



# COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: June 14, 2011  
Staff Report #: 11-100

Agenda Item #: F-4

**REGULAR BUSINESS:** **Review of Project Status for the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan and Opportunity for General Comments on Upcoming Planning Commission Review Process**

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## RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council review the project status for the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan and provide general comments on the upcoming Planning Commission review process.

## 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. Following the release of the Draft Specific Plan, City staff and consultants focused work on the Draft EIR and FIA. During this period, City staff also continued to conduct outreach with downtown businesses and other stakeholders, continuing the plan's overall emphasis on broad public outreach and participation.

The Draft EIR was released on April 29, 2011, which with the upcoming June 20 comment deadline will allow for 52 days of public review (greater than the 45 days that the CEQA Guidelines set as a minimum for this type of action). The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the Draft EIR on June 6, 2011, which included an

overview of the project background, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the Draft EIR, and the next steps. The June 6 meeting also gave Planning Commissioners and members of the general public an opportunity to comment individually on the Draft EIR. Comments received at the June 6 public hearing and received in writing prior to the June 20 comment deadline will be included as part of the Final EIR. Draft EIR comments that address the adequacy of the EIR or the City's compliance with CEQA will be responded to and can potentially result in changes to the Draft EIR, and non-environmental comments will be noted.

Following the close of the Draft EIR comment period, the Planning Commission will conduct its own review of the Draft Specific Plan. The Planning Commission was originally scheduled to complete this review in one meeting. However, in late 2010 the Commission approved an expanded process intended to more fully explore and address comments, questions, and concerns (from both the Commission and the public), with the aim of providing clear and specific direction if improvements and refinements to the plan are needed. The revised process involves the expansion of Commission meetings on this topic from the original one meeting, to four or possibly five sessions, described in more detail in Attachment A.

The Commission's recommendations will subsequently be reviewed by the City Council, which will tentatively take place late summer/early fall 2011. These future recommendations and direction for changes will provide the basis for the Final Specific Plan, which will be reviewed concurrently with the Final EIR.

Throughout the planning process, staff has been advised by a Council Subcommittee. The Subcommittee was made up of Council Members Boyle and Cline prior to the expiration of Council Member Boyle's term in December 2010, and it is currently comprised of Council Members Cline and Keith.

## **ANALYSIS**

As previously noted, the City Council's detailed review of the Draft Specific Plan will not take place until late summer or early fall. This scheduling is due to a number of factors, including the Draft EIR's release date and associated required review period, the expansion of the Planning Commission's review process, and the Council's summer meeting schedule. Because of the relative time lag, the Subcommittee requested that the Council schedule this session as an opportunity to review the project status (as described above in the Background session), as well as provide an opportunity for general comments.

In acknowledgement of the Planning Commission's established role as a recommending body to the City Council (in particular considering the Planning Commission's willingness and interest in holding the upcoming expanded set of meetings on the draft plan), the Council is asked to not provide detailed comments at this point. For example, a recommendation to modify a particular development standard (such as the maximum building height in a specific Zoning District) or alter a particular public improvement

(such as the expanded Santa Cruz Avenue sidewalks) would be considered a detailed comment that is better relayed at the City Council's late summer/early fall meetings, at which point the Planning Commission will have provided its comprehensive set of recommendations. However, at this point, it would be appropriate for the Council to provide feedback on overarching issues for the Planning Commission and the public's consideration as the process moves into the next steps. Phrased another way, Council Members may help frame the questions for review of the Draft Specific Plan, but should not provide specific solutions at this point. For example, the Council could provide guidance on questions such as the following:

- How to embrace and encourage new community input while still respecting the extensive past community engagement process
- How best to balance the desire for vibrancy with the potential negative effects that might come with additional congestion/activity

Staff will be available to help refine additional topics and guidance at the meeting, if needed.

Although this meeting is taking place within the Draft EIR comment period, is not a Draft EIR public hearing, and any comments made that refer to the Draft EIR will not be included in the Final EIR unless separately submitted in writing prior to June 20, 2011 at 5:30 P.M.

## **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, but additional services for the Final EIR and associated legal review will be required that will require City Council review and approval of a new contract and new General Fund Reserve appropriation. This will take place at an upcoming City Council meeting, potentially as a Consent Calendar item.

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 appropriations of \$176,500 for consultant services and \$50,000 related City costs (initial outreach, speaker series, printing and mailing of the project newsletters, meeting documents and refreshments, and contingencies).

## **POLICY ISSUES**

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

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The Vision Plan (Phase I) was a planning study and as such was not a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Specific Plan (Phase II) includes the preparation of a program-level Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The current phase of environmental review is discussed in more detail in the Background section of this report. This meeting of the City Council is not a Draft EIR public hearing, and any comments made that refer to the Draft EIR will not be included in the Final EIR unless separately submitted in writing prior to June 20, 2011 at 5:30 P.M.

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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 958 subscribers.

## **ATTACHMENTS**

A. Planning Commission Review Process

**Attachment A**  
**El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan**  
**Planning Commission Review Process for Draft Specific Plan**

- **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