



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Council Meeting Date: August 25, 2009
Staff Report #: 09-113

Agenda Item #: SS-1

STUDY SESSION: Review of El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan Project Status and Opportunity for Council Member Feedback on the Process

The purpose of this item is to be a regular 'check-in' that allows the City Council to review the status of the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan project and to provide process feedback.

BACKGROUND

Menlo Park is developing a long-term plan for the El Camino Real and Downtown areas. The completed visioning process (Phase I) has led into the preparation of a Specific Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report (Phase II). Environmental and fiscal reviews are being integrated into this process, so that potential benefits (such as tax revenue) and impacts (such as traffic) of different scenarios will be considered as the community develops the long-term plan. The completed Specific Plan will contain elements such as detailed land use regulations, design guidelines, infrastructure plans, and implementation measures. Broad public outreach and participation continues to be a key element of the project.

The project 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 the "Development of Framework, Concept Plans, Programs and Guidelines" stage, having completed the project initiation, existing conditions analysis, and vision refinement tasks. A key milestone for the earlier work was the first Community Workshop, which took place on April 16, 2009. At this workshop, the community looked beyond the Vision Plan goals to understand existing opportunities and constraints and the inherent trade-offs (e.g., traffic/parking and pedestrian space) when considering a vibrant downtown appropriate for Menlo Park. Approximately 100 community members attended the first workshop.

The current stage involves developing, reviewing, and refining concept plans and strategic approaches for the Specific Plan project area. The community began to address these topics at the second Community Workshop, which took place on June 18, 2009 and which 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.

The third and final community workshop will be held on Thursday, September 17, 2009. At this workshop, refined concepts and a preferred alternative, based on input from the previous meetings, will be presented and discussed. The results of this workshop will set the foundation for the draft version of the Specific Plan, with recommendations for land use, building character, and public improvements. Concurrently, the team will also conduct a thorough fiscal impact analysis and Draft Environmental Impact Report, which will be presented for full public review and comment in spring/summer 2010. The draft fiscal and environmental documents will provide the Planning Commission, City Council, and general public with detailed information about benefits and impacts of the draft Specific Plan and of its alternatives, allowing more fully informed decision-making about the final Specific Plan.

At the August 25 meeting, the City Council will separately consider a Consent Calendar item that would amend the approved scope of work with one additional meeting each for the Planning Commission and City Council in early October to provide additional direction following the third Community Workshop. This proposal is discussed in more detail in a separate staff report.

ANALYSIS

This meeting of the City Council is one of three scheduled working sessions on the project that precede the Council's formal review of the Draft and Final Specific Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The working sessions are intended to be regular 'check-ins' that allow the Council to review the status of the project, discuss the draft findings from the previous workshop, and to provide process feedback. The Council's sessions are complemented by similar meetings of the Planning Commission, the most recent of which took place on Monday, August 24. Due to the staff report printing deadlines, a summary of the Planning Commission meeting cannot be provided here, but will be integrated into the August 25 City Council presentation.

This meeting will involve a presentation by the consultant consisting of the following topics:

1. Review of Schedule
2. Community Meeting #2 (June 18, 2009): Key Directions
3. Oversight and Outreach Committee Meeting (July 30, 2009) and Planning Commission Meeting (August 24, 2009): Summary of Comments
4. Next Steps to Preferred Alternative: Refinement and Evaluation of Process Steps
5. Approach to Community Workshop #3 (September 17, 2009)

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 web page after the meeting.

Staff recommends that the meeting follow the outlined procedure:

1. Consultant Presentation
2. City Council Detail/Clarification-Type Questions of the Consultant and Staff
3. Public Comment
4. City Council General Feedback on Process

In its discussion, the Council should try to emphasize process-related topics (such as the workshop format or event promotions) and potential improvements or refinements to these elements. Comments on plan content (such as land uses and building attributes) should ideally be kept more general at this point, in order to continue this phase's emphasis on the community planning 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 study to allocate the costs appropriately.

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) 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.

ATTACHMENTS

None

EXHIBITS TO BE PROVIDED AT MEETING

Consultant Presentation