



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: October 13, 2009
Staff Report #: 09-142

Agenda Item #: B1

REGULAR BUSINESS: Review of and Direction on the Emerging Plan and Next Steps Related to the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the City Council provide direction on the Emerging Plan, as it has been generated through the extensive community engagement process, prior to the preparation of the Draft Specific Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR). Staff also recommends that the City Council authorize the Council Subcommittee to work with staff to explore opportunities for additional public involvement during the upcoming phase of work.

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 earlier 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 detailed land use regulations, design guidelines, infrastructure plans, 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 transitioning between Task 3 ("Development of Framework, Concept Plans, Programs and Guidelines") and Task 4 ("Draft Specific Plan, Fiscal Impact Analysis, and Draft EIR"), having completed the project initiation, existing conditions analysis, and vision refinement tasks.

The key milestones for the earlier work 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. As the project has progressed, 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 871 subscribers.

The results of the third workshop are being used to refine and improve the Emerging Plan. The revised plan will serve as the basis for the Draft Specific Plan, which will itself be used to prepare the Draft EIR and Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA). These draft documents will be presented for full public review in spring/summer 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

This meeting of the City Council is one of four working sessions on the project that precede the Council's formal review of the Draft and Final Specific Plan and EIR. The working sessions have been intended to be regular 'check-ins' that allow the Council to review the status of the project and to provide feedback. The Council's sessions have been complemented by similar meetings of the project Oversight and Outreach Committee and Planning Commission, the most recent of which took place on Thursday, October 1 and Monday, October 5, respectively. Summaries of these meetings will be integrated into the October 13 City Council presentation.

The meeting will involve a presentation by the consultant on the following topics:

1. Project Schedule
2. Reminder of Phase I Vision Plan – Process and Goals
3. Emerging Plan – Review of Community Meeting #3
4. Next Steps – Specific Plan and EIR
5. Private Development and Public Benefit
6. Comments from the Oversight/Outreach Committee and Planning Commission

Hard copies of the presentation will be available at the meeting for the City Council and the public, and an electronic version will be posted on the project page after the meeting.

Staff recommends that the meeting follow this procedure:

1. Consultant Presentation
2. City Council Detail/Clarification-Type Questions of the Consultant and Staff
3. Public Comment
4. City Council Discussion and Direction on the Preparation of the Draft Specific Plan and EIR and Potential Public Communications/Activities for the Upcoming Phase of Work

As noted earlier, the Emerging Plan is being revised in response to the comments from the third Community Workshop and will serve as the basis for the Draft Specific Plan (and by extension the Draft EIR and FIA). *At this stage, the City Council should provide direction on the content of the plan to inform the next phase of work.* Council should keep in mind the overall spirit of the community outreach program, and comments should ideally complement, not directly contradict, areas of the Emerging Plan that appear to have substantive community support, in order to maintain the integrity of the overall process. The Council should note that substantive improvements to the Draft Specific Plan may be considered after its release (anticipated for spring/summer 2010). Refinements could include responses to specific issues or areas of concern that arise through the Draft EIR and FIA processes.

The Council should also provide direction at the October 13 meeting on what communications or other project activities should take place while the Draft Specific Plan, EIR, and FIA are being prepared. As approved, the scope of work does not include any public meetings until the release of the documents, but staff recommends that the Council authorize the Council Subcommittee to work with staff to explore additional public involvement strategies for this period. Preparation of a Draft EIR is a highly structured process, and there are typically not opportunities to release draft findings prior to the publishing of the full document. However, there may be opportunities to inform the public and continue the existing momentum by releasing certain background materials (such as a market study) and providing information and/or regular business updates to the City Council and Planning Commission. As with the Council's feedback on the Emerging Plan, staff recommends that such potential additions to the process honor the areas of agreement that have resulted through the public engagement process.

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).

The potential additional activities for the upcoming phase of work are anticipated to be conducted by staff, and would not result in additional consultant costs.

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) will include the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

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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 or meetings are scheduled. The project list currently has 871 subscribers.

ATTACHMENTS

None

EXHIBITS TO BE PROVIDED AT MEETING

Consultant Presentation