



# MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** November 1, 2010

**TO:** Planning Commission

**FROM:** Thomas Rogers, Associate Planner  
Community Development Department

**RE:** **Agenda Item E2: El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan –  
Planning Commission Review Process**

Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review and approve the Commission Subcommittee recommendation for an enhanced Planning Commission review process for review of the Draft El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan.

## **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. A key milestone of the current phase of work was the release of the Draft Specific Plan on April 7, 2010 to strong community interest. Upon release of the Draft Specific Plan, City staff held two open house release events and one Planning Commission study session to present an overview of the Draft Specific Plan and inform community

members of how comprehensive input is to be solicited after the release of the associated environmental and fiscal analyses.

Since the release of the Draft Specific Plan, City staff and consultants have focused work on the Draft EIR and FIA. The intent at the time of the Draft Specific Plan's release was to publish the Draft EIR and FIA in late summer/fall 2010. However, the initial administrative drafts required more work than anticipated, resulting in a time extension. The current projection is to release the Draft EIR prior to the Thanksgiving holiday, although it should be noted that this timeline may change depending on the results of a pending comprehensive legal review. The EIR work is being expedited to the full extent possible, while still ensuring that the document is comprehensive and accurate. The potential release date of the Draft EIR and FIA and its impact on the next phases of work is discussed in greater detail in the Analysis section.

During summer 2010, concurrent with work on the Draft EIR and FIA, City officials conducted one-on-one, informal outreach with downtown businesses, with the intent to make sure businesses were aware of the draft plan and the next steps in the process, answer basic questions, hear preliminary opinions/concerns, and make sure that the lines of communication were open. Two-person teams made efforts to reach each of the approximately 180 storefront businesses in the downtown core, and were successful in most cases at either speaking directly with an owner or manager, or leaving a flyer with basic information about the plan and direct contact information. During this period, City staff also met with representatives of the Menlo Park Live Oak Lions Club, which sponsors the weekly Sunday Farmer's Market, in order to better understand their concerns and to answer questions about the Draft Specific Plan and its potential impact on the Farmer's Market. During this meeting, staff clearly stated that the intent of the Draft Specific Plan is to enhance and preserve the Farmer's Market, which is broadly considered a key downtown amenity and which generates significant funds and food donations to community groups and non-profits. Staff also relayed that the continued input of the Farmer's Market representatives is desired as part of the ongoing community feedback, in order to ensure the Draft Specific Plan adequately preserves and enhances the Farmer's Market.

## **ANALYSIS**

### Next Steps

The approved scope of work includes one Planning Commission meeting to review and provide direction on the Draft Specific Plan, EIR, and FIA. The Commission's recommendation will then be provided to the City Council, which will provide direction on any changes to the Draft Specific Plan. The project will next enter Task 5 (*Final Specific Plan, EIR and Amendments*), which involves changes to the plan in response to Council direction. The revised plan would

then be subject to final review and recommendation by the Planning Commission, and final review and actions by the City Council.

As noted earlier, the original intent was to release the Draft EIR and FIA and conduct a comprehensive review of the Draft Specific Plan and the associated analyses, so that comments and recommendations on the plan would be informed by the projected impacts, both positive and negative (“Standard Process”). However, due to the recent delay with the Draft EIR and FIA, the Council Subcommittee (John Boyle and Rich Cline) has recommended commencing the Planning Commission review of the plan itself in advance of the Draft EIR and FIA release, in the event that the analyses cannot be released before December 1, 2010 (“Alternate Process”). This would allow the project to retain momentum, although it would require follow-up review by the Planning Commission after the release of the analyses, in order to affirm/modify the earlier recommendations. These process scenarios are laid out in more detail in Attachment A, and the highlighted Planning Commission reviews are described in more detail in the following section.

#### Commission Subcommittee Recommendation

As noted earlier, the approved scope of work provides for one Planning Commission meeting to review and provide a recommendation on the Draft Specific Plan. The Commission has recently 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 if improvements and refinements to the plan are needed. The Planning Commission formed a project subcommittee of Commissioners Vincent Bressler, Katie Ferrick, and Henry Riggs, with the objective of formulating an enhanced review process for the Commission. The Commission Subcommittee met with staff twice during October 2010 to develop the recommendation described below, which was also reviewed and endorsed by the Council Subcommittee.

The Commission Subcommittee recommendation is presented in outline form in Attachment B. The number of Planning Commission meetings would be increased from one to four, with a fifth meeting slot held in reserve. The initial meeting would be an introductory session, consisting primarily of an overview presentation and public comment, both of which would help orient the Planning Commission’s future discussion. The presentation would describe in more detail the format of the subsequent meetings, which would be broken down primarily by the plan’s three sub-areas: the Station Area, Downtown, and El Camino Real. The ordering of the geographic areas is a deliberate recommendation of the Commission Subcommittee: the Station Area is a geographic and thematic center of the project area and is such a natural starting point to spin off the Downtown and El Camino Real reviews. The discussion at each of the sub-area meetings would be divided in turn into review of public and private improvements,

with “public” representing elements such as sidewalks, parks, Market Place, public garages, and bike lanes, and “private” representing the regulations and guidelines for buildings on private property and associated regulations. The intent would be for each sub-area meeting to result in a set of tentative recommendations for changes and improvements to the Draft Specific Plan.

The breakdown of the discussion into geographic zones would allow the Commission greater time for discussion and would also permit community members with a particular interest in one area to potentially attend that meeting only. Each of the three sub-area meetings would be preceded by an optional ‘refresher’ session to bring community members who may not have attended a previous session up-to-date. These refreshers would include summaries of previous public comment, although community members would have opportunities to provide additional comment if needed.

In the Standard Process scenario (in which the Draft EIR/FIA are released by December 1), the fourth sub-area meeting would close out with a review and confirmation of the Commission recommendations, in case a tentative recommendation for one sub-area was affected by a later recommendation for another sub-area. This review and confirmation could be deferred to a fifth meeting if necessary. In the Alternate Process scenario (in which the Draft EIR/FIA) are released later than December 1), this review and confirmation would be a separate meeting to take place after the Draft EIR public comment period.

In order to not affect the Planning Commission’s other obligations, the expanded review process would require the scheduling of special meetings. The recommendation is for the Commission to undertake the primary four-meeting set over a two-week period (two meetings per week). This would require scheduling flexibility by Commissioners, but it would allow the process to retain momentum. Ideally, meetings would take place on different evenings each week, in order to allow community members who have other recurring commitments to attend as many meetings as possible. The expanded schedule would be coupled with an objective that meetings would finish by a reasonable hour, such as 10 P.M., although discussions could be extended if needed.

Staff believes the Commission Subcommittee recommendation represents a reasonable balance between allowing greater time for discussion and direction, and the need to retain momentum and focus. The primary breakdown of the discussion in geographic zones is a natural division, and the public/private improvement division would provide focus within each geographic area. Staff recommends that the Planning Commission review and approve the Commission Subcommittee recommendation for an enhanced review process for the Draft Specific Plan. If the overall process is approved, staff would next work with the Commission to schedule these meetings, noting that the precise dates will be affected by the in-progress review of the Draft EIR/FIA.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

- A. Schedule Options
- B. Commission Subcommittee Recommendation for Planning Commission  
Review of Draft Specific Plan

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## ATTACHMENT A SCHEDULE OPTIONS

<b>Standard Process</b> (if Draft EIR and FIA can be released by early December 2010)	<b>Alternate Process</b> (if Draft EIR and FIA cannot be released by early December 2010)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Release of Draft EIR and FIA; start of formal 45-day Draft EIR comment period</i></li> <li>• <u>Oversight and Outreach Committee meeting</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Receive overview of Draft EIR and FIA</li> <li>○ Commit to continued outreach and provide oversight input on overall review process</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Planning Commission</u> public hearing (timing: towards the end of the 45-day Draft EIR comment period)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Receive and make comments on the Draft EIR</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Close of 45-day Draft EIR comment period; staff and consultant start work on responses to comments</i></li> <li>• <u>Planning Commission</u> public meeting(s)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review and formulate a recommendation on the Draft Specific Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>City Council</u> public meeting(s)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review and provide direction on changes to the Draft Specific Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Staff and consultant revise Draft Specific Plan and continue to work on Draft EIR responses</i></li> <li>• <i>Final documents released, including associated General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Amendments</i></li> <li>• <u>Planning Commission and City Council</u> public hearings to review/recommend/act on final documents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Planning Commission</u> public meeting(s)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review and formulate preliminary recommendations on the Draft Specific Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Release of Draft EIR and FIA; start of formal 45-day Draft EIR comment period</i></li> <li>• <u>Oversight and Outreach Committee</u> meeting           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Receive overview of Draft EIR and FIA</li> <li>○ Commit to continued outreach and provide oversight input on overall review process</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Planning Commission</u> public hearing (timing: towards the end of the 45-day Draft EIR comment period)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Receive and make comments on the Draft EIR</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Close of 45-day Draft EIR comment period; staff and consultant start work on responses to comments</i></li> <li>• <u>Planning Commission</u> public meeting(s)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Finalize recommendation on the Draft Specific Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>City Council</u> public meeting(s)           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Review and provide direction on changes to the Draft Specific Plan</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <i>Staff and consultant revise Draft Specific Plan and continue to work on Draft EIR responses</i></li> <li>• <i>Final documents released, including associated General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Amendments</i></li> <li>• <u>Planning Commission and City Council</u> public hearings to review/recommend/act on final documents</li> </ul>

**ATTACHMENT B**  
**COMMISSION SUBCOMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION FOR PLANNING**  
**COMMISSION REVIEW OF DRAFT SPECIFIC PLAN - OUTLINE**

- **Meeting 1 – Overview/Background and Public Input - 7:00 P.M start**
    - Overview Presentation
      - Project history and Vision Plan Goals
      - Specific Plan Process
      - Key Elements of Draft Specific Plan
    - Geographic Area Breakdown – Orient Commission and Public to Station Area, Downtown, and El Camino Real
    - Discussion of Public/Private as Framework for Subsequent Discussion
      - Public: sidewalks, parks, Market Place, public garages, bike lanes, etc.
      - Private: regulations and guidelines for private buildings, off-street parking, etc.
    - Interrelationships – potential changes to some elements can generate unintended consequences to other elements
    - Public Comment
    - Planning Commission Procedural/Technical Questions and Clarifications
  - **Meeting 2 – Station Area**
  - **Meeting 3 – Downtown**
  - **Meeting 4 – El Camino Real**
- These three meetings would follow the same format below, but the primary discussion would respectively focus on the three geographic areas noted above
- ‘Refresher’ Overview - 5:30 or 6:00 P.M. start (Planning Commissioners not required to attend)
    - Abbreviated version of Meeting 1 overview presentation and what’s occurred since then, including summary of previous public comment
  - Public Comment - 7:00 P.M. start  
*Chair may consider requesting that comments not duplicate previous comments and/or limit time depending on number of comment cards received*
  - Commission Discussion
    - Public
    - Private
    - Preliminary Recommendations
- **Meeting 4 End or Meeting 5 – Review/Wrap-up**
    - Public Comment
    - Review and Finalization of Commission Recommendations