



PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

FOR THE PLANNING COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING OF AUGUST 4, 2011
AGENDA ITEM D1

PROJECT: **El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan
Review of Draft Specific Plan
Meeting 4 – El Camino Real**

BACKGROUND

Menlo Park is developing a long-term plan for the El Camino Real and Downtown areas. The completed visioning process (Phase I: 2007-2008) has led into the preparation of a Specific Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report (EIR) and Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) (Phase II: 2009-2011). The culmination of the first phase of work was the City's Council's unanimous acceptance of the Vision Plan, which serves as the foundation for the Specific Plan. The completed Specific Plan will be a comprehensive, action-oriented set of rules, containing elements such as plans for open space and other public improvements, detailed land use regulations, design guidelines, and implementation measures.

The Specific Plan process is currently in Task 4 (*Draft Specific Plan, Fiscal Impact Analysis, and Draft EIR*), having completed the *Project Initiation, Existing Conditions Analysis; Vision Refinement, and Development of Framework, Concept Plans, Programs and Guidelines* tasks. Key milestones of the current phase of work were the release of the Draft Specific Plan on April 7, 2010, and the release of the Draft EIR on April 29, 2011, both to strong community interest. The Draft EIR comment period ran through June 20, 2011, and comments were received both in written correspondence and verbal remarks at a June 6, 2011 Planning Commission public hearing. Draft EIR comments that address the adequacy of the EIR or the City's compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) will be responded to in the Final EIR and can potentially result in changes to the Draft EIR text/analysis (non-environmental comments will be noted). The response to comments in the Final EIR will be reviewed at a future Planning Commission meeting.

With the conclusion of the Draft EIR review period, the project focus is the Planning Commission and City Council's review of, and recommendations/direction on, the Draft Specific Plan itself. The Planning Commission was originally scheduled to hold one meeting to provide direction on the Draft Specific Plan, but the Commission subsequently expressed an interest and willingness to hold additional meetings in order

to more fully explore and address comments, questions, and concerns, both from the Commission and the public, with the aim of providing clear and specific direction on potential improvements and refinements to the plan.

The expanded review process includes one introductory/background session (intended to be the primary public comment opportunity), three meetings on specific geographic areas, and one wrap-up session. Each of the three geographic area meetings are intended to conclude with the Planning Commission making tentative recommendations on aspects of the Draft Specific Plan for that particular zone, which will then be finalized comprehensively at the wrap-up session. The Planning Commission's review will also incorporate review of the project's Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA), which is pending. Each of the three geographic area meetings is being preceded by a 'refresher' summary on the overall plan and its history, as well as summaries of the public input made at the immediately previous session. The Planning Commission's recommendations will form the basis for the City Council's subsequent discussion and direction on the Draft Specific Plan.

The Planning Commission's review of the Draft Specific Plan commenced on July 11, 2011, with the overview/background meeting. The Planning Commission subsequently reviewed the Station Area on July 21 and Downtown on July 28. A summary of tentative Planning Commission recommendations from the July 28 meeting is provided as Attachment A. Due to the extent of public comment at the July 28 meeting, the summary of the public comment could not be completed in time for the publishing of this staff report, but it will be distributed in advance of the August 4 meeting. Summaries of earlier public comments and Planning Commission recommendations are provided as part of previous staff reports. The staff reports, presentations, and video for all meetings are available as part of the project web page.

ANALYSIS

EI Camino Real Review

The focus of the August 4 meeting is the Planning Commission's review of, and potential recommendations on, aspects of the Draft Specific Plan relating to the EI Camino Real geographic zone. Recommendations are expected to generally take the form of direction such as the following:

- "Strengthen and expand on *Topic A*"
- "Modify *Development Standard B* from *Z* feet to *Y* feet (or *X* stories to *W* stories)"
- "Remove *Improvement C* from consideration"

While the Planning Commission's discussion has been broken up into geographic zones for the purposes of creating a manageable discussion, Commissioners should consider linkages between the various zones as the review proceeds. In particular, in and around the Station Area, Downtown and EI Camino Real intersect and relate to each other closely.

Key elements of the plan relating to El Camino Real are summarized in this report and in the meeting presentation, although Planning Commissioners and the public are expected to have reviewed the source Draft Specific Plan in advance of the meeting, and Planning Commissioners are asked to bring their copies of the document to the meeting, in case specific sections need to be referenced. Key sections of the plan are noted by page number within this report.

Discussion Framework/Meeting Structure

The Planning Commission should consider the El Camino Real elements within the context of the established Vision Plan's Vision Statement and Goals (Attachment B) and the Draft Specific Plan's Guiding Principles (Attachment C). The Commission may wish to structure its recommendations on potential modifications to the draft plan to reference specific Goals or Guiding Principles that would be enhanced by a proposed change.

As noted at the July 11 meeting, the Planning Commission is encouraged to keep in mind the various interrelationships between plan elements as its detail-type discussion proceeds. As the Commission considers potential changes to a particular plan element, the potential changes to other aspects of the plan should also be considered. In addition, the Commission should consider the Draft EIR analysis as the geographic area review process unfolds.

Urban Design Framework

Chapter C (Plan Principles, Framework + Program) discusses the Guiding Principles in more detail, and correlates them to an Urban Design Framework for each of the three geographic sub-areas. For the El Camino Real corridor, the framework (pages C10-C13) recognizes the street's role as both a local-serving and a regional-serving arterial roadway. The concept for El Camino Real enhances overall street character, east-west connection opportunities and pedestrian safety and comfort. It recognizes and addresses the character of various areas along the corridor and embraces the following strategies:

- Provide continuity and consistency along the corridor with coordinated streetscape elements and regular street tree planting as private improvements take place;
- Improve pedestrian crossings at key intersections;
- Provide wider sidewalks and more comfortable walking zones, where possible, within development setbacks; and
- Establish development controls and guidelines for buildings that address various conditions along the corridor and enhance building character.

Specific elements of this framework are discussed in more detail below in the Public and Private Improvements sections.

As noted in the draft plan, graphics of various improvements are conceptual, meant to relay the overall intent, not final designs. Both public and private space improvements will undergo public review and approval processes for discrete projects. For public improvements, final decisions on phasing, design, and financing would come through subsequent City Council actions, primarily through the Capital Improvement Program (CIP) planning process.

Public Improvements

El Camino Real would see significantly improved north-south walkability (pages D38-D41 and F6-F10). Along the east side of the street, sidewalks would be required to be at least 15 feet wide, with a minimum of 10 feet used for the pedestrian through zone. On the west side, sidewalks would need to be at least 12 feet wide along the majority of the corridor (12-15 feet wide within the Downtown area), inclusive of an eight-foot wide pedestrian through zone. Because of the constraints posed by the existing street dimensions and its arterial service role, most of the sidewalk improvements would take place as adjacent redevelopment occurs, with sidewalks located in part on private property setback areas. Within the downtown core (between Oak Grove Avenue and Menlo/Ravenswood Avenues), sidewalks would be widened to the maximum extent possible by adjusting roadway and lane widths (no changes to the overall number or configuration of El Camino Real automobile through-lanes or parking are proposed).

East-west connectivity (pages D42-D44 and F6-F10) would also be enhanced at key locations. As noted during the earlier staff reports and meetings, links between Downtown and the Caltrain station would be improved through the enhancement of pedestrian crosswalks on El Camino Real at Oak Grove Avenue, Santa Cruz Avenue, and Ravenswood/Menlo Avenues. These crossings would be improved with “special” crossing treatments, including high-visibility crosswalks with enhanced pavement, accessible pedestrian signals, countdown pedestrian signals, sidewalk extensions (“bulb-outs”), and median islands/pedestrian refuges. Intersections at Encinal Avenue, Glenwood/Valparaiso Avenues, Roble Avenue, Middle Avenue, and Cambridge Avenue would see “basic” treatment improvements, including marked crosswalks, accessible pedestrian signals, and sidewalk extensions. East-west connectivity would also be improved with grade-separated pedestrian/bicycle crossings of the railroad tracks at the Caltrain station and in the vicinity of Middle Avenue. The latter improvement would be coupled with a plaza that provides an additional open space amenity.

Bicycle improvements (pages F11-F14) would include a Class III bicycle route (shared auto/bike use) along the majority of El Camino Real, with the section north of Encinal Avenue proposed as a Class II bicycle lane. Additional Class II and III lanes and routes along Alma Street and Garwood Way would provide alternate paths for north-south travel along streets with less automobile traffic than El Camino Real.

Private Improvements

The land uses (pages E4-E9) for the parts of El Camino Real closest to Downtown and the Station Area would be governed through the El Camino Real Mixed Use/Residential

land use designation, while the parts of El Camino Real at the northern and southern edges of the corridor would be governed through the El Camino Real Mixed Use designation. Both land use designations would permit a wide range of uses, including retail, personal services, office (limited size per parcel), residential units, and hotels. In contrast to the various Downtown and Station Area designations, personal services would not be limited in size or location, and more automotive-oriented uses would be permitted or conditionally permitted (for example: auto sales, gas stations, and take-out restaurants).

The private development building regulations for El Camino Real are described in six different zoning districts: ECR NW (El Camino Real North-West), ECR NE-L (El Camino Real North-East – Low-Density), ECR NE (El Camino Real North-East), ECR NE-R (El Camino Real North-East – Residential Emphasis), ECR SW (El Camino Real South-West), and ECR SE (El Camino Real South-East). The number of zoning districts is due to the variety of El Camino Real, with different development regulations proposed to address unique conditions. The primary development regulations are summarized as follows:

AREA	FAR	DU/ACRE	FAÇADE HEIGHT	MAXIMUM HEIGHT	SETBACKS (FRONT AND CORNER SIDE)
ECR NW	1.10 (1.50)	25.0 (40.0)	n/a	38'	5'
ECR NE-L	0.75 (1.10)	20.0 (30.0)	30'	38'	10'-20' (15' sidewalk)
ECR NE	1.10 (1.50)	25.0 (40.0)	n/a	38'	10'-20' (15' sidewalk)
ECR NE-R	1.10 (1.50)	32.0 (50.0)	n/a	38'	10'-20' (15' sidewalk) on El Camino Real; 7'-12' (11' sidewalk) on Oak Grove and Garwood
ECR SW	1.10 (1.50)	25.0 (40.0)	30' (rear)	38'	10'-20' (15' sidewalk)
ECR SE	1.25 (1.75)	40.0 (60.0)	45'	60'	7'-12' (12' sidewalk) south of Live Oak Ave; 5' north of Live Oak Ave

Details are available in the full zoning district regulations (pages E54-E79). The differing FAR and DU/acre standards represent the proposed Base and Public Benefit Bonus levels. The Base standards are intended to achieve inherent public benefits, such as the redevelopment of underutilized properties and creation of more vitality and activity. The Public Benefit Bonus standards would be applied when an applicant proposes to provide additional benefits to the city through a negotiated process.

For most of the El Camino Real districts, the current FAR effective maximum is 0.75 and the current DU/acre maximum is 18.5. As with the entire plan area, medical and dental office would be limited to one-third of the applicable FAR, with total office limited to one-half of the applicable FAR. The office limits are intended to reflect existing City policy restricting those uses (currently limited to 0.40 FAR in the C-4(ECR) district), to increase the diversity of overall uses, and to address concerns in particular about traffic from medical and dental uses.

The existing maximum height in most of the El Camino Real districts is 30 feet, although certain properties can currently apply for Planned Development (P-D) or Conditional Development Permits (CDP) to exceed 30 feet (for example, the building at 800 El Camino Real is 56 feet to the main roof deck). Façade height would be a new standard intended to limit the perceived mass of any building. Above the façade height limit, upper floors need to step back at a 45-degree angle (10-foot minimum), similar to the Daylight Plane regulation that is used in many residential districts.

Buildings would be required to provide façade modulation over long stretches to provide visual interest and could also continue to inset entrances and provide other variation. New developments in the ECR SE district would additionally be required to provide building and frontage breaks, in order to break up building mass and to provide publicly-accessible open space, essential linkages, and an improved pedestrian environment (pages E33-E35). All developments in the ECR districts would also be required to provide open space, including private open space for residential development.

Parking standards would be set by use, as shown in Table F1 (page F21), with the potential to propose shared parking reductions by a standard ULI (Urban Land Institute) methodology. All developments in the ECR zoning districts would be required to provide all parking on-site.

Plan-wide design guidelines, such as requirements for active ground-floor uses, building entries, retail frontage, and parking/service access, would all be applied along El Camino Real. In addition, sustainability regulations and guidelines, in particular LEED Silver certification requirements for common project types, would be also required along El Camino Real.

Public Comment and Correspondence

As noted in the Background section, public comments were made at the July 11 and 21, 2001 meetings and are summarized (along with written correspondence) in earlier staff reports. Public comments made at the July 28 meeting will be summarized and distributed in advance of the August 4 meeting.

Additional written correspondence received after the printing of the July 28 staff report is included here as Attachment D and briefly summarized below.

- Mary Gilles states that Menlo Park is desperate for some improvements and she is not opposed to parking structures if they are located where they are most needed.
- John Worthing is opposed to the plan and recommends putting energy into the El Camino corridor.
- Jym Clendinin writes that parking structures are an important and perhaps necessary component of the plan, and that parking issues will get worse as the overall economy improves.
- Howard Crittenden recommends several regulations that would apply to buildings with design components deemed to have historical significance.

- Hugh MacDonald supports modifying the plan to be more natural, and that the Palo Alto-like crowding would be unpleasant and detracting from the current relaxed atmosphere of downtown.
- Joseph and Eleanor McLoughlin write that they love Menlo Park and oppose a parking structure on Plaza #1.
- Web Augustine encourages moving ahead on the plan and its implementation, supporting in particular construction of a parking structure and noting the plan's public outreach.
- Sierra Club (Bonnie McClure) recommends retaining the 60' maximum height in the Station Area and also appreciates the Commission's tentative recommendation to reduce residential parking requirements in that zone and recommends enhancing affordable housing requirements.
- Patti Fry expresses concern with the proposed increases in FAR (in particular for office uses) and the plan's review process for new developments, and recommends eliminating the proposed market place and limiting the number of parking garages to just one.
- Helen Steinberg opposes changing the quaintness of Menlo Park, because she enjoys walking around downtown and frequenting the small shops.
- Joe Digiovanni states that he is a longtime owner of commercial property downtown and strongly supports the Downtown Alliance, noting serious concern with how the plan would change the nature of downtown in a negative way.
- Joan Skurnick welcomes improvements along El Camino Real but strongly opposes the downtown parts of the plan, in particular parking garages.
- Sharon Mangold expresses strong concern with the plan, in particular as it relates to parking and the Farmer's Market.
- Susan Bryan recommends the inclusion of dedicated bike routes across El Camino Real through all areas of the plan, and supports one parking garage for employees and other long-term parkers.
- Chuck Bernstein states that the plan is not a coherent plan and overemphasizes taller buildings and more housing, and also notes that uncertainties about financing and traffic are negatives.
- Linsay M. Mickles relays concerns about parking garages, including fees, safety, and shadows.
- Dexter Chow supports the overall goals of the plan and states that relocating all-day parking permits to upper garage levels would improve customer parking, and also hopes that compromises can be reached on parking structure height and Farmer's Market effects.
- Sam and Lorrie Sinnott strongly support the plan and state that it is intended to guide the evolution of downtown for decades to come, and that housing near transportation and shopping is desired by the next generation.
- Roxie Rorapaugh thanks the Commission for the hard work and opportunity for the public to speak and hear more about the plan.
- Janet Gilmore states that she attended the July 28 meeting but did not feel comfortable voicing her opinion due to the actions of other attendees, but that she is writing now to support the modernization of downtown and El Camino Real and the plan making these areas more pedestrian friendly and less car-centric.

- Margaret Petitjean resends an earlier piece of correspondence opposing housing near El Camino Real and the train tracks due to air quality concerns.

Next Steps

- **Meeting 5 (Monday, August 22) – Review/Wrap-up**

The Planning Commission's original meeting schedule stated that, depending on time and the complexity of the Planning Commission's tentative recommendations, the review and finalization of the Commission's recommendations to the City Council could either take place at the end of the August 4 meeting or at the meeting of August 22. The Planning Commission has made good progress so far, but Commissioners have noted some overarching topics that haven't necessarily yet been adequately addressed. For example, the topic of public benefit has come up several times but effectively been deferred. In addition, the project FIA is close to being released, but is not available for the publishing of the August 4 staff report. Based on these factors, staff recommends that the August 4 meeting be focused on the El Camino Real corridor, and that the August 22 meeting be used to finalize the geographic area direction and address any overarching topics that have not been fully discussed. Planning Commissioners should consider noting on August 4 which topics should be considered for the August 22 meeting.

- **City Council Review and Direction on the Draft Specific Plan (Late August/Early September)**

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. In addition, the City has prepared a project page for the proposal, which is available at the following address: <http://www.menlopark.org/specificplan>. This page provides up-to-date information about the project, allowing interested parties to stay informed of its progress. The page allows users to sign up for automatic email bulletins, notifying them when content is updated and meetings are scheduled. The project list currently has 971 subscribers.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Planning Commission Meeting of July 28, 2011 – Planning Commission Preliminary Recommendations on Downtown
- B. Vision Plan Excerpt – Vision Statement and Goals
- C. Draft Specific Plan Excerpt – Guiding Principles
- D. Correspondence
 - Mary Gilles, received July 25, 2011
 - John Worthing, received July 26, 2011
 - Jym Clendinin, received July 27, 2011
 - Howard Crittenden, received July 27, 2011
 - Hugh MacDonald, received July 27, 2011
 - Joseph and Eleanor McLoughlin, received July 27, 2011
 - Web Augustine, received July 27, 2011
 - Sierra Club, received July 27, 2011
 - Patti Fry, received July 27, 2011
 - Helen Steinberg, received July 27, 2011
 - Joe Digiovanni, received July 27, 2011
 - Joan Skurnick, received July 28, 2011
 - Sharon Mangold, received July 28, 2011
 - Susan Bryan, received July 28, 2011
 - Chuck Bernstein, received July 28, 2011
 - Lindsay M. Mickles, received July 28, 2011
 - Dexter Chow, received July 29, 2011
 - Sam and Lorrie Sinnott, received July 29, 2011
 - Roxie Rorapaugh, received July 29, 2011
 - Janet Gilmore, received July 31, 2011
 - Margaret Petitjean, received August 1, 2011

EXHIBITS TO BE PROVIDED AT MEETING

Presentation

AVAILABLE FOR REVIEW AT CITY OFFICES AND ON THE PROJECT WEB PAGE

- Draft El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan
- Draft Environmental Impact Report (EIR) prepared by ESA, dated April 2011
- Draft EIR Comments
- El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan

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