

## CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT  
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 2, 2022

### 5. STUDY SESSION

- 5.1 **Study Session to Discuss a Request for a Planned Community Permit, Development Review Permit, and Heritage Tree Removal Permit to Construct a New 80,000 Square Foot Office Building, a New Parking Structure with Four Levels Above Grade and Two Levels Below, and Minor Building Modifications to an Existing Two-Story Office Building to Remain On-Site, Including a Request for Transfer of Development Rights as Part of the Los Altos School District TDR Program at 189 North Bernardo Avenue**

#### RECOMMENDATION

That the Environmental Planning Commission provide input on the proposed project.

#### PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The Environmental Planning Commission's (EPC) agenda is advertised on Channel 26, and the agenda and this report appear on the City's internet website. All property owners and tenants within a 750' radius and other interested stakeholders were notified of this meeting.

## BACKGROUND

### Project Site and Location

The approximately four-acre project site is located on the northeast corner of North Bernardo Avenue and Central Expressway. The project site is surrounded by office developments to the north and west, residential developments across Central Expressway, and the Caltrain tracks to the south and east.

The project site is currently developed with an approximately 59,000 square foot, two-story office building and surface parking lot.

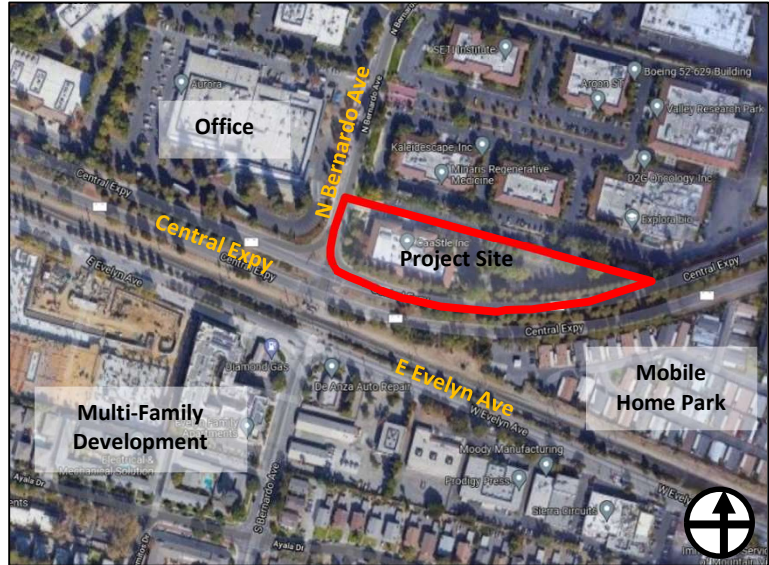


Figure 1: Location Map

### General Plan and Zoning Designation

The current General Plan Land Use designation for the site is High-Intensity Office. The site is within the East Whisman Precise Plan (EWPP)—Employment Character Area (South). No changes to the General Plan or zoning are requested as part of the project.

### Prior Meetings and Hearings

#### TDR Program and Gatekeeper Authorization

The Los Altos School District (LASD) transfer of development rights (TDR) program stems from years of coordination between the City and LASD on opportunities to support a new school site in the San Antonio Precise Plan (SAPP) area, including adopted policies in the SAPP for measures like the TDR program.

On January 16, 2018, the City Council authorized the City Manager to execute a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the City and LASD establishing the framework for the TDR program comprised of up to 610,000 square feet of transferable development rights. At the same meeting, Council also authorized City staff to begin review

of several Gatekeeper requests for development projects proposing to utilize available TDR square footage, including this project.

The applicant, Sand Hill Property Company, received Council authorization to submit an application utilizing up to 28,000 square feet of TDRs at the site and construct a new 90,000 square foot office building and associated parking garage (see Exhibit 1—[City Council Report, January 16, 2018](#)).

In November 2019, the City Council directed LASD TDR projects be “grandfathered” out of the Jobs-Housing Linkage requirement in the East Whisman Precise Plan, which was under development at the time the LASD TDR program was authorized (see Exhibit 2—[City Council Report, November 5, 2019](#)).

#### Development Review Committee

The Development Review Committee (DRC) reviewed the project on February 2, 2022 and discussed the proposed site plan, open space design, office building design, and garage screening design. DRC recommendations are summarized in the relevant sections below.

The City received comments from two members of the public for the DRC meeting. Both persons were concerned about the number of Heritage tree removals being requested. One person also provided comments encouraging the publicly accessible open space, multi-use path, and adding building design features that limit light spillover from the buildings and emphasize active design elements.

#### Community Meeting

The applicant hosted a virtual community meeting on February 10, 2022. No members of the public attended the meeting or submitted comments to the City or applicant.

### **DISCUSSION**

#### **Project Overview**

The proposed project includes development of the site with a new four-story, approximately 80,000 square foot office building, utilizing Bonus Floor Area Ratio (FAR) allowances under the EWPP as well as the TDR square footage; a new six-level parking structure (with four levels above-grade and two levels below-grade); and minor facade modifications to the existing two-story office building, which would remain on-site as part of the project (see Exhibit 3—Project Plans).

Vehicular access to the site would be through a driveway accessed from North Bernardo Avenue and running behind the office buildings, leading to limited surface parking spaces and the parking garage entrance on the east end of the site.

Open-space amenities are proposed at the east and west ends of the site, between the two office buildings, and on upper-floor decks. The project proposes several public amenities, including a multi-use path (located along Central Expressway), a north-south paseo through the site (between the parking garage and office building), and privately owned open space, which will be available for public use. The project is proposing to remove 74 Heritage trees.

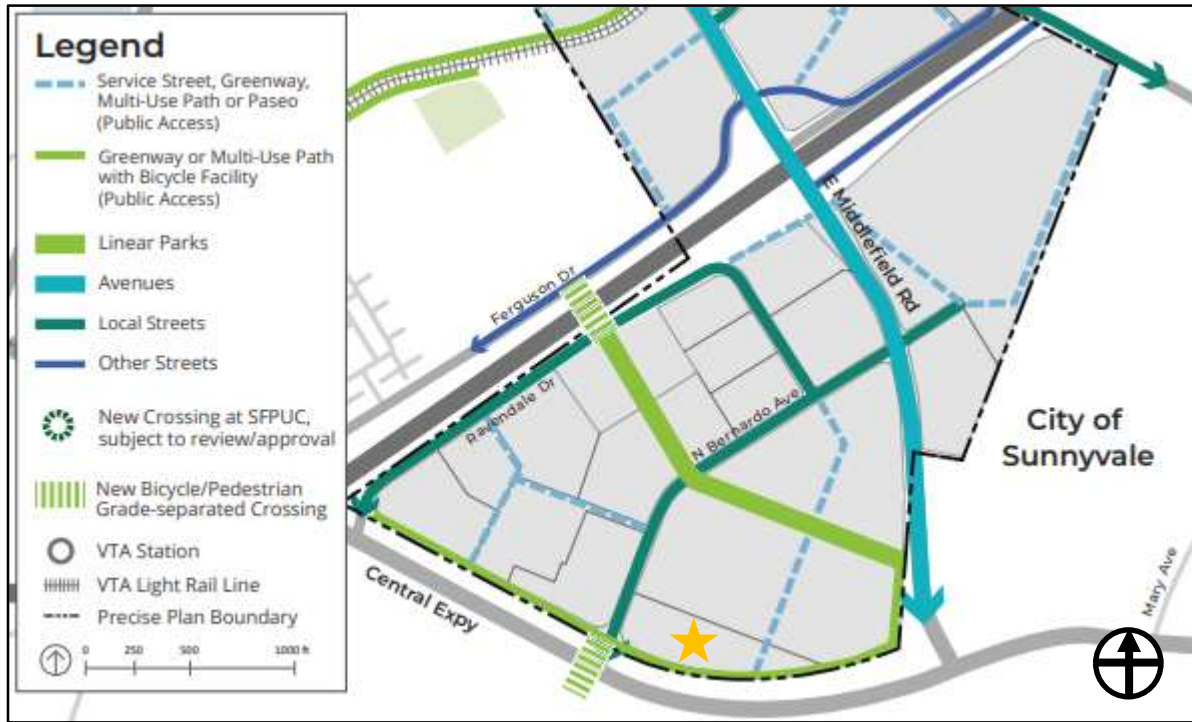


Figure 2: Site Plan

Site Plan and Circulation Design

The Publicly Accessible Complete Street Network adopted in the EWPP requires a multi-use path with bicycle facilities and a pedestrian paseo on the project site. Figure 3 is a partial

image of *Figure 21* of the EWPP and illustrates the planned multi-modal street network through the area. The project site is indicated with a yellow star.



**Figure 3: Publicly Accessible Complete Street Network in EWPP**

The multi-use path planned for this project site is the first portion of the path likely to be constructed in the area. Early in the review process, staff and the applicant identified some constraints/challenges of placing the multi-use path on this project site. Other portions of the path will be constructed as redevelopment occurs and could face similar constraints. The constraints include:

- The project and multi-use path design must be coordinated with the planned “New Bicycle/Pedestrian Grade-Separated Crossing” (see Figure 3). This project is under way as a coordinated effort between Sunnyvale and Mountain View and is referred to as the “Bernardo Undercrossing Project.” The current plan options indicate the bicycle/pedestrian connection will go under Evelyn Avenue and Central Expressway and likely surface on the east side of Bernardo Avenue, adjacent to the project site.
- The existing building to remain on the west end of the site constrains the area in which the multi-use path should be located along Central Expressway, as called for in the EWPP.
- Twenty-two (22) Heritage trees are located between the existing building to remain and Central Expressway. These trees are indicated as Tree Nos. 39 through 57 and

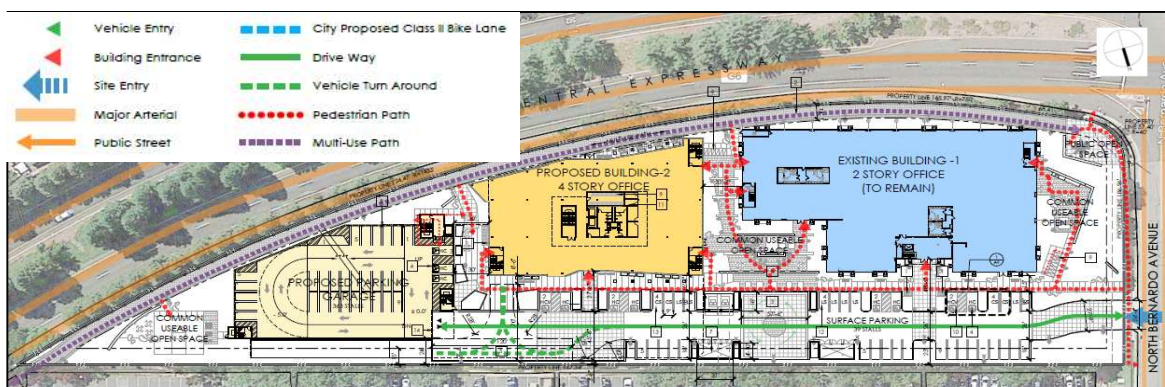
59 through 61 on Sheet L8.0 of Exhibit 3—Project Plans. Nineteen (19) of these trees are in “good” health and predominantly Coast redwoods. These trees are discussed in further detail in the *Tree Preservation* section below.

In an effort to preserve the healthy trees between the existing building and Central Expressway, staff worked extensively with the applicant to explore alternatives to accommodate the multi-use path on the north side of the site (as an exception to the Precise Plan). However, all options were infeasible, inconsistent with the intent of the EWPP, and resulted in a less-attractive site design. In addition, the multi-use path placed along the site’s northern edge resulted in the following issues:

- Conflict with and/or lack of connection with the planned Bernardo Undercrossing project.
- Potentially unsafe pedestrian/bicycle connection to future portions of the multi-use path.
- Conflict with required fire and trash truck turnaround.
- Narrow path unsuitable for shared pedestrian and bicycle use.
- Required coordination with the adjacent property owner (coordination was attempted but failed).

Furthermore, many of the trees that could be saved by the alternative location of the multi-use path would likely be removed in the planned Bernardo Undercrossing project.

The proposed circulation plan (Figure 4) locates the multi-use plan along Central Expressway and the north-south paseo between the proposed office building and parking garage, consistent with the locations illustrated in the EWPP.



**Figure 4: Circulation Plan**

Due to the existing development to remain, the project site’s irregular shape, and the increased intensity through the TDR program, the multi-use path and the north-south paseo do not meet some of the development standards in the EWPP. The project is seeking exceptions to some multi-use path and paseo standards as outlined in Table 1 below.

**Table 1: EWPP Compliance**

	<b>EWPP Standard</b>	<b>Proposed (New Buildings)*</b>
<b>Multi-Use Path</b>		
Pedestrian Zone	10’ path, 2’ shoulder	15’+
Building Setback from Path	10’-16’ landscaping	0’-16’
Building to Property Line Setback	30’ minimum	15’-30’
Planting Area for Trees	4’-8’ minimum	None between path and building; street trees along Central Expressway provided.
<b>North/South Paseo</b>		
Pedestrian zone	10’ minimum	10’
Building to Building Setback	35’	30’

\* A value range indicates the buildings’ setbacks vary in relation to the property line and multi-use path.

*DRC Recommendation*

The DRC discussed the proposed site plan at length and provided many detailed recommendations. While the DRC generally supported the site layout, given the project and site’s constraints, the DRC indicated site plan refinement should be prioritized, including the following recommendations, to better comply with the intent of the EWPP and improve the projects’ design:

- Continue to work with staff to study all opportunities to preserve or relocate healthy, mature trees, especially native species. Tree replacements should prioritize large, canopied species.
- Increase the office building and garage setbacks from the multi-use path to allow for amenities, improved landscape buffers along the path, and tree preservation. If proposed buildings cannot be fully set back along the entire length of the multi-use path, study options, such as ground-floor-only setbacks or limited ground-floor setbacks at periodic intervals along the path.

- Create strong visual and/or physical connections between the various publicly accessible open spaces, particularly those located at the far corners of the property. Special attention should be given to connecting the open spaces to the multi-use path and to addressing design features that currently constrain access from the multi-use path to more internal public access areas.
- Design and program the publicly accessible areas to create a mix of experiences and purposes.
- Extend the special paving material and pedestrian-oriented design elements across the driveway to extend the north/south paseo to the adjacent site (north) and complete the future connection. Continue to work with staff to study options to soften the appearance of large pavement areas in the emergency vehicle turnaround area.
- Include wayfinding signage for the public-use areas of the private property.
- Ensure proposed buildings are designed to engage the open space/circulation pathways they front, as discussed in more detail below.

***EPC Question No. 1: Does the EPC support the proposed exceptions to the EWPP development standards for the multi-use path and paseo and/or have any additional comments on the project site plan?***

### Tree Preservation

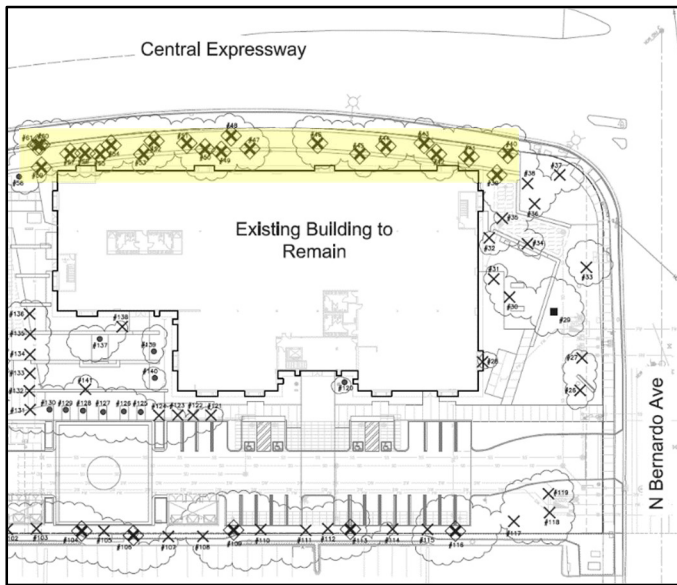
The project's arborist report assessed 160 trees, 94 of which are Heritage trees. The project is proposing to remove 74 Heritage trees. The two reasons for the proposed removal of Heritage trees are fair or poor health (38 trees) and impact of the proposed development (36 trees). Forty-eight (48) of the 55 non-Heritage trees proposed for removal are not in good health.

Staff analyzed the proposed tree removals for potential retention of Heritage and non-Heritage trees in good health. Nine Heritage trees and seven non-Heritage trees could potentially be preserved with modifications to the development proposal. These modifications would involve changes to the proposed building and underground garage footprint, decreased vehicle parking, and further exceptions to the design of the multi-use path. The trees are also being assessed for transplant suitability.

The project is proposing to plant 173 new trees.



*Multi-Use Path*



**Figure 5: Partial Tree Plan**

Twenty-two (22) of the Heritage trees proposed for removal are located along Central Expressway and are proposed for removal due to conflict with the multi-use path (See the yellow highlighted area in Figure 5). Nineteen (19) of these trees are healthy. Staff has identified six of the healthy trees for potential preservation if further studies determine innovative design of the multi-use path along Central Expressway is feasible. The potential future design would involve meandering the path decreasing the width of the path at certain locations.

Many of the trees in question, highlighted in Figure 5, would likely be removed in the planned Bernardo Undercrossing project.

***EPC Question No. 2: Does the EPC support studying minor changes to the building/garage footprints, decreased vehicular parking, and further exceptions to the multi-use path design to preserve trees as identified by staff and/or have any additional comments on the proposed tree plan?***

Building Design

*Office Building*

The proposed office building is four stories and features 12,000 square feet of deck space for employees. The structure features predominantly glass walls with curved cutouts. Wood-clad tower features are located at three corners of the



**Figure 6: Office Building Rendering from Central Expressway**

building. On the east and west facades, a thick metal frame surrounds windows on the second and third floors with vertical metal fins over the windows.

Portions of the ground floor are set back from the floors above with a partially covered arcade on the south and north elevations. These arcades help to indicate the facades as primary entrances.

#### *DRC Recommendation*

The DRC discussed the office building facade design extensively and expressed concerns about the effectiveness of the proposed design in achieving the intended design objectives—a light, floating glass building with curvilinear cutouts that respond to the curved property line along Central Expressway. The DRC also expressed concern regarding the proposed designed relationship to open space and pedestrians. Once site design recommendations are addressed, the DRC recommended the applicant team revise the office building design to:

- Create a clear hierarchy of design movements that elevate and draw more cohesive attention to the primary design intent. The DRC found certain design decisions, such as the prominent wood-clad stair towers and heavy metal-framed side elevations, conflicted with the glassy upper-floor design concept; and
- Treat the ground-floor design differently than the upper-floor facade, with pedestrian-scaled elements that build a connection between the building and the exterior open space and multi-use path. The DRC found the floating, horizontal glass concept to be less effective when it was brought down to the ground level and suggested a more distinct ground-level design could be one way to create a connection between the new building design and the existing office building to remain.

### *Parking Garage*



**Figure 7: Garage Rendering  
from Central Expressway**

elements and glass at the south and west corners, respectively.

The parking garage is located at the east corner of the site (see elevations on Sheet A-27). One facade (north elevation) features a three-story, colored, graphic printed screen. The other facades are clad in vertical metal fins with a one- or two-story green screen (i.e., a mesh screen that allows vines to grow on it). The design uses some of the same materials as the proposed office building, including vertical wood

### *DRC Recommendation*

The DRC discussion of the garage focused on the potential success of the green screen, the metal fin installation, and the relationship to the office building. The DRC made the following recommendations:

- Use of the green screen could be appropriate in this context. However, the applicant and staff should work to address all necessary design elements, such as location/solar exposure, green screen material, and plant types, to ensure its success and growth will occur as shown in the renderings.
- The metal fin installation, mostly seen on the upper floors of the garage, should be designed to create interest and movement and better obscure the ramping and structure of the garage.
- The extent and orientation of different design features (e.g., vertical fins, green screens, etc.) could complement each other and be well-integrated with each other.
- As the office building design evolves, incorporate design elements in the garage cladding design that relate it to the proposed office building.
- Use key materials to emphasize pedestrian and vehicular entrances to the garage.

***EPC Question No. 3: Does the EPC have any comments on the proposed design of the office building or parking garage?***

## **CONCLUSION**

This Study Session gives the EPC the opportunity to provide early input on key project topics to guide the applicant and staff in refining the project design through the remainder of the development review process. The project will return to the EPC for a formal recommendation to the City Council once the development review process and environmental review is complete.

Staff requests EPC feedback on the following questions and any other project-related comments:

1. Does the EPC support the proposed exceptions to the EWPP development standards for the multi-use path and paseo and/or have any additional comments on the project site plan?
2. Does the EPC support studying minor changes to the building/garage footprints, decreased vehicular parking, and further exceptions to the multi-use path design to preserve trees as identified by staff and/or have any additional comments on the proposed tree plan?
3. Does the EPC have any comments on the proposed design of the office building or parking garage?

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- Exhibits:
1. [City Council Report, January 16, 2018](#)
  2. [City Council Report, November 5, 2019](#)
  3. Project Plans