



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: December 15, 2009

Staff Report #: 09-180

Agenda Item #: F2

REGULAR BUSINESS: Consideration of the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council consider the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan. The item serves as a scoping session for Council Members and the public to provide direction on specific environmental topics that should be addressed in the environmental analysis, including potential alternatives to the project. Comments may also be submitted in writing through January 8, 2010.

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 EIR (Phase II: 2009-2010). 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 contain elements such as plans for open space and other public improvements, detailed land use regulations, design guidelines, and implementation measures. As was the case with Phase I, the Phase II process has been a community-oriented planning project, with unprecedented levels of public outreach and participation. The project study area has remained consistent through the process and encompasses both Downtown and the El Camino Real corridor.

The Specific Plan process is being guided by the planning and architecture consulting firm Perkins+Will ("the consultant"), with the close assistance of City staff. The project 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. The key milestones for the earlier portion of the Specific Plan process were the three Community Workshops. At the first Community Workshop (April 16, 2009), approximately 100 participants looked beyond the Vision Plan goals to understand existing opportunities and constraints, and the inherent trade-offs (e.g., traffic/parking and pedestrian space) of new scenarios. The second Community Workshop (June 18, 2009) involved the

review of alternative plan elements (for example: land use mixes, vehicular/pedestrian/bicycle circulation details, and parking options), shown in advanced graphical formats such as 3D models and photomontages. Approximately 150 community members attended the second workshop. At the third and final Community Workshop (September 17, 2009), approximately 130 community members reviewed and provided comments on the Emerging Plan, which was based on input from the previous meetings. Throughout the process, attendance has been diverse, including both recurring participants as well as new faces. The workshop feedback has also been augmented by email correspondence from those who were unable to attend certain meetings, but who have been able to catch up using project materials posted on the project page. The project email list has grown steadily throughout the process, and now includes 869 subscribers.

The feedback from the third community workshop is being used to refine and improve the Emerging Plan, along with subsequent direction from the project Oversight and Outreach Committee, Planning Commission, and City Council. The revised Emerging Plan is serving as the basis for the Draft Specific Plan, which itself is the basis for the Draft EIR and Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA). The draft documents will be presented for full public review in Spring 2010, which will allow for detailed discussion and potential revisions to take place prior to the completion of the final documents. Final City Council actions on the plan are anticipated to take place by October 2010.

ANALYSIS

The Notice of Preparation (NOP) is a brief notice published by the lead agency (in this case, the City), soliciting input from the public and other agencies on specific topics that they believe should be addressed in the environmental analysis. The NOP (Attachment A) has been published on the project web page and is being mailed to the relevant agencies. The NOP includes a general description of the project, its location, and the probable environmental effects of the project, along with several figures meant to relay general principles. The categories of probable environmental effects to be analyzed in more detail in the Draft EIR include the following:

- Aesthetic Resources
- Air Quality
- Biological Resources
- Cultural Resources
- Geology, Soils, and Seismicity
- Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- Hazardous Materials and Hazards
- Hydrology and Water Quality
- Land Use and Planning Policy
- Noise
- Public Services and Utilities
- Recreation

- Transportation, Circulation and Parking (*includes a supplemental exhibit of specific intersections and roadway segments proposed for analysis*)

The categories of Agricultural Resources and Mineral Resources are excluded, since the project is within an urban infill area where these resources do not exist.

As noted earlier, work on the Draft Specific Plan is currently in progress, and will be published for public review in early Spring 2010. However, materials presented at the third Community Workshop (September 17, 2009) and subsequent Oversight and Outreach Committee, Planning Commission, and City Council meetings (all October 2009) are available on the project web page and provide the basis for considering potential environmental effects. Although elements of the Emerging Plan are being modified in response to Council direction, the earlier materials adequately relay the extent of public improvements, the amount and character of private development, and related improvements, and as such allow for informed comments on the NOP.

Public scoping sessions are optional under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines, which require only that a NOP be prepared and sent to relevant agencies. Throughout the extensive, multi-year planning process, environmental issues have been regularly raised for discussion, and as a result staff and the consultant believe the NOP accurately reflects the analysis that is needed. However, the scoping session provides another opportunity to solicit input on environmental topics that might be missing from the proposed analysis. In addition, comments are requested on project alternatives that might feasibly attain the basic objectives of the project, while avoiding or substantially lessening the impacts of the project. Comments received during the scoping session on the project will be included in the Draft EIR, and may result in changes to the projected analysis. The release of the Draft EIR itself provides yet another full opportunity for public comments on environmental impacts, and those comments will be responded to as part of the Final EIR.

Written comments on the scope of the EIR may also be sent to:

Thomas Rogers, Associate Planner
City of Menlo Park
Community Development Department, Planning Division
701 Laurel Street
Menlo Park, CA 94025
throgers@menlopark.org

Comments are requested by January 8, 2010.

IMPACT ON CITY RESOURCES

The Specific Plan requires both staff resources dedicated to the project, as well as appropriations of \$830,550 from the General Fund Reserve for consultant services, \$78,400 for transportation and traffic analysis contingency, and \$25,000 for related City

costs, for a total appropriation of \$933,950. At the City Council meeting of December 16, 2008, the Council approved the overall scope of work and made a General Fund Reserve appropriation of \$380,000 for the cost for the first year of the project (fiscal year 2008-2009). As part of the 2009-2010 budget, the City Council made a General Fund Reserve appropriation of \$450,000 for the current year's work. A future appropriation of \$100,000 is projected for fiscal year 2010-2011.

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 an Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The current phase of environmental review is discussed in more detail in the Analysis section of this report.

Thomas Rogers
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Report Author

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, 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 or meetings are scheduled. The project list currently has 869 subscribers.

ATTACHMENTS

A. [Notice of Preparation \(NOP\)](#)

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