

**DATE:** June 19, 2018

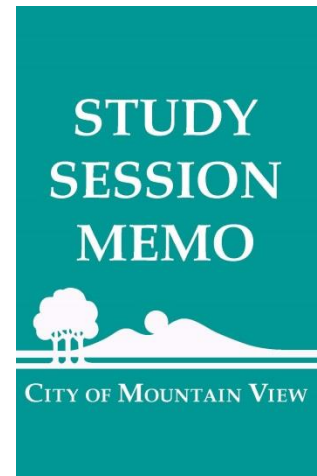
**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council

**FROM:** Rebecca Shapiro, Deputy Zoning  
Administrator  
Randall Tsuda, Community Development  
Director

**VIA:** Daniel H. Rich, City Manager

**TITLE:** **Residential Architecture Discussion**

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## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this meeting is to provide an opportunity for a broader discussion of design objectives for upcoming multi-family residential development. This input will help staff better understand design expectations and guide the design review process for these projects.

## **BACKGROUND**

Over the past year, the City Council, Environmental Planning Commission (EPC), and community members have identified some recurring concerns about the design of higher-intensity residential developments. This Study Session memo provides general background information on recent development, the City's development review process and design guidelines, and staff strategies implemented in the last year to try to address design concerns. The attached EPC staff report (Attachment 1) provides greater detail on these topics. Information in these reports is intended to complement the Study Session presentation and discussion at the Council meeting.

### **Council Study Session Format and Objectives**

Based in part on input from the Mayor and Vice Mayor, the presentation at the meeting will be graphics-heavy and led by two consulting architects providing:

- *A Primer on Residential Design Features*, using photos of existing buildings of varying architectural style in Mountain View to show how key residential features are implemented in different ways.

- *A Survey of New Development*, providing photos of development in other Bay Area communities as reference for Council to discuss features/buildings that successfully achieve objectives for residential design.
- *Food for Thought*, identifying some potential areas for Council to consider recommending design attention in future developments.

The presentation is intended to help provide a common language and development examples as a reference point for Council discussion at the meeting. The Council presentation will largely duplicate the EPC presentation, but some slides will be cut or repackaged to try to reduce presentation time.

### Recent Development

The 2030 General Plan was adopted in 2012 and identified key areas of targeted growth (“Change Areas”). Since then, Mountain View has seen a substantial amount of constructed and approved, but not yet built, residential development, including:

- Over 4,000 constructed/approved residential units in approximately 60 residential development projects.
- Higher-intensity residential developments comprise roughly two-thirds of the constructed/approved residential units.
- Of the approximately 20 higher-intensity residential developments, roughly one-half are complete and the other half are approved but unbuilt or under construction.

Residential development has been proposed in many areas of the City, but larger residential developments have predominantly been constructed in Precise Plan areas corresponding to the Change Areas, including the El Camino Real and San Antonio Precise Plans, and previously adopted Precise Plans that already allowed more intense development such the South Whisman, Downtown, and Evelyn Corridor Precise Plans. The new Precise Plan areas, in particular, are locations where substantial changes from existing conditions are planned, and, therefore, the differences between new development and existing conditions are most noticeable.

The City is currently reviewing, and continues to receive, applications for new residential developments, including higher-intensity projects in Precise Plan areas, residential Gatekeeper applications, and medium-density rowhouse projects. Given recent design concerns, this report and meeting is focused on larger/higher-intensity

residential development. However, it is worth noting that the City has also approved, and continues to see, a large number of applications for rowhouses or similar medium-density, multi-family development projects constituting roughly one-third of new housing units.

### Brief Summary of Recent Design Concerns

While Councilmembers, Environmental Planning Commissioners, and community members have generally supported increased housing development in the City, staff has heard the following concerns expressed about the design of recent developments:

- Recent development with contemporary architecture all looks the same;
- More architectural variety is needed, including buildings with more traditional architectural styles; and
- New contemporary buildings look too blocky and commercial.

### EPC Study Session

On May 16, 2018, the EPC received a residential design presentation and provided input on recent concerns, objectives for future development, and staff design review strategies to address previously express concerns. A summary of EPC input is incorporated into the Discussion section of this report, so it can be easily referenced in context to staff's Council questions for this Study Session.

### *Public Comment*

Approximately six members of the public attended the EPC Study Session, and four people provided comments on residential design, including:

- Support for contemporary architectural styles and flexibility in architectural styles (all of the speakers supported contemporary design, citing a variety of reasons).
- Walkability and pedestrian experience of buildings and streetscapes is vital to good projects, including building materials, setbacks, landscaping, wide sidewalks, and street trees.
- Push for differentiation between projects.

- Aim for a clear hierarchy of building areas—e.g., base, middle, and top with simple articulation (some recent buildings have too much articulation/too many parts).
- Encourage good, interesting modern materials and interesting building features; specific items mentioned included punched metal and art installations.

## DISCUSSION

### Development Review Process

The attached EPC staff report provides greater detail on the development review process, and development context; some key points are summarized here for ease of reference.

#### *Role of Design Review*

Design review is a component of a city's development review process, to ensure new development is of high quality, and consistent with the City's vision for future development conditions. Cities use a standardized process for development review and adopt design guidelines and/or development standards to provide clear, consistent, and proactive design direction reflecting community values.

Adopted standards and guidelines, as well as City action on other similar developments, are early inputs for developers preparing to submit applications for new development. The City's development review process is reactive to project proposals by a developer and begins only after a developer has already spent time and money to acquire property, conduct due diligence, and work with their teams to draft plans.

The development review process incorporates input from a variety of sources, including multiple internal departments, the Development Review Committee (DRC), outside agencies, and interested community members. Project planners consider a variety of design inputs, but often have to balance those design objectives with diverse code requirements and constraints in order to achieve a project design that decision-makers will support, and that the developer/property owner feels they can build. Some developments are also reviewed by the EPC and/or City Council at an early Study Session to highlight key issues for input and guidance for the development review process.

The development review process is rigorous and sometimes lengthy, involving multiple steps and types of review (e.g., design, code compliance, environmental, etc.). As such,

it can take time to see the results of changes in design direction/design review practices. In general, big-picture design direction or issues are identified as early as possible in the application process.

Gaining clarity about Council concerns with recent residential projects, and specific input on what Council would like to see in future development designs, will help staff provide better direction to applicants in the development review process. This input will also allow staff to evaluate if more substantial changes are needed (e.g., updates to development standards or design guidelines) to meet community design goals.

### EPC Input on Recent Design Concerns

The EPC noted the following items, to clarify the recent concerns summarized above:

- Building articulation looks forced, and provided mostly in large blocks.
- Windows and other features all looked the same along longer facades.
- Windows lacked trim and other treatments.

Some EPC members did not have significant concerns with the design of recent development, but did want better pedestrian features and to ensure materials do not quickly feel dated. Several EPC members noted that greatest concerns were focused on buildings/sites along El Camino Real and San Antonio Road (Phase 1).

*Council Question No. 1:* Does Council agree with EPC's input on recent design concerns, or have further clarification of concerns about recent higher-intensity residential developments in Mountain View?

### EPC-Recommended Objectives for Future Developments

The vast majority of recently constructed/approved higher-intensity residential developments have occurred in new Precise Plan areas; project design in those areas is guided by applicable development standards and design guidelines from these regulatory documents. The Precise Plans are also sometimes referenced in review of Gatekeeper projects of similar scale and/or context, when a "P District" rezoning is proposed rather than a new standard zoning district (which would have its own development standards and design guidelines). Recent Gatekeepers have predominantly been higher-intensity residential developments.

It would be challenging to provide detailed summaries of all of the adopted design direction in the scope of this report. However, there are some common themes to design direction in the newly adopted Precise Plans:

- New development will be taller and more dense than prior conditions, with buildings located near/at public sidewalks.
- Quantitative and qualitative development standards and design guidelines identify desired size, placement, and character of new development. This direction generally aims to change existing conditions to create varied, human-scaled buildings/building elements located closer to the public realm, while maintaining compatibility with surrounding conditions.
- There are no prescriptive requirements for architectural style. The North Bayshore and San Antonio Precise Plans encourage innovative, contemporary architecture; the El Camino Real Precise Plan is silent on architectural style.

The design guidelines focus on general compatibility and building form and character objectives for each respective area. This is, in part, because architectural style preferences are subjective, and restricting architectural styles can lead to less overall design variety and visual interest.

The EPC had the following thoughts on important design objectives for review of future residential developments:

- Encourage design variety and do not prescribe architectural styles.
  - Incorporate defining/distinctive features and character, to achieve a diversity of expressions and styles (versus trying to make everything look unique).
- Simplify and vary articulation, including taller/narrower articulation (as opposed to larger, blockier forms).
- Focus on ground-level building/site design, and emphasize the pedestrian experience.
  - Feature residential entries on public sidewalks/paths.
  - Strengthen design of retail frontages and public spaces.
  - Allow adequate space for robust streetscape landscaping.

- Advocate for interesting, higher-quality materials and detailing with contrasting textures; materials should feel substantial and not cheap.
- Encourage innovative retail uses to provide pedestrian destinations.
- Vary heights (EPC was open to height flexibility if it achieved better articulation).

*Council Question No. 2:* Does Council agree with EPC's recommended objectives for review of future developments, or have other design objectives to prioritize?

### EPC Input on Recent Staff Strategies to Address Design Concerns

Design guidelines tend to avoid prescribing a particular architectural style(s) for new development, except when there is a strong basis that can be consistently applied, such as in a historic district with architecturally significant structures. Existing development in Mountain View is fairly eclectic, including a wide range of building sizes and architectural styles. As such, the City's adopted design direction largely addresses compatibility goals through height and setback standards to establish sensitive transitions, rather than by prescribing architectural design styles.

The EPC staff report provides significant detail on ways that City staff have tried to address recently expressed design concerns in projects that are currently under review, particularly comments requesting more traditional architectural styles or features be included in new development. Overall, the EPC supported staff's initial strategies to address design concerns. In particular, EPC supported using the development review process to ensure buildings fit into or are compatible with neighborhoods; the EPC also recognized that using traditional architectural designs may not always be desired.

The EPC was open to flexible options on how best to integrate new development, especially for new projects located next to, rather than entirely within, existing residential neighborhoods. The EPC supported case-by-case evaluation to determine the best design approach for new projects, such as: incorporating a more traditional style, taking a contemporary approach to incorporating more recognizably residential elements, and employing more uniquely contemporary styles. They noted that there would likely be tradeoffs between complementing existing neighborhoods and promoting diverse designs.

Staff appreciates both the EPC's respect for the development review process, as well as the objective to be flexible and not prescribe architectural style. However, case-by-case evaluation does not provide clear proactive input for future projects, or more

specifically the role of traditional architectural styles in new, higher-intensity development. As such, staff has identified additional questions for Council consideration.

*Council Question No. 3:* Does Council support EPC's general recommended approach to addressing compatibility concerns and incorporation of traditional styles/design elements?

*Council Question No. 4:* Are there specific locations or project sizes where Council would or would not like to see traditional architecture styles used?

*Council Question No. 5:* Does Council support design flexibility or prefer traditional architectural styles be prioritized on rowhouse projects?

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends the City Council—after receiving a presentation and viewing graphics—provide feedback and direction on architectural design objectives for residential developments, including input on the following staff questions:

*Council Question No. 1:* Does Council agree with EPC's input on recent design concerns, or have further clarification of concerns about recent higher-intensity residential developments in Mountain View?

*Council Question No. 2:* Does Council agree with EPC's recommended objectives for review of future developments, or have other design objectives to prioritize?

*Council Question No. 3:* Does Council support EPC's general recommended approach to addressing compatibility concerns and incorporation of traditional styles/design elements?

*Council Question No. 4:* Are there specific locations or project sizes where Council would or would not like to see traditional architecture styles used?

*Council Question No. 5:* Does Council support design flexibility or prefer traditional architectural styles be prioritized on rowhouse projects?

### **NEXT STEPS**

The residential projects that have been constructed and raised design concerns have been largely compliant with Precise Plan development standards and design guidelines.



Depending on the scope and nature of City Council direction, feedback from this Study Session can be incorporated into the development review process for current and future residential developments. While staff has already begun trying to address community design concerns in current projects, many projects have been in the development review process for months, and it may be challenging to fully incorporate Council direction into those projects. It will take some time for any additional Council direction from this meeting to be fully implemented in new developments.

If Council is interested in any larger design studies and/or updates to Precise Plan or zoning standards and guidelines, this should be identified for incorporation into the Council goal-setting process.

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Attachments: 1. [EPC Staff Report dated May 16, 2018 \(without exhibits\)](#)  
2. Recent Higher-Intensity Residential Projects (~2012–Present)