

Staff recommends that the City Council review and accept the Vision Plan. Acceptance may be made conditional on changes to certain aspects of the plan, if additional modifications can be clearly identified. If the plan is accepted, the consultant and staff will prepare a final version for distribution on the project web page, as well as prepare hard copies for City officials. Hard copies will also be made available for the public.

## **Phase II (Implementation)**

As noted earlier, the El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan would provide the foundation for Phase II, the implementation stage of the overall project. Per the original City Council approval, Phases I and II have been set up as separate tasks with separate RFP (Request for Proposals) processes. This two-phase structure has served to reinforce the principle that the vision plan was intended to be open-ended and unburdened by a perception that specific implementation measures (and, by implication, specific vision elements) had already been assumed.

While the accepted Vision Plan would establish broad and inspirational goals for these geographic areas of the city, Phase II would answer detailed questions about the proposed vision plan elements, such as:

- What are the impacts? For example, what would be the traffic impacts of new development?
- What are the benefits? For example, how would tax revenue be affected by different land uses?
- Are the proposed vision plan elements financially feasible? For example, how would proposed public improvements such as a new parking garage be funded? Similarly, how feasible would private development be, given factors such as land values?
- What are the appropriate trade-offs between “upzoning” and public benefits?
- How should the City work with external entities such as Caltrans and Caltrain to implement the vision plan?

The visioning process has incorporated a certain base level of economic and traffic/transportation feasibility analysis in order to keep the discussion within the realm of what is and is not achievable, but the answers to the questions above and similar detailed analyses will help refine the vision into something that can be implemented through ordinance/policy changes.

As detailed in Section E (“Next Steps”) of the Vision Plan, the consultant is recommending that the City pursue a Specific Plan to implement the vision. A Specific Plan can provide greater detail on a range of issues, from the adoption of broad policies to be considered when reviewing new development in a certain area to detailed land use regulations, development standards, design guidance and financing mechanisms. The consultant recommends that the Specific Plan process incorporate the following tasks, which are described in more detail in the draft plan:

- General Plan Amendment
- Zoning Ordinance Amendment
- Environmental Review
- Fiscal Impact Analysis
- Design Guidelines
- Study of Development Incentives/Density Bonuses for Public Benefits
- Santa Cruz Avenue/Downtown Streetscape Plan
- El Camino Real Configuration Study
- Parking Study
- Detailed Market Study
- Caltrain/High-Speed Rail Grade Separation Feasibility Study
- Discussion and Coordination with Stanford University
- Review Comprehensive Bicycle Plan

Staff concurs that a Specific Plan would be the appropriate overall mechanism to implement the vision plan in that it would provide a comprehensive and coordinated approach to consideration of a number of elements. However, a detailed Phase II work plan cannot be fully established prior to acceptance of the Vision Plan. In particular, an overall cost estimate and detailed phasing plan are not included with this broad recommendation, by design. In addition, with regard to the individual project tasks, staff believes that there are certain elements, such as Environmental Review, that would definitely be included as part of a Specific Plan, but there are others, such as Caltrain/High-Speed Rail Grade Separation Feasibility Study, that are dependent on external factors and may not necessarily be included as a required element of an initial work plan. Similarly, individual tasks may affect each other in different ways, and should be phased accordingly for efficiencies. In addition, individual consulting firms may have different skill sets and strengths, allowing for different approaches to the proposed work.

In order to effectively resolve these and related questions, staff recommends that the City conduct a public and transparent project scoping and consultant procurement process for Phase II, following the model of Phase I. The first step would be for staff to prepare an initial draft RFP for review with the Council Subcommittee. After incorporating any changes from the Subcommittee, staff would review the revised draft in a public meeting with the Oversight and Outreach Committee. This task is not a specific part of that Committee's original work plan, but staff believes it fits within the Committee's charter to provide process oversight and public outreach services. Members of the broader public would be invited to provide comment at this meeting, and, after another round of review, staff would bring the draft RFP to the City Council for final approval. This meeting would conclude the Oversight and Outreach Committee's Phase I duties. Staff expects that a similar advisory committee would be formed as part of Phase II, but would leave the precise details to be reviewed as part of the Phase II project scoping and consultant procurement process.

Consultant proposals would be due within four weeks. Staff recommends that a Consultant Review Committee be formed and charged with reviewing the proposals and interviewing all firms that have submitted qualified proposals. The overall Committee composition would be the same as the one that was formed for Phase I:

- City Council Member John Boyle
- City Council Member Rich Cline
- Two Planning Commissioners to be appointed by the Planning Commission
- Community Development Director Arlinda Heineck
- City Manager Glen Rojas

The consultant interviews would be public meetings at which public comment would be permitted, and copies of the proposals would be made available to interested members of the public. The Committee's recommendation would next be presented to the City Council for review and approval. Both the review committee and full Council would have the ability to direct that staff negotiate specific modifications to a preferred proposal in consultation with the consultant.

The recommended process would proceed along the following timeline:

Staff Prepares Draft RFP	Mid/Late July 2008
Council Subcommittee Reviews Draft RFP	Late July 2008
Staff Revises Draft RFP	Late July 2008
Oversight/Outreach Committee and Public Reviews Draft RFP	Early August 2008
Staff Revises Draft RFP	Early August 2008
City Council Reviews and Approves Draft RFP	Late August 2008
RFP Issuance	Late August 2008
Deadline for Proposals	Late September 2008
Consultant Interviews and Review Committee Recommendation	Early October 2008
City Council Discussion and Consultant Selection	Mid October 2008
Start of Preliminary Consultant Work	Mid/Late October 2008

This process and the subsequent Phase II would strive to meet the high standard of public outreach and participation set by Phase I. In order to allow the consultant selected for Phase II an opportunity to help shape the community engagement process, details have not yet been developed. However, staff suggests that the Community Engagement Model currently being proposed by the Community Engagement Manager be incorporated into the public input process that any successful consultant would design and that the Community Engagement Manager be included in any associated planning activities.

Staff recommends that the City Council approve the Phase II scoping and consultant procurement process as outlined above.

## **IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES**

The Vision Plan has 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). Consultant services for Phase II would require a new General Fund reserve appropriation at a future City Council meeting.

## **POLICY ISSUES**

The El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan is intended to lead into a Specific Plan, Zoning Ordinance amendment, or equivalent document or strategy that could result in policy clarifications or changes related to land use and transportation issues. Phase II will fully address these issues.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The Vision Plan (Phase I) is a planning study and as such is not considered a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Subsequent work on a Specific Plan or equivalent implementation strategy (Phase II) would require environmental review.

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Thomas Rogers  
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Report Author

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Arlinda Heineck  
Community Development Director

## **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, during the week of July 7, 2008, a project newsletter with notice of the meeting was sent to every postal address in Menlo Park, as well as to all local property owners with an out-of-town mailing address of record.

In addition, the City has prepared a project page for the proposal, which is available at the following address: [http://www.menlopark.org/projects/comdev\\_ecrdowntown.htm](http://www.menlopark.org/projects/comdev_ecrdowntown.htm). 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**

- A. [Draft Vision Plan](#)
- B. Staff Report from City Council Study Meeting of June 10, 2008 (*attachments not included but available for review on project web page or at City offices*)
- C. Draft Vision Plan Working Version, Showing Changes Made in Response to Input Received at City Council Meeting of June 10, 2008

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# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT



Council Meeting Date: June 10, 2008  
Staff Report #: 08-076

Agenda Item #: B1

**STUDY SESSION: Consideration of the Revised Draft El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan and Discussion of Potential Next Steps for the Visioning Process.**

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## RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council review and provide feedback on the Revised Draft El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan, as well as provide direction on potential next steps for the visioning process.

## BACKGROUND

At the City Council workshop on January 6, 2007, the Council identified a goal to set a clear long-term plan for the El Camino Real and Downtown areas. The setting of this goal was inspired in part by the presence of a number of large vacant parcels along El Camino Real that were formerly occupied by auto dealerships, as well as by the referendum of the Derry Lane mixed-use development, which placed on hold General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Amendments for an area near the Caltrain station.

Over the following months, the Council discussed various options for realizing this goal, establishing a Council Subcommittee of Council Members Boyle and Cline and reaching general agreement that a broad and inclusive community visioning process (Phase I) was needed prior to creation of a Specific Plan, Zoning Ordinance Amendment, or equivalent implementation strategy (Phase II).

During the latter part of 2007, the City conducted a public, multi-phase consultant review and project scoping process, ultimately selecting Design, Community & Environment (DCE) to manage the community visioning process. The selection of DCE was based primarily on the firm's strong emphasis on broad community involvement and public participation, as well as its extensive Bay Area experience. The primary project work commenced in December 2007, although City staff conducted some initial outreach tasks during the consultant selection and project scoping process. These tasks and the main outreach work are discussed in more detail in the Analysis section.

## **ANALYSIS**

### **Visioning Process and Revised Draft Vision Plan**

The primary objective of the visioning process is a general one: to develop a long-term vision for the El Camino Real and Downtown areas. The Vision Plan is not meant to be as detailed as a Specific Plan or equivalent planning document, but it is intended to set the stage for a Phase II implementation strategy.

The open-ended nature of the Vision Plan objective is by design, as the City Council has acknowledged that the lack of success of some previous plans could potentially be traced to a perception that they were burdened with preconceived outcomes or solutions. The two-phase structure of the current process has served to reinforce that principle. For example, an alternate decision to start working on a Specific Plan (even one that incorporated a significant visioning component) could have been interpreted as an implication that significant changes to the current General Plan and Zoning Ordinance were assumed, and that more modest modifications had already been ruled out. By contrast, the current visioning process has been set up to fully allow for a wide range of outcomes, including a validation of the existing regulations.

From the beginning, the key guiding principle of the visioning process has been an emphasis on broad public outreach and participation. The process has engaged a wide range of community members, including those who may not have previously been involved in civic activities. The goal has been to create a guiding plan that truly represents the community's vision.

### **Oversight and Outreach Committee**

As part of the visioning process, the City Council approved the formation of an Oversight and Outreach Committee ("the Committee"). The Committee has operated with the following primary tasks:

1. Provide input to the consultant and staff regarding the management of the process; and
2. Reach out to other community members and help bring them into the broader visioning process through participation in the Community Workshops and other visioning activities.

The Committee consists of 18 community members, appointed either by a designated group (such as a City Commission) or by the City Council. The Committee membership is as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Member</u>
Parks and Recreation Commission	Kristi Breisch
Planning Commission	Henry Riggs
Housing Commission	Elizabeth Lasensky
Environmental Quality Commission	Daniel Kocher
Transportation Commission	Reginald Rice
Bicycle Commission	John Fox
Stanford University	Steve Elliott
Downtown/EI Camino Real Business Owner	Kerry Hctor
Downtown/EI Camino Real Property Owner	Lorie Sinnott
Development Community Representative	Jeff Warmoth
Downtown/EI Camino Real Area Resident	Tom Hilligoss
Downtown/EI Camino Real Area Resident	Todd Temple
Downtown/EI Camino Real Area Resident	Elizabeth Weiss
At-Large Member	Vincent Bressler
At-Large Member	Ben Eiref
At-Large Member	Katie Ferrick
At-Large Member	J. Michael Gullard
At-Large Member	Clark Kepler

The Committee has conducted four meetings, all of which were open to other community members, and public comment was welcomed and incorporated by the Committee into its own discussion. All materials presented at the Committee meetings are available on the project web site. The meetings provided an opportunity for Committee Members to discuss outreach efforts, as well as to review and comment on past project tasks/events and the plans for upcoming project work.

The Committee has served as an invaluable sounding board, and in several cases helped to direct substantive changes to the format of the workshops and other project events, such as by emphasizing the importance of general verbal visioning exercises prior to diving into detailed map review. In addition, the Committee also restructured its own meetings by asking that Public Comment be allowed both at the beginning and the end of each session, to allow greater input from the broader community. The Committee has also worked to increase turnout at the project events by posting flyers, sending messages to various private email groups, and informally promoting the project. The Committee has concluded its formal set of meetings, although Committee Members have been strongly encouraged to stay involved through the remainder of the visioning

process, to conduct additional outreach efforts and to provide continuity and related project assistance.

### **Community Surveys**

Two short surveys were distributed to every postal address in Menlo Park, as well as to all local property owners with an out-of-town mailing address of record (approximately 19,000 addresses total). Both surveys included paid return postage.

Prior to selection of DCE as the project consultant, City staff sent a short open-ended survey card in October 2007, which generated approximately 600 responses. The general input received was used to help structure the primary visioning process, and was also useful in helping establish a strong base of project email list subscribers.

In February 2008, a second, more focused survey was sent, which to date has resulted in over 2,000 responses (approximately 11% return rate). The survey was used to establish and prioritize specific topics for further discussion at the Community Workshops. A summary of the survey results is included as Attachment E. This summary was also distributed at Community Workshops #2 and #3, and is also available on the project web page.

### **Mobile Tour**

On February 6, 2008, a mobile tour of neighboring communities took place, primarily for the benefit of the Oversight and Outreach Committee, although several other community members also attended and contributed to the discussion. The group visited various sites in San Carlos, Redwood City, and Palo Alto, looking at a variety of buildings, street configurations, streetscape improvements, grade separations, and other aspects of the built environment. The objective was to learn from a wide range of examples, in order to help inform Menlo Park's visioning process. Tour stops included sites and features such as: a one-story retail corridor with newer streetscape improvements (San Carlos); mixed-use buildings, district identification signs, and plazas (Redwood City); and a bicycle-pedestrian tunnel, low-rise parking structures, and playing fields (Palo Alto). Photographs from the Mobile Tour are available on the project web page.

### **Walking Tours**

On February 9 and 23, 2008, three separate walking tours were held of the north and south segments of El Camino Real and the Downtown. The purpose was to allow participants to review the existing conditions, discuss challenges and opportunities, and interact with other community members in an informal setting. The tours stopped at key locations to collect input and opinions from participants. Participants also discussed the character of development, transportation issues, public space and other issues at each site. Approximately 40 people attended the walking tours of El Camino Real, and 50 people attended the walking tour of the Downtown.

Comments and photographs were taken by individual community members and later reviewed and consolidated by the consultant. A summary of the feedback received on the walking tours is included as Attachment F. This summary was distributed at Community Workshops #2 and #3, and is also available on the project web page. Tour maps and photos are also available on the project web page.

### **Stakeholder Interviews**

On February 13, 2008, the consultant conducted a set of small-group interviews of several target groups:

- Residents
- Property owners/managers
- Business owners
- Schools, religious institutions, and seniors
- Architects and developers
- Former City Council Members
- Applicants for the Oversight/Outreach Committee
- City staff

These interviews were intended to generate useful, frank discussions that would identify key issues to be discussed during the main portion of the visioning process. A summary of the stakeholder interviews, with comments sorted by group, is included as Attachment G. This summary was distributed at Community Workshops #2 and #3, and is also available on the project web page.

### **Targeted Outreach**

The process has included targeted outreach to community groups, with the specific goal of increasing attendance at the workshops by members of the target groups. Early outreach efforts included presentations to service clubs (Rotary International, Kiwanis International), the Menlo Park Senior Center, Belle Haven Child Development Center, and a general canvassing of the Downtown during a typical lunch hour and during a weekend Farmer's Market.

### **Speaker Series**

The first public event for the visioning process took place in October 2007, with the inauguration of an educational forum on planning and related topics. The speaker series has continued throughout the primary visioning process, with the objective of generating discussion that could help inform the Community Workshops. All presentations have been followed by question-and-answer sessions, allowing for a lively exchange of ideas.

Staff and the consultant have attempted to schedule a range of topics, with the full schedule consisting of the following presentations:

- “Previous Planning Projects in the El Camino Real/Downtown Areas, Visioning and Planning Projects in Other Cities, and Lessons for Menlo Park” (Michael Dyett, October 24, 2007)
- “Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) in the Peninsula Context” (Dena Belzer, November 14, 2007)
- “The Economics of Mixed-Use Development” (Denise Conley, December 12, 2007)
- “Preservation and Prosperity in Downtown Environments” (Frederic Knapp, February 13, 2008)
- “Parking and Transportation Demand Management Strategies for Cities Like Menlo Park” (Jeffrey Tumlin, March 12, 2008)
- “Twelve Ingredients for a Successful Downtown” (Jeff Eichenfield, April 9, 2008)
- “Context-Sensitive Thoroughfare Solutions” (Jim Daisa, May 14, 2008)

Recordings of the forums are available on the project web page (with one exception due to a technical failure), along with electronic versions of all presentations and handouts.

## **Newsletters**

In addition to the initial project flyer sent in October 2007, three project newsletters and two postcards have been sent to every postal address in Menlo Park, as well as to all local property owners with an out-of-town mailing address of record (approximately 19,000 addresses total). The newsletters and postcards have been intended to keep the general community apprised of the progress of the project and to solicit ongoing input and community participation.

## **Project Web Site and Email Updates**

A project web page has been established at the following address:

[http://www.menlopark.org/projects/comdev\\_eocrdowntown.htm](http://www.menlopark.org/projects/comdev_eocrdowntown.htm)

This page provides up-to-date information about the project, allowing interested parties to stay informed of its progress. The page hosts electronic copies of all presentations, handouts, meeting notices and agendas, photos, maps, staff reports, and all other supporting materials. The project web page has been an important part of the outreach process, allowing community members to stay informed and involved, even when attendance at certain meetings is not possible.

In addition, the page allows users to sign up for automatic email bulletins, notifying them when content is updated and when events are occurring. The project list currently has

701 subscribers, which is significantly more than any other planning-related project list. Dozens of bulletins have been sent to this list over the course of the visioning process.

### **Community Workshops**

The three Community Workshops represent the core of the visioning process. The input received through the walking tours, surveys, and other earlier outreach efforts was used to help structure these events, in particular by helping create alternative visions for the community to evaluate. The workshops themselves then served as a forum for community members to work with each other to discuss the trade-offs of potential visions. The interactive workshop format allowed community members to gain a deeper understanding of unfamiliar or opposing views and to consider potential areas of common ground, in contrast to the primarily one-way dialog of standard public comment.

The first Community Workshop, held March 6, 2008, provided an opportunity for the public to learn more about the Vision Plan process and to provide initial input. Opportunities and constraints in the Study Area were discussed, including results of the public walking tours and community surveys. The workshop included individual and group exercises, summaries of which are included as Attachments H and I.

At the second and third Community Workshops, held April 3 and May 1, 2008, community members began to create a more detailed vision, focusing respectively on the El Camino Real corridor and Downtown. Each workshop started with a summary of the input received to date, in order to orient newcomers to the process. Then, workshop participants broke into small groups to provide feedback on conceptual alternatives, combining and modifying ideas and adding new proposals to agree upon a vision. Each workshop concluded with a summary from each group, followed by an overall summary by the consultant of areas of underlying agreement, as well as areas for which there did not appear to be current community consensus. Summaries of these workshops are included as Attachments K and J.

The attendance at all Community Workshops has been very positive in relation to both past City projects and the consultant's professional experience, with approximately 100 attendees at Community Workshops #1 and #2 and 70 attendees at Workshop #3.

### **Planning Commission Workshop**

On May 19, 2008, the Planning Commission hosted an event that functioned as a hybrid of a Community Workshop and a standard Planning Commission meeting. Over 80 community members attended this event. The overall goal of the meeting was for the Commission and the public to review and comment on the Draft Vision Plan, which was prepared in accordance with the extensive visioning process described above. At the heart of the Draft Vision Plan was a set of 12 detailed goals and objectives. Each goal statement included a list of objectives for meeting the goal, as well as a background statement, which described the community input that led to the formulation of that

particular goal. Eight of these goals were based on what the consultant and staff believes to be relatively clear areas of suggested community compromise, while the remaining four were not. The focus of the meeting was the goals for which there was not clear community agreement, although any aspect of the Draft Vision Plan could be discussed during this segment. The Draft Vision Plan in the form discussed at the Planning Commission Workshop is included as Attachment L.

Once again, the meeting commenced with a background summary to help orient attendees who were new to the process. Following the summary, attendees broke into randomly-assigned small groups to discuss the Draft Vision Plan in greater detail. Planning Commissioners were not assigned to a particular group, but rather 'floated' from table to table, observing the dialog. At the completion of the small group exercise, each group appointed a representative to summarize that group's discussion to the Commission and the other community members. The consultant then summarized areas of underlying agreement, as well as areas for which there still did not appear to be community consensus. A summary of the small group feedback is included as Attachment M. The Commission then asked clarification-type questions of the consultant.

Following the interactive workshop portion of the evening, 14 individual attendees gave public comment. The comments varied significantly by person and did not reach overall consensus, although several individuals suggested that the visioning process was potentially ending too soon and that additional work was still needed. Following individual public comment, the Commissioners also relayed individual comments, summarized in the Commission-approved Workshop Summary and Recommendations (Attachment N). The Commission then summarized the key feedback into the following direction, approved by general consensus, 7-0:

- For the City Council Meeting of June 10, the consultant should prepare a document that presents Vision Plan options. The consultant should evaluate the various options with regard to certain criteria and should make a recommendation.
- The Vision Plan should be based on the underlying principle that if any changes would result in benefits (such as "upzoning") to private property owners, the public should also receive benefits as a result of a project. The Vision Plan should set the stage for a specific public benefits framework and/or implementation strategy.
- The consultant should consider and potentially include revitalization techniques such as an area-wide sales-tax in-lieu fee.

The consultant and staff have addressed aspects of the first bullet point, which requests that options be presented for each of the 12 goals, through the preparation of a Revised Draft Vision Plan (described in more detail below), but full adherence to this direction is not possible without an amendment to the project scope, timeline, and budget (described in more detail along with other options in the Next Steps section of this

report). The consultant and staff believe that the latter two bullet points address concepts that are more accurately part of the Phase II (implementation) part of the process and as such should be considered in more detail after the completion of Phase I (visioning).

Since the Planning Commission Workshop, staff has received one item of correspondence regarding the Draft Vision Plan, from Mitch Slomiak, Co-Chair of the Menlo Park Green Ribbon Citizens' Committee (Attachment O).

### **Revised Draft Vision Plan**

The Draft Vision Plan has been revised in response to the feedback received at the Planning Commission Workshop. The Revised Draft Vision Plan consists of a vision statement and 12 detailed goals and objectives (Attachment A), as well as a conceptual illustrative map and cross-sections of El Camino Real and Santa Cruz Avenue (Attachments B, C and D) that relays aspects of the vision statement and goals in a visual format.

At the core of the Revised Draft Vision Plan is the set of 12 detailed goals and corresponding objectives, organized by topic area. Each topic includes a detailed background statement, which describes the community input that led to the formulation of the particular goal and associated objectives. In response to the Planning Commission's direction, the 12 goals have been extensively reorganized and expanded to include more context. While it was not possible to fully address the Commission's direction to present each topic area as a set of options without a change to the consultant budget and scope, the revisions more effectively describe the ways in which various options and alternatives were an integral part of the earlier visioning process. In addition, the revisions attempt to better relay the richness and context of the process, highlighting notable concepts considered in the workshops.

After having received and considered individual public comment, Council Members should use the Study Session as an opportunity to comment on the content of the Revised Draft Vision Plan. Council Members may also ask questions of the consultant and staff regarding the plan and/or the visioning process.

### **Next Steps**

In the approved scope of work, the June 10 City Council meeting was intended to focus primarily on the Revised Draft Vision Plan, where the Council could either accept the plan that same evening with minor revisions, or direct more substantial changes that would be reviewed at a subsequent meeting. After the Planning Commission Workshop, the consultant and staff conferred with the Council Subcommittee regarding the workshop feedback (both from the Commission and the public) and potential next steps. As a result, the consultant and staff have reformatted and expanded the Draft Vision Plan as described above to provide greater context, and have postponed other project tasks that would have otherwise taken place, in order for the Council to weigh in

on the next steps in the process. In particular, the creation of artistic perspective renderings of future streetscapes, a detailed discussion of implementation strategies, and the mailing of a detailed project newsletter have been postponed.

When considering options for the completion of Phase I, the Council should keep Phase II in mind as a part of the overall project. A key element of Phase I that will also be a key element in Phase II is the focus on public outreach, involvement and consensus building. In addition, while the exact format of Phase II is not known at this time, if the work involves any potential change to the General Plan or Zoning Ordinance, it will have to include an environmental review component. Depending on the scope of the proposed modifications, analysis such as a traffic study and/or full Environmental Impact Report (EIR) could be required during Phase II. Such analysis would allow the community and the Council to better understand the ramifications of the Vision Plan and, if needed, make changes to specific vision elements if they would otherwise result in impacts that would be unacceptable to the community.

### **Recommendation**

Staff and the consultant believe that the process as it was originally scoped and as it has been conducted has been successful in developing a future vision in the community. The process has been deliberate and transparent, and has engaged a broad cross-section of community members, not only through well-attended workshops but also through utilization of a community survey that helped establish a foundation for the process. On this basis, staff is recommending the completion of the work plan for Phase I as provided in the approved scope of work. This would include the following steps:

- Council Members provide feedback at this study session on the content of the Revised Draft Vision Plan in order to inform discussions about the next steps in the process.
- The consultant and staff would revise the plan into a Final Draft Vision Plan, including the postponed artistic perspective renderings and implementation strategy elements.
- A final newsletter would be sent describing the Final Draft Vision Plan in detail and inviting the public to provide input at a future regular Council Meeting.
- At a subsequent meeting, the Council would receive public comment and review the Final Draft Vision Plan. Assuming the plan meets with the Council Members' satisfaction, the Council would vote to accept the Vision Plan and direct preparations for Phase II. Under this scenario, no modifications to the project budget would be required.

### **Other Options**

Staff and the consultants recognize that there is some community interest in modifying and/or expanding the Phase I visioning process, as represented both in the Planning

Commission's recommendation and in general public comment. For this reason, staff and the consultants believe it is appropriate for the Council to consider possible options for modifying the visioning process. Staff has outlined several options for further consideration. The options are not mutually exclusive; elements from two or more could be combined.

Although staff has provided options for further consideration, staff is sensitive to the fact that the process to date has included an unprecedented amount of community outreach and engagement, with a large number of community members participating in a clearly defined process. While the Council should consider changes that would enhance the process that has been conducted to date, care should be given to respect and support the contributions and participation of the public such that it does not undermine the community's confidence in the outcome.

Staff would note that the options presented below would require changes to the project scope of work, timeline, and budget. Based on the Council's direction regarding the inclusion of various options, staff would return at a future meeting for Council approval of a revised scope of work and budget appropriation. The consultant will be prepared to discuss potential budget ramifications of various options at the June 10 City Council meeting.

#### 1. Provide Options and Additional Analysis

This option would fully address the direction of the Planning Commission, which recommended that the consultant revise the Draft Vision Plan to provide a more robust analysis and presentation of options for each of the 12 goals and objectives. It would then be the Council's responsibility to determine the best course of action for review of the options, potentially including additional outreach (see Option 2 below). As noted previously in the report, the Revised Draft Vision Plan includes revisions to partially address the Commission's recommendation by providing more description of the integrated discussion of options and trade-offs that occurred during the workshops.

#### 2. Conduct Additional Outreach

The City Council could amend the process to conduct new tasks such as additional workshops, targeted outreach, focus groups, and/or surveys. For example, one or more workshops could be added to work through the 12 draft goals in more detail, or another survey could be sent to gauge support for the draft plan.

If additional outreach were to be considered, the Council would need to be clear on the purpose of the outreach, and the additional outreach would need to be conducted such that it supports and does not overshadow the high level of community engagement and feedback that has already taken place.

### 3. Modify Oversight/Outreach Committee Charter for Additional Tasks

As noted earlier, the Oversight and Outreach Committee has been a crucial and positive part of the visioning process. The Council could expand the Committee's role to hold one or more additional meetings to help refine the process for additional outreach (Option 2), provided the Council has clearly specified the purpose of that outreach.

### **IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES**

The Vision Plan requires both staff resources dedicated to the project as well as previously-appropriated funds for consultant services. Modifications to the scope would require a new General Fund reserve appropriation at a future City Council meeting.

### **POLICY ISSUES**

The El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan is intended to lead into a Specific Plan, Zoning Ordinance amendment, or equivalent document or strategy that could result in policy clarifications or changes related to land use and transportation issues.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The Vision Plan (Phase I) is a planning study and as such is not considered a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Subsequent work on a Specific Plan or equivalent implementation strategy (Phase II) would require environmental review.

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Thomas Rogers  
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Report Author

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Arlinda Heineck  
Community Development Director

### **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, a postcard was sent to every postal address in Menlo Park, as well as to all local property owners with an out-of-town mailing address of record.

In addition, the City has prepared a project page for the proposal, which is available at the following address: [http://www.menlopark.org/projects/comdev\\_eocrdowntown.htm](http://www.menlopark.org/projects/comdev_eocrdowntown.htm). 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.

## ATTACHMENTS

- A. Revised Draft Vision Plan
- B. [Draft Conceptual Illustrative](#)
- C. [Draft Illustration of El Camino Real Configuration](#)
- D. [Draft Illustration of Santa Cruz Avenue Configuration](#)
- E. Summary: Community Survey
- F. Summary: Walking Tours
- G. Summary: Stakeholder Interviews
- H. Summary: Community Workshop #1: Individual Exercise
- I. Summary: Community Workshop #1: Group Exercise
- J. Summary: Community Workshop #2: Small Group Discussion
- K. Summary: Community Workshop #3: Small Group Discussion
- L. Draft Vision Plan from Planning Commission Workshop
- M. Summary: Planning Commission Workshop: Small Group Discussion
- N. Planning Commission Workshop Summary and Direction
- O. Correspondence from Mitch Slomiak, Co-Chair of Menlo Park Green Ribbon Citizens' Committee

## EL CAMINO REAL/DOWNTOWN VISION PLAN

This document reflects the vision of the Menlo Park community for Menlo Parks' Downtown and El Camino Real corridor. This vision has been developed through intensive outreach and discussion during Phase I of this process. This document is a working draft of the *El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan* for use at the City Council Study Meeting on June 10, 2008. The Vision Plan is intended to serve as a starting point for additional public input and technical analysis to be undertaken in Phase II, the next step of Menlo Park's ongoing effort to plan for the future of El Camino Real and Downtown.

### A. *The Vision Plan Area*

As shown in Figure 1 on the next page, the Vision Plan Area generally includes all parcels fronting onto El Camino Real for its entire length through Menlo Park; parcels fronting onto Oak Grove Avenue, Santa Cruz Avenue and Menlo Avenue generally between University Drive and the railroad tracks; and parcels fronting onto Alma Street immediately east of the train tracks.

### B. *Outreach Efforts*

The Vision Plan was developed through a community workshop process. Attendance at those workshops and community interest in the Vision Plan process were generated through an extensive series of outreach efforts to the Menlo Park community. Those efforts included:

- ◆ Oversight and Outreach Committee
- ◆ Mobile Tour
- ◆ Walking Tours
- ◆ Stakeholder Interviews
- ◆ Community Surveys
- ◆ Targeted Outreach
- ◆ Speaker Series

Input gathered from these outreach efforts, the three previous Community Workshops and the workshop held with the Planning Commission are included as appendices to this report.

### *C. Vision Statement*

Downtown Menlo Park and the El Camino Real corridor through Menlo Park will continue to be known for the vitality and diverse range of activities that are available. It will become a place where people live, work and shop and a place that provides services and offers cultural opportunities. A unique identity can be created for the Vision Plan Area that builds on the attributes and opportunities that exist as community assets in the Vision Plan Area today. Those Menlo Park assets include:

- ◆ **Santa Cruz Avenue.** Menlo Park’s “Main Street” is an intimately-scaled street with fairly wide sidewalks and a rhythm of storefronts that is conducive to pedestrian activity. City-owned parking plazas are accessible via a series of similarly-scaled cross streets and augment the on-street parking provided on Santa Cruz Avenue.
- ◆ **The Menlo Park Train Station.** Rail and bus service connects Menlo Park’s downtown to the region; the station provides the opportunity for Menlo Park residents to access job opportunities elsewhere on the Peninsula as well as to bring visitors to existing and expanded opportunities in downtown Menlo Park.
- ◆ **Menlo Park’s Independently-owned Businesses.** The range of services and goods provided by local businesses and merchants has been identified by several community members as a major contributor to the small town, or village, character in Menlo Park. One-of-a-kind retail businesses and services contribute greatly to making a downtown unique.
- ◆ **Strategic Opportunities for Near-term Change.** Vacancies and under-utilization of the Plan Area’s larger parcels, particularly those with the exposure that El Camino Real provides, offer the opportunity to envi-

sion future uses that are different than those that formerly occupied those key sites.

- ◆ **City-owned Parking Plazas.** These areas are integral to the health of businesses and merchants in the Downtown. However, the parking plazas are also the largest areas of City-owned land in the Plan Area, outside of public streets. A comprehensive redesign of these areas could provide the potential for a more efficient configuration and greater number of parking spaces, as well as shade trees in conjunction with plazas or small park spaces that could be components of a coordinated downtown pedestrian network.
- ◆ **Future Railroad Conditions.** Although precise determinations of future activities on the Caltrain tracks are unknown at this time, alterations or expansion of the tracks to accommodate high speed rail or future Caltrain needs seems likely. Acknowledging that such changes may occur provides the opportunity for the Vision Plan to propose ways to expand east-west connectivity across the tracks for bicyclists and pedestrians, in addition to vehicles, in conjunction with future track changes.
- ◆ **Other Unique Community Assets.** Menlo Park also contains a number of additional community assets, both in and outside of the Vision Plan Area. Allied Arts Guild, an architecturally unique complex, is located near the Vision Plan Area. Fremont Park, Menlo Park Presbyterian Church, Burgess Park and the Menlo Park Civic Center are also important community assets located just outside the Vision Plan Area. The Park Theater, now vacant, is located in the Vision Plan Area and is considered by some community members to be a significant cultural asset. The numerous trees of the city are also considered by many to be an important community asset.

Menlo Park has also undergone several previous planning projects and studies for this area. The Vision Plan builds on these earlier efforts, which include the following:

- “Imagine a Downtown” Charrette

- [Center City Design Plan](#)
- [Commercial Zoning Ordinance Update \(CZOU\)](#)
- [Downtown Parking Structure Feasibility Study](#)

These community assets and past efforts are among ~~will be~~ the building blocks for attaining a vision of a more vital and thriving downtown and establish Menlo Park's segment of El Camino Real as an integral component of that vitality. In order to achieve this vision for the future of the El Camino Real corridor and downtown Menlo Park, future development and public improvements need to achieve the goals and objectives identified in the next section.

#### *D. Goals and Objectives*

This section provides goals and specific objectives for twelve topic areas, all of which were derived from the visioning process. The goals and objectives follow a brief background discussion about the community input on each topic. For some goals and objectives, an expanded discussion providing recommendations for implementation or potential City improvements is provided. [Figure 2 on the next page shows a conceptual illustrative plan for future development and open space in the Vision Plan Area.](#)

### **1. Vision Plan Area Character**

#### *Background*

An image that was repeatedly provided by a number of community members was one of a "village feel." This was quite often characterized by the inclusion of vertical mixed-use, but not "highly intense" development. [Several other characteristics also contribute to the village feel, including a](#) ~~Also contributing to what people feel is a necessary component of the village character would be a~~ comfortable, walkable scale and pedestrian safety in conjunction with active places, expanded business hours and more vitality in the Down-

town. The interest in expanded vitality was also heard from participants seeking an appropriate balance between “village” and “city”, where the latter might have more cultural institutions, restaurants and shops.

The character identified in the visioning process for El Camino Real is one that includes variety in development. El Camino Real should be a diverse corridor, including different architectural styles and building scales, featuring good design and high-quality building materials. Buildings and open spaces should provide visual interest and be compatible with their existing context.

Given this input, it is recommended that Menlo Park establish the following goal and objectives to ensure that the “village feel” is pursued for the Vision Plan Area:

*Goal: Maintain a village character unique to Menlo Park.*

*Objectives:*

- Downtown accessible by all transportation modes, and particularly for pedestrians.
- Expanded housing opportunities, particularly for seniors and all segments of the workforce.
- Well-designed and well-maintained buildings, plazas and streets.
- Downtown storefronts exhibit community pride and contribute to Menlo Park’s identity.
- Development in the Downtown and on El Camino Real is sensitive to the adjacent residential context.
- A mix of uses, with upper floor uses ranging from residential to office and—under specific circumstances—retail.
- Specially-designed and strategically-placed gateways mark the entry to Menlo Park as well as to Downtown.
- A rich tree canopy in Menlo Park.

- A balance of hardscaped plaza spaces, and active and passive green spaces.
- Development and open spaces on El Camino Real that support one another and provide a variety of uses, architectural styles and building scales.

## 2. East-West Connectivity

### *Background*

East-west connectivity was identified as an important issue for the Vision Plan Area during the community outreach process. Community members specifically identified El Camino Real and the Caltrain tracks as barriers to traveling from east to west through Menlo Park, particularly for pedestrians and bicyclists.

During the workshop process, most people reported they liked the idea of a bicycle and pedestrian underpass of the train tracks and a plaza, tentatively identified at the terminus of Middle Avenue, particularly along with improved bicycle and pedestrian crossings of El Camino Real at Middle Avenue. See Figure 3 for an artist's rendering of this underpass. Community members also expressed an interest in improved connections between the west side of El Camino Real and the train station and civic center areas. There were a variety of ideas expressed for how such connections could be improved, ranging from pedestrian and bicycle underpass/overpass to a grade separation, to putting some or all of El Camino Real underground as it goes through Menlo Park. Trenching Caltrain through Menlo Park was another potential solution identified by community members.

Pedestrian and bicycle bridges over or tunnels under El Camino Real were also identified as potential measures for improving east-west connectivity. One idea was to connect taller buildings on opposite sides of El Camino Real with bridges between their upper floors. It was also proposed that the east and west sides of El Camino Real be connected underground at its intersec-

tion with Santa Cruz Avenue, with significant underground parking areas at either end of the pedestrian connection.

During targeted outreach sessions in Belle Haven, it was reported that some members of that community do not go to the west side of town because the transit connections between the east and west are slow and infrequent. They would like to use the train and the recreational amenities of Burgess Park but need to be able to access those areas of town more easily.

Given this input and preliminary analysis, it is recommended that Menlo Park establish the following goal and objectives to create better east-west connections:

*Goal: Provide greater east-west, town-wide connectivity.*

*Objectives:*

- Improved pedestrian/bicycle connections across the railroad tracks.
- Improved vehicular connections across railroad tracks.
- A pedestrian/bike underpass of the railroad tracks in conjunction with a public park or plaza.
- Improved crosswalk and pedestrian connections across El Camino Real.
- Strong pedestrian and bicycle connections between Downtown and Civic Center/Burgess Park.

It is recommended that this goal and corresponding objectives be implemented through the following actions:

- Train tracks grade separated ~~by lifting tracks moderately~~ to allow ~~Oak Grove and~~ Ravenswood to run underneath.
- Pedestrian/bicycle underpass of rail in conjunction with a public park or plaza at Middle Avenue (or other appropriate location).

- Pedestrian underpass or other protected crossing of train tracks ~~at~~ within the station area.
- El Camino Real crossing improvements at grade, including features such as textured pavement, pedestrian refuges, and count-down signals, where feasible.
- Improved connections to Civic Center/Burgess Park; including resolving possible conflict with grade separations.

Other solutions for improving east-west connectivity, including the undergrounding of Caltrain and El Camino, are not recommended for the following reasons:

- Costs of these methods are high, and it is unlikely that funding could be secured during the lifespan of this Vision Plan.
- The horizontal distance required to underground Caltrain would require extensive new infrastructure, and likely have an effect on Caltrain outside of the Menlo Park city limits.
- Undergrounding Caltrain or El Camino Real would dramatically change current block and street pattern in Menlo Park, including demolition of existing buildings.
- Undergrounding Caltrain ~~would~~ could require deep tunneling to ensure that San Francisquito Creek is not disturbed.
- Pedestrian and bicycle bridges are often used with less frequency than anticipated due to the additional time required for their use. Tunnels are often underused due to safety and lighting concerns.

### 3. El Camino Real Circulation

#### *Background*

Traffic flow and north-south connectivity on El Camino Real was identified as an issue for the Vision Plan Area during the community outreach process.

Community members specifically identified parking, traffic and pedestrian amenities as major issues for El Camino Real.

Reconnaissance of El Camino Real for this planning process determined that there are approximately twenty-two cross-sectional configurations (arrangements of lanes, parking, medians, etc.). These twenty-two conditions are sometimes repeated so that in the approximately one and one half mile length of El Camino Real in Menlo Park, at least twenty-seven different changes in configuration take place. Some community members suggested trenching or tunneling El Camino Real for a distance that would range from just the blocks between Menlo Avenue and Oak Grove Avenue to a longer stretch of El Camino Real. Some community members also suggested that connecting Sand Hill Road as it enters the Stanford Shopping Center across El Camino Real directly to Alma in Palo Alto would alleviate congestion. Currently, traffic turning onto El Camino Real from Alma Street must turn right, and then u-turn in Menlo Park to travel southbound on El Camino Real or to continue west on Sand Hill Road. With regard to non-trenching solutions, community opinions expressed at Workshop #2 included the following approaches:

- Convert the entire length to two travel lanes and one parking lane in each direction.
- Convert the entire length to three travel lanes and no parking lane in each direction, except where parking could also be accommodated.
- Convert the entire length to two travel lanes and one parking lane in each direction; however, the parking lane would be closed during commute hours to accommodate a third travel lane.
- Extend Alma or other alternate north-south routes to alleviate traffic on El Camino Real.

♦Trench El Camino Real.

- Coordinate with Palo Alto to connect Sand Hill Road to Alma Street.

In addition to the input from the community, it is important to consider Caltrans in determining the vision for El Camino Real because it is a Caltrans facility. A preliminary meeting with Caltrans indicated that they would have concerns about any reduction in the number of lanes. This is due to a recent agreement with City/County Association of Governments of San Mateo County (C/CAG) stating that lanes should be retained for future Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) opportunities. C/CAG does, however, recognize in the agreement that additional lanes for BRT may not always be possible through downtown-type settings. BRT could be considered as a constraint to some potential improvements on El Camino Real in Menlo Park; however such a system could help to facilitate better connectivity, accessibility and safety for community members and visitors.

Given this input and some preliminary analysis, it is recommended that Menlo Park establish the following goal and objectives to improve conditions on El Camino Real:

*Goal: Improve circulation and streetscape conditions on El Camino Real.*

*Objectives:*

- Wider sidewalks.
- Less congestion.
- Calmer traffic.
- Increased opportunities for safe east-west connectivity.
- Standardized cross-sections of El Camino Real, including number of lanes, lane widths and availability of parking lanes, where feasible.

These objectives would need to be followed up with further engineering studies to determine how the standardized cross-section could best be achieved. There will be several different considerations to take into account in this study, including Caltrans' and C/CAG's preferences to retain lanes for Bus Rapid Transit; the desire for a more pedestrian-friendly roadway; and the

desire to reduce congestion on El Camino Real. In order to implement this recommendation, the City would need to work closely with Caltrans and C/CAG to find an acceptable configuration. Further public outreach would also need to be undertaken to ensure that an appropriate tradeoff is being made between reducing congestion on El Camino Real and creating a more pedestrian-friendly roadway. While some improvements could be made that would meet both of these objectives, most improvements to the pedestrian experience would result in either no change to congestion or an increase in congestion.

A more standard lane configuration could add to the safety and understanding of drivers and pedestrians. It would make it possible to have more consistent plantings in the medians and along the sidewalks. It would not necessarily result in any change in the amount of traffic congestion. Figure 4 on the next page shows the existing street cross-section and plan, and Figure 5 shows a recommended configuration that modifies unnecessarily-wide vehicle lanes to create wider sidewalks.

#### 4. Neighborhood Context

##### *Background*

During the visioning process, community members generally agreed that the scale of development allowed in Menlo Park should be altered to allow greater density and height in certain areas. This opinion was accompanied by an equally strong desire to carefully identify where development intensity could increase.

Workshop participants felt that the east side of El Camino Real could accommodate higher intensity development because it does not have immediate neighbors (between El Camino Real and train tracks) and the buildings would not cast shadows onto any other buildings. On the west side, more concern was expressed about casting shade on neighboring single-family residential parcels. When El Camino Real was discussed in small group sessions at

Community Workshop #2, most groups used Alternative 2 (moderate development) as a starting point. They discussed making sure buildings on the west side stepped down to be sensitive to the existing residential neighborhoods. At the north end of the Plan Area, ~~participants generally felt there is not much of a market for retail or restaurant uses, which have often ended up failing in that part of the city.~~ there was also more interest in mixed-use development, with the anticipation that housing ~~and~~ office uses would be most successful, ~~or retail uses that are different from those in the Downtown~~ Although there was some skepticism about the success of retail in this area, the market conditions will ultimately determine which uses will be provided.

Additional opinions with less support surfaced throughout the visioning process that contrast the majority vision described above. Specifically, some community members felt that the existing development intensities in Menlo Park are appropriate, and should not be altered. Another minority opinion observed was that the vision should include higher intensity development, including 4-6 story mixed-use development along El Camino Real and in Downtown.

Given this input and preliminary analysis, it is recommended that Menlo Park establish the following goal and objectives to ensure that new development along the El Camino Real corridor is in accordance with the desires of the community and is sensitive to nearby residential neighborhoods:

*Goal: Ensure that El Camino Real development is sensitive to and compatible with adjacent neighborhoods.*

*Objective:*

- Variations in building heights and uses on different parts of El Camino Real are respectful of their neighboring contexts and also provide opportunities for variations in the character.

It is recommended that this goal and corresponding objective be implemented in the following ways:

- On the west side of El Camino Real, new buildings are up to 2 to 3 stories in height, stepping down in height and potentially increased setbacks and landscape screening on the sides of the building that are adjacent to residential neighborhoods. Uses include residential, office and, potentially, smaller hotels. See Figure 6 for an artist's rendering of this type of development on El Camino Real.
- On the east side of El Camino, north of Oak Grove Avenue, new buildings are up to 2 to 3 stories in height. Uses include residential and, potentially, office and retail.
- On the east side of El Camino, south of Ravenswood Avenue, new buildings are up to 4 stories in height. Uses include residential, retail, office and potentially a hotel with conference facilities.

The building heights suggested above, which are based on input received during the visioning process, provide a general framework to move forward by providing broad upper limits for new development. Future development will likely be provided in a range from single-story existing development to the upper limits suggested above. Further consideration could be given to higher heights where greater community benefits are provided. Development will need to be considered for its relationship with adjacent development and for its overall contribution to the Menlo Park community. This flexibility will facilitate the variety desired for development along El Camino Real.

## 5. Vacant and Underutilized Parcels on El Camino Real

### *Background*

There has been general agreement throughout the planning process that something needs to be done on vacant sites in varying states of disrepair to improve the character of El Camino Real. This is most notable in the southern portions of El Camino Real on the land formerly occupied by automobile dealerships. Stanford University owns the majority of these properties. Their continued vacancy is a serious concern for Menlo Park and a major impetus for the visioning process. Community members continually ex-

pressed their concern about the blight these vacant parcels bring to Menlo Park and urged that they be redeveloped in a timely manner. Additionally, the community supported redevelopment of other parcels along El Camino Real currently developed in a less-efficient manner. For example, some community members expressed that small, 1-story auto mechanic and service uses were not appropriate on El Camino Real. With regard to new land uses, the community identified hotels as a potential priority, due to their positive fiscal benefits and relatively limited negative impacts.

Given this desire of the community, it is recommended that Menlo Park establish the following goal and objectives to ensure that vacant and underutilized parcels are redeveloped on El Camino Real:

*Goal: Revitalize underutilized parcels and buildings.*

*Objectives:*

- A hotel with conference facilities should be part of future development of the south end of El Camino Real. See Figure 7 for an artist's rendering of a conference center on El Camino Real.
- Additional hotel uses, including small, affordable hotel rooms.
- ~~The Park Theater site is a cultural amenity that complements but does not compete with the Downtown.~~
- New development maintains a sensitive relationship to adjacent neighborhoods.
- North-south bicycle and pedestrian connections are created on or adjacent to the railroad tracks.
- Wider sidewalks are provided on El Camino Real in coordination with redevelopment.
- Support for and recruitment of "green" businesses, highlighting a local emphasis on innovation and environmental leadership.

- Encourage retrofitting or redevelopment of seismically vulnerable buildings.

The viability of conference/hotel facilities needs be studied in further detail to ensure they will be appropriate for Menlo Park. Issues to be explored further include working with Stanford University to determine their need and future plans for similar facilities, potential partnerships with the existing Stanford Park Hotel and how plans for such a facility would affect short-term existing tenants and expected future tenants on these properties. In general, conference facilities have limited direct profit potential, but are catalysts for hotel use and other revenue sources.

~~While there has been general agreement that the Park Theater site should remain a cultural amenity, some community members have expressed concerns that this may not be economically viable without support from the City. Implementation of this objective would likely require further study and possibly collaboration with the property owner.~~

## 6. Train Station Area

### *Background*

Community members expressed that the train station area should be livelier and provide something for people to do as they are waiting for the train. During community walking tours of the Downtown, participants expressed that the uses around the station do not take advantage of their location. Even the generally-approved-of Menlo Center (the building housing Kepler's Books and Café Borrone) turns its back on the train station and does not show much of an entrance to the station area.

Given this desire of the community, it is recommended that Menlo Park establish the following goal and objectives to promote increased activity, new uses and plaza spaces near the Caltrain station area:

*Goal: Activate the train station area.*

*Objectives:*

- There are expanded housing opportunities, particularly for seniors and all segments of the workforce.
- New cultural institutions or similar facilities contribute to the liveliness of this area.
- New parking facilities in this area are generally underground.
- A public plaza terminating Santa Cruz Avenue serves as a forecourt to the station.
- Mixed-use development with active ground floor retail uses.
- Increased Caltrain service at the Menlo Park station.

See Figure 8 for an artist's rendering of the Caltrain station area including implementation of these objectives.

Community members have expressed concern about the cost of underground parking in this area. Underground parking would likely be provided privately as part of a larger development project. Underground parking could also be provided through a public/private partnership between a developer and the City to ensure that some number of parking spaces would be made available to members of the public.

## 7. Santa Cruz Avenue Pedestrian Character

### *Background*

There has been much discussion on the future sidewalk and street conditions of Santa Cruz Avenue. Community members expressed their desire to maintain and expand the pedestrian character of Santa Cruz Avenue. Wider sidewalks were often identified as a desired improvement. This change would allow for additional street furniture, outdoor seating and other activities.

Though most agree that these improvements would be positive, there is some disagreement about what strategy will be most appropriate for Santa Cruz Avenue.

Some community members have advocated closing it permanently to vehicular traffic, perhaps in coordination with conversion of Menlo and Oak Grove Avenues to one-way streets. Alternately, others have suggested turning Santa Cruz Avenue itself into a one-way street. Others have suggested keeping the existing vehicular travel lanes but undertaking other changes to ~~other options~~ for providing a more comfortable pedestrian environment along Santa Cruz Avenue. Some community members have advocated for the transformation of angled parking on Santa Cruz to parallel, dedicating the excess space to sidewalk widening. Others suggested that any number of parking spaces could potentially be removed from Santa Cruz Avenue in order to provide additional open space and other public amenities. It was also stated that it would be important that any removal of parking be analyzed for its feasibility for businesses and coordinated with a broader downtown parking strategy and potential parking structures. ~~parking could be eliminated completely from Santa Cruz Avenue.~~

It is recommended that Menlo Park establish the following goal and objectives to promote increased pedestrian character on Santa Cruz Avenue:

*Goal: Protect and enhance pedestrian amenities on Santa Cruz Avenue.*

*Objectives:*

- Strengthened pedestrian character on Santa Cruz Avenue.
- Wider sidewalks on Santa Cruz Avenue to provide additional space for outdoor seating, street furniture or other pedestrian amenities.

It is recommended that this goal and corresponding objectives be implemented in the following ways:

- Eliminate parallel parking, retain angled parking and widen sidewalks where parallel parking previously existed.
- Create more “public” mid-block connections between the street and the parking plazas.
- Create intermittent plazas that would form a network between Fremont Park and the plaza at Café Borrone.
- Design “step-down” feature into sidewalk to better accommodate street closure for festivals, farmers markets and other potential community events.

Figures 9 and 10 show the existing street cross-section and plan, as well as the recommended configuration for Santa Cruz Avenue, including the removal of parallel parking and sidewalk extension. This approach to providing additional sidewalk width on Santa Cruz Avenue was supported by a majority of participants at the Planning Commission Workshop. Preserving the angled parking is most feasible and will also accomplish the following:

- Preserve existing median and mature trees on Santa Cruz Avenue.
- Preserving angled parking spaces on Santa Cruz Avenue will retain more on-street parking for Downtown businesses.
- Continue to bring vehicle and pedestrian traffic through Downtown, ensuring that businesses have a steady stream of potential customers.

Figure 11 provides an artist’s rendering of Santa Cruz Avenue as it would look after the steps outlined above were followed.

The objectives for this goal do not include permanent closure of Santa Cruz Avenue because this is rarely successful, more often reducing business due to limited visibility for stores.

## 8. Downtown Vibrancy

### *Background*

The visioning process indicated that there is strong community support for increased vibrancy in Downtown. Community members expressed a desire to encourage a development density and use mix that will help facilitate increased activity in Downtown. Many workshop participants also expressed a desire to have uses in Downtown that would remain active later at night and on weekends.

Some community members expressed a desire for new development in the Downtown to be 1 story in height while others suggested 4 stories would be appropriate. A larger number of small group workshop reports expressed that 3 stories would work, particularly to expand opportunities for housing. Many of those expressing a desire to see 3 stories in the Downtown suggested that those buildings should step back at the third story. ~~Many community members have expressed a desire for greater liveliness, particularly in the evening hours.~~

Some community members also suggested that an institutional use, such as a library or some other City service, would help to increase vitality in the Downtown. Some community members think the vision should focus on retail and restaurant uses in Downtown, and that housing uses will not effectively add to Downtown vitality.

It is recommended that Menlo Park establish the following goal and objectives to promote increased vitality Downtown:

*Goal: Expand shopping, dining and neighborhood services to ensure a vibrant downtown.*

*Objectives:*

- Most restaurants and stores are open during evening hours and weekends; family-friendly restaurant options expand.
- New buildings are up to 2 to 3 stories in height with the third floor stepping back from the front façade.

- Upper floor uses include residential, office and, potentially, retail.
- There are expanded housing opportunities, particularly for seniors and all segments of the workforce.
- The parking plazas are more active and carefully designed to facilitate pedestrian activity, including the addition of plaza-facing storefronts, articulated walkways, and additional landscaping elements. [See Figure 12 for an artist's rendering of the parking plazas with implementation of this objective.](#)
- There are anchor destinations at both ends of the Downtown, the train station at the east and another at the west, potentially in coordination with Menlo Park Presbyterian Church.
- Cultural institutions, such as a small museum or theater are part of the downtown mix.
- An independent shuttle bus circulates through parts of Menlo Park with the Downtown as its hub.

## 9. Housing

### *Background*

At the community workshops and other Vision Plan events, a strong majority of community members expressed concern over a shortage of housing options in Menlo Park. Community members generally agreed that new housing opportunities should be provided within the Vision Plan Area.

Many workshop groups expressed that they wanted to see more housing in the area, both as a way to provide affordable housing and as a way to bring more life to the area, bringing people in who would support the market for a downtown that stays open later in the evening.

Some community members have expressed strong concerns about the impacts residential development has on Menlo Park's schools, traffic and other com-

community facilities and services. It was also expressed that any new housing should be carefully evaluated to ensure that it is compatible with Menlo Park's existing character. ~~Such~~ These concerns led them to recommend that no new housing be added unless it could be shown that the impacts could be mitigated. ~~Those~~ Both character and the impacts of new housing need to be considered in the planning for future residential development.

The following goal and objectives capture the community's vision for housing in the Vision Plan Area:

*Goal: Provide residential opportunities in the Vision Plan Area.*

*Objectives:*

- The Downtown, the area around the train station and the El Camino Real corridor see the development of differing types of housing depending on the specific traffic and issues for each of those areas.
- There are new affordable housing options within the Vision Plan Area.
- Housing improves the jobs/housing balance in Menlo Park.

New housing should respect existing development, both in terms of its physical presence and the impacts it may create. These impacts will be studied further as projects are proposed within the Vision Plan Area.

## 10. Open Space

### *Background*

Community-wide desire for new parks, plazas and other open spaces was evident throughout the visioning process. The desired types, locations and character of potential open spaces differed across the community.

Open space was discussed by many community members. The plaza in front of Borrone's was often cited as a positive example to follow. Park space, particularly in conjunction with new residential development was viewed as being a crucial component of the Vision. A larger park space was discussed for the southern areas of El Camino Real. Community members generally agreed that passive open space, as opposed to active playing fields and other similar open spaces were needed most in the Vision Plan Area. The parking plazas were also identified for their potential to locate new open space. For example, the parking provided at one plaza could be replaced in a new parking structure, allowing another parking plaza to be redesigned as a "town square" or public park. The potential to provide dramatic streetscape and landscape features, such as water features, interpretive walkways, educational signage or public art display, should also be explored.

Some community members suggested different approaches to providing open spaces in Menlo Park, including the following:

- Make Santa Cruz Avenue a "pedestrian mall" or "walking street".
- Playing fields on existing parking plazas.
- Underground El Camino Real, provide plazas and open space on top.
- Underground parking at existing parking plaza locations, provide plazas and open space on top.
- "Pedestrian way" through southern parking plazas.
- Plazas and outdoor parks, ~~and playing fields~~ on El Camino Real.

The following goal and objectives capture the community's vision for plazas and parks in the Vision Plan Area:

*Goal: Provide plaza and park spaces.*

*Objectives:*

- Plazas activated by storefront activity or ground floor uses.

- Parks that provide passive and active recreational spaces.
- Parks and plaza spaces that provide amenities for a range of ages, including seniors and children.

It is recommended that this goal and corresponding objective be implemented through the creation of the following open spaces:

- New plaza on Santa Cruz Avenue.
- Pedestrian way through southern parking plazas.
- Plaza/park at Middle Avenue, in coordination with bicycle/pedestrian underpass.
- Plaza at train station.
- Semi-public plazas provided in coordination with private development throughout the Vision Plan Area.

These open spaces could be developed through a number of mechanisms, including a trade-off with developers of future projects. One example of such a trade-off would be the granting of density bonuses to developers of projects providing publicly accessible open spaces. The City could also provide plazas and parks by allocating funds for such projects, using potential parking revenues to make improvements, creating a Benefit Assessment District, competing for grant funding, or by creating a new tax program.

## 11. Pedestrian and Bicycle Circulation

### *Background*

Community members have been supportive of increased access and facilities for pedestrians and bicycles throughout the visioning process. Much of the input has focused on east-west pedestrian and bicycle connections, but community members have also discussed north-south connections, so people have alternatives to walking and biking on El Camino Real. It was expressed in the visioning process that pedestrians and bicycles often have very different

needs or conflict with one another, and at times may need to be planned for individually rather than collectively. Specific circulation ideas were also discussed, including a bike loaner program or a shuttle system to assist pedestrians in traveling longer distances.

The following goal and objectives capture the community's vision for pedestrian and bicycle circulation in the Vision Plan Area:

*Goal: Provide an integrated, safe and well-designed pedestrian and bicycle network.*

*Objectives:*

- Pedestrian and bicycle connections provide alternatives to El Camino Real.
- Conflicts between motor vehicle circulation and bicycle and pedestrian connectivity are minimized.
- Bicycle connections that extend to Downtown.
- Strong bicycle connections to Palo Alto and Palo Alto's bicycle system.

It is recommended that this goal and corresponding objectives be implemented through the creation of the following pedestrian and bicycle improvements:

- A path runs behind the parcels on the southern segment of El Camino Real.
- Another path is on the other side of the tracks, on Alma Street, which connects to the bicycle/pedestrian bridge to Palo Alto at the south end of the city.
- A safe and clear connection between Downtown, the station area and the Civic Center/Burgess Park area.

- Downtown bike connections, the route of which still needs to be determined. One possibility would be dedicated bikeways or lanes on Menlo and Oak Grove Avenues.

## 12. Parking

### *Background*

Community members expressed some concern that they would like to patronize shops and restaurants in downtown Menlo Park, but find the current 2-hour parking limit constraining. People sometimes get parking tickets because a lunch or other activity has gone on longer than anticipated. Such comments were often in conjunction with a willingness to pay for parking if it would mean fewer parking tickets and more flexibility in how long they could stay downtown. Some community members are adamant that parking should be free. Specific parking solutions proposed by the community included the following:

- Parking strategies and pricing and timing mechanisms.
- Parking structures—or not; above grade or below.
- Below grade parking as an opportunity to create plaza/park space at grade.
- Coordination with Menlo Park Presbyterian Church.
- Parking Meter District.
- Shortest-term meters on Santa Cruz Avenue.
- Short-term meters on Menlo and Oak Grove Avenues.
- Advanced parking technologies.
- Employee/Church parking structure on Parking Plaza 3.
- Parking Structure on Parking Plaza 1.
- Free parking in structures for first 2 hours.
- Free parking.

- Paid short-term parking combined with free long-term parking to encourage patrons to spend more time Downtown.

The following goal and objectives capture the community's vision for parking in the Vision Plan Area:

*Goal: Develop parking strategies and facilities that meet the commercial and residential needs of the community.*

*Objectives:*

- Ample parking to accommodate all Downtown users.
- Development of a "Park Once" strategy--"destination parking".
- Balanced parking to accommodate the needs of employees and downtown patrons, short visits and long-term.
- Surface parking strategies that accommodate patrons and employees, and encourage greater downtown patronage.
- A parking strategy that is good for business, and is carefully evaluated in the context of local competition.
- Underground parking where possible to promote improved aesthetics on El Camino Real.

It is recommended that this goal and corresponding objective be implemented by the following strategies and infrastructure improvements:

- 1-2 parking structures (1 public, 1 in coordination with church/business owners/employees).
- Paid parking on surface lots and streets.
- Shorter-term parking where high turnover is desired; longer-term parking further away from high turnover locations.
- Parking revenues earmarked to benefit the Downtown area.

The community did not come to a clear agreement about parking strategies, but a majority did agree that parking structures and some fee mechanism would be appropriate for Downtown. The recommendation above will preserve some short-term parking for customers visiting the Downtown, provide an opportunity to institute a “park once” strategy in Downtown and encourage partnerships between the City and other entities to provide parking.

E. Next Steps

This section outlines potential implementation tools to be considered by the City of Menlo Park for Phase II of the Downtown/El Camino Real planning process. The items discussed below include broad measures that could potentially become the end result of Phase II, as well as more focused studies that could be conducted independently or as part of a broader planning effort. This Vision Plan is a planning study, and as such will not directly change the regulatory structure regarding land use planning or development in Menlo Park. It provides a base from which to move toward a more literal policy change, which will sufficiently permit the vision to be implemented. All of the potential next steps would include additional public outreach and provide additional opportunities for community members to voice their opinions and discuss future options, similar to that of the Vision Plan process.

It is recommended that Phase II use as its base the preparation of a **Specific Plan**. Under California law cities and counties may prepare Specific Plans to develop policies, programs and regulations to implement the jurisdiction’s adopted General Plan. A Specific Plan can provide greater detail on a range of issues, from the adoption of broad policies to be considered when reviewing new development in a certain area to detailed land use regulations, development standards, design guidance and financing mechanisms. The Specific Plan process would include the following components:

- ◆ **General Plan Amendment.** Certain aspects of the Specific Plan could be inconsistent with the current General Plan, which would require amendments to bring it into compliance.

- ◆ **Zoning Ordinance Amendment.** A zoning ordinance amendment could be completed to implement new land use regulations and development standards, as well as other specific directives created as part of a Specific Plan.
- ◆ **Environmental Review.** A Specific Plan and associated General Plan and Zoning Ordinance amendments would require environmental review, most likely through the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The EIR would analyze potential impacts such as traffic and transportation.
- ◆ **Design Guidelines.** Design Guidelines could serve as another tool to ensure that new development within the Vision Plan Area reflects the vision for Menlo Park. Design guidelines could be created independently or as part of a broader Specific Plan process undertaken for the Vision Plan Area. Design guidelines can create strict standards or broad and flexible guidance for new development and redevelopment projects.
- ◆ **Caltrain/High-Speed Rail Grade Separation Feasibility Study.** This Vision Plan recommends a grade separation of Ravenswood and the Caltrain (and High-Speed Rail, pending state action) tracks. Some research has already been conducted on this issue, and should be built upon with further research. A feasibility study should recommend a strategy for grade separations, including identifying the most suitable locations. Additionally, a feasibility study may analyze costs of a specific strategy and provide direction for the City to secure funding.
- ◆ **Fiscal Impact Analysis.** A fiscal impact analysis would review the potential revenue benefits and service impacts of the proposed Vision Plan elements. This could include analysis of possible financial assistance or public/private partnerships that might be required for implementation; revenue that could be expected from new development; and costs to provide amenities envisioned.
- ◆ **Study of Development Incentives/Density Bonuses for Public Benefits.** It has been stated several times throughout the Vision Plan process that any upzoning or benefit to developers should be balanced by a re-

quirement that those same developers provide some public benefit. A potential study could analyze a number of approaches to establishing rules by which such a trade-off between developer and City could occur, as well as provide recommendations for the developer incentives, density bonus programs or other similar programs. This study could occur as part of a broader process or independently.

- ◆ **Santa Cruz Avenue/Downtown Streetscape Plan.** Interest was expressed during the visioning process in upgrading the current streetscape on Santa Cruz Avenue, and potentially other portions of Downtown. A streetscape plan for Santa Cruz Avenue could provide direction for the future of the street, including direction about lane configuration, materials, landscaping, tree placement, street furniture and amenities, and other detailed physical characteristics.
- ◆ **Parking Study.** A detailed parking plan or study would create a comprehensive parking strategy for the Downtown and train station portions of the Vision Plan Area. The study would include investigation of potential parking alternatives, including parking facilities, analysis of various fee mechanisms, or the development of a strategy that will equitably provide parking solutions for Downtown customers and employees. The parking study would be performed as part of a Specific Plan process and incorporated directly into the regulations being created as part of that Specific Plan. It would build upon past studies that have been completed by providing more detailed information, particularly regarding payment for a possible parking structure(s).
- ◆ **El Camino Real Configuration Study.** A detailed study of El Camino Real could examine a number of issues. Ideally, a study of potential solutions for improving the configuration and alleviating congestion on El Camino Real would analyze a number of potential solutions and compare them. The study could include analysis of removal of parking or travel lanes, or any number of other potential improvements. It could also examine the impacts of any changes on adjacent neighborhood streets. This study would require close coordination with Caltrans.

- ◆ Discussion and Coordination with Stanford University. A major driving force for the undertaking of the visioning process has been the vacant parcels located at the southeastern portions of El Camino Real. These parcels are owned by Stanford University. As such, Menlo Park should initiate discussions with Stanford University to better understand their intent for these parcels, as well as the potential to include conference facilities and hotels, as the potential for these land uses on some portion of these parcels was discussed during the visioning process. Discussion and coordination with Stanford must be incorporated into a specific plan or other planning process.
- ◆ Detailed Market Study for Menlo Park. A more detailed market study could be performed for Menlo Park, the Vision Plan Area, or specifically for the Downtown area. A more thorough understanding of the market potential for specific land uses could help to develop business recruitment and retention strategies that focus on bringing and retaining appropriate businesses to Menlo Park.
- ◆ Review Comprehensive Bicycle Development Plan. Several key points in this Vision Plan include bicycle circulation. For the most part, they are consistent with the existing Comprehensive Bicycle Development Plan, which indicates how the City can improve its bicycle network and continue to emphasize bicycle transportation around the City. The Comprehensive Bicycle Development Plan should be reviewed for consistency with the Vision Plan, however, to ensure that the specific approaches to bicycle circulation mentioned in the Vision Plan are captured in the bicycle plan.