



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: October 4, 2011
Staff Report #: 11-168

Agenda Item #: F-1

REGULAR BUSINESS: Review of Planning Commission Recommendations on the Draft El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan (Meeting 4)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council conclude its review of the Planning Commission's recommendations on the Draft El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan with the following:

- Provide direction on areas of El Camino Real (other than El Camino Real South-East (ECR SE) zoning district);
- Review and finalize overall direction on the Draft Specific Plan.

The City Council's preliminary direction from the meetings of August 30 (focusing on the Station Area and the ECR SE zoning district) and September 13 (focusing on Downtown), and September 20 (focusing on non-geographic topics) is included as Attachment A. The Planning Commission's recommendations are included for reference as Attachment B.

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. Both the Vision and Specific Plan processes have benefited from extensive community outreach and participation.

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 future Planning Commission and City Council meetings.

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 Planning Commission's recommendations have formed the foundation of the City Council's subsequent discussion and direction on the Draft Specific Plan. The expanded Planning Commission review process has been strongly supported by the Council's Specific Plan Subcommittee (currently Council Members Cline/Keith; previously Boyle/Cline), as it would enable the Commission to conduct an in-depth discussion, and thus allow the Council itself to have as efficient a review process as possible.

The Planning Commission's review of the Draft Specific Plan commenced on July 11, 2011, with an overview/background meeting. The Planning Commission subsequently reviewed the Station Area on July 21, Downtown on July 28, and El Camino Real on August 4. Each of the geographic area meetings concluded with tentative recommendations, which were reviewed comprehensively and finalized/augmented at the final meeting of August 22. The Planning Commission's comprehensive recommendations are included as Attachment B. The August 22 Planning Commission meeting also included review of the plan's Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA), which was the subject of City Council review at the meeting of September 20. Staff reports, presentations, public comment summaries, and video for the preceding Planning Commission meetings are available as part of the project web page.

Concurrent with the Planning Commission and City Council's review, the Housing, Transportation, and Bicycle Commissions conducted sessions on the Draft Specific Plan and have recommended moving forward with the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan process, subject to specific recommendations. The Housing, Transportation, and Bicycle Commissions' actions are included as Attachments C, D, and E, respectively.

City Council Draft Specific Plan Review Process

The City Council was originally scoped to conduct its review of the Draft Specific Plan in one meeting. In discussions with staff, the Council Subcommittee recommended that the City Council review process be enhanced, in order to allow for more discussion and deliberation. At the August 30 meeting, the City Council approved the staff

recommendation to expand the Council review process to three meetings (subsequently expanded to four), with the following focuses:

- August 30, 2011
 - Introduction/overview
 - Review and approval of the Draft Specific Plan review process
 - Geographic area review
 - Station Area and ECR SE zoning districts
- September 13, 2011
 - Geographic area review
 - Downtown
- September 20, 2011
 - Non-geographic topics, including but not limited to:
 - Bicycle/pedestrian improvements
 - Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA)
 - Public benefit
- October 4, 2011
 - Geographic area review
 - El Camino Real (other than ECR SE zoning district) [*deferred from September 13 and 20*]
 - Review/wrap-up [*deferred from September 20*]

The breakdown of the discussion by geographic area reflects the Planning Commission experience, which found this a generally useful way to structure the discussion. The geographic area splits should also benefit the Council's review, since the following Council Members with conflicts-of-interest can more easily recuse themselves from specific discussions:

- Council Member Fergusson: ECR SE and ECR SW (El Camino Real South-west) zoning districts and southern portions of the *El Camino Real Mixed Use* and *Mixed Use/Residential* land use designations
- Council Member Ohtaki: ECR SW zoning district and southern portion of the *El Camino Real Mixed Use* land use designation

As noted previously, the City Council's preliminary direction is included as Attachment A.

ANALYSIS

Discussion Framework/Meeting Structure

As noted in the Draft Specific Plan, the various geographic areas are distinct, but they are also connected, and as such some zoning districts may be considered to be part of multiple areas, and issues may overlap. The City Council is encouraged to keep in mind interrelationships between plan elements as its detail-type discussion proceeds. As the Council considers potential changes to a particular plan element, the potential changes to other aspects of the plan should also be considered. In addition, the Council may consider the Draft EIR analysis throughout the review process.

The City Council should consider the Plan elements within the context of the established Council-accepted Vision Plan's Vision Statement and Goals (Attachment F) and the Draft Specific Plan's Guiding Principles (Attachment G). The Council 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.

El Camino Real (Other Than ECR SE Zoning District) Review

The City Council September 13 meeting was anticipated to include review of the Downtown and areas of El Camino Real (other than ECR SE zoning district), although the latter discussion was deferred to September 20, and subsequently deferred again to October 4, due to time constraints. Key elements of these areas are discussed below, with Draft Plan page numbers noted where applicable. Council Members and the public are encouraged to have hard copies of the Draft Plan available during all meetings, in order to reference topics in more detail. Where the Planning Commission and/or City Council has recommended that a plan element change, that is noted in *italics*.

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. Specific elements of this framework are discussed in more detail below.

As noted in the draft plan, graphics of various improvements are conceptual, meant to relay overall intent, not final designs. Both public and private space improvements will undergo public review and approval processes for discrete projects.

Public Improvements

El Camino Real

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 dedicated for public access. 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. 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. *The Planning Commission has recommended that the option for sidewalk extensions (also known as “bulb-outs”) be removed from the Plan, so that north-south vehicle flow could be improved and thus potentially increase the frequency of east-west pedestrian/bike crossings. The City Council has enhanced/clarified this direction by preliminarily recommending that the plan be revised to remove any elements (such as curb extensions) that would preclude the option of the City to modify the central portion of El Camino Real to either provide three lanes of auto travel and/or Class II bike lanes (potentially limited to peak hours).*

Bicycle improvements (pages F11-F14) in the vicinity of the El Camino Real corridor 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. *The Planning Commission has recommended exploring the possibility of improving/upgrading bicycle improvements on El Camino Real and Middle Avenue to Class II bicycle lanes (the latter when the proposed pedestrian/bicycle crossing of the railroad tracks is implemented). The City Council has also endorsed the recommendations of the Bicycle Commission (with some changes), which broadly recommend that bicycle lanes be used instead of bicycle routes, wherever feasible.*

Private Improvements

The land uses for the areas 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 segments 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 (for example: auto sales,

gas stations, and take-out restaurants) would be permitted or conditionally permitted.

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 last district was the subject of the August 30 City Council meeting but is noted here for comprehensiveness*). 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'	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 E53-E97). The differing FAR (Floor Area Ratio) and DU/acre (dwelling units per 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. *The Public Benefit Bonus process was discussed in more detail at the September 20 meeting, and the Council has recommended retaining the process and current density/intensity levels, although staff will need to return with additional information and analysis that could enable further consideration of threshold levels.*

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, to increase the diversity of overall uses (a developer of an office project would have to also include retail, personal services, residential, or other uses in order to benefit from the overall FAR maximum), and to address particular concerns about potential traffic from medical and dental uses. 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. A table showing the proposed density and intensity standards for all Plan districts, in comparison with existing standards, is available as Attachment G.

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). Under the Specific Plan, façade height would be a new standard in certain districts, 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. Within the ECR (non-SE) zoning districts, maximum building height would be limited to 38 feet, which would be close to the existing 30- to 35-foot height limits in and around these areas. *The Planning Commission has recommended that, in the ECR NE and NE-R zoning districts, a new Public Benefit Bonus standard for height be established, equivalent to one additional story.*

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. *The Planning Commission has recommended that regulations in the ECR NE-L and SW zoning districts call for compatible modulation of form on facades adjacent to residential or residential-mixed-use zones (in other words, the facades of buildings on streets such as College Avenue and Spruce Avenue should have forms similar to other nearby buildings fronting on such streets). The Planning Commission has also recommended that the Massing and Modulation regulations for all ECR zoning districts be modified to state that major portions (as opposed to “all”) of a building facing a street should be parallel to the street, in order to more clearly allow for additional design variation.* All developments in the ECR districts would be required to provide open space, which for residential development could take the form of private open space.

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 in these areas. In addition, sustainability regulations and guidelines, in particular LEED Silver certification requirements for common project types, would be required.

The Planning Commission has recommended revisions to private development regulations to encourage senior housing, such as through increased density, lower parking ratios, or other incentives. This recommendation was relayed during the Commission’s El Camino Real meeting, although staff is interpreting it as applying generally to the entire Plan area, unless directed otherwise by the City Council.

Review and Finalization of Overall Direction

The City Council’s preliminary direction is included as Attachment A. The City Council’s direction on the Draft Specific Plan will inform staff and the consultant’s work on the Final Specific Plan. Some direction is detailed and specific (such as to modify the SA E zoning district upper-floor setback from 10 feet to 15 feet) and will

result in a clear change to the Plan, while other direction is more open-ended (such as exploring the potential for a parking garage at the Caltrain station, which staff has already begun to explore) and as such may not necessarily result in specific changes if there are not any feasible options. However, all Council direction will be responded to as part of the Final Specific Plan process, so it will be clear where changes were or were not made, and why.

In addition to considering potential new recommendations for the El Camino Real (non-ECR SE) areas, the Council should review the earlier direction and make sure that this guidance is accurate and complete. Staff believes the Council has conducted the earlier Draft Specific Plan review with due care and attention to public input, and as such the preliminary direction should not be subject to wholesale revision at this time. However, wording changes/refinements may be appropriate. In addition, there are preliminary staff responses to Council inquiries under the ECR SE Zoning District section regarding development regulations that would apply to the Stanford University properties. This response requires City Council review and direction as to whether this or alternate approaches be revised in the Final Specific Plan.

Correspondence

All public correspondence submitted since the start of the City Council review process is available as part of the City Council Email Log (<http://ccin.menlopark.org:81/>).

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES

The Specific Plan requires both staff resources dedicated to the project, as well as appropriations of \$839,080 from the General Fund Reserve for consultant services, \$78,400 for transportation and traffic analysis contingency, \$27,010 for a Water Supply Assessment (WSA), and \$25,000 for related City costs, for a total appropriation of \$969,490. The City Council has made General Fund Reserve appropriations over the preceding years for these expenses. In addition, due to a conflict of interest with the City Attorney (who leases property within the Plan area), the City has contracted with a Contract City Attorney to provide legal services for the project. The Contract City Attorney's review of the Draft EIR was conducted through a contract under the City Manager's discretion. Depending on the scope of the City Council's direction on the Draft Specific Plan, as well as on the scope of the Draft EIR comments (detailed review in progress), the project could require contract cost adjustments in order to adequately address work not covered by the existing contract. If additional costs are necessary, they will be brought to the Council for review and action.

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

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

POLICY ISSUES

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

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The Vision Plan (Phase I) was a planning study and as such was not a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Specific Plan (Phase II) includes the preparation of a program-level Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The comment period for the Draft EIR closed on June 20, 2011, and responses to the comments will represent the Final EIR, which will be reviewed publicly at future Planning Commission and City Council meetings.

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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 966 subscribers.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. [City Council Preliminary Recommendations on the Draft Plan](#)
- B. [Planning Commission Recommendations on the Draft Plan](#)
- C. [Housing Commission Recommendations on the Draft Plan](#)
- D. [Transportation Commission Recommendations on the Draft Plan](#)
- E. [Bicycle Commission Recommendations on the Draft Plan](#)
- F. [Vision Plan Excerpt - Vision Statement and Goals](#)
- G. [Draft Specific Plan Excerpt - Guiding Principles](#)

Note: Attached are reduced versions of maps and diagrams submitted by the applicants. The accuracy of the information in these drawings is the responsibility of the applicants, and verification of the accuracy by City Staff is not always possible. The original full-scale maps and drawings are available for public viewing at the Community Development Department.