

CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT JANUARY 22, 2014

5. PUBLIC HEARINGS

5.1 Study Session – El Camino Real Precise Plan Strategies and Options

RECOMMENDATION

That the Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) provide their preferences from among the strategies and options in the El Camino Real Precise Plan Briefing Book.

MEETING PURPOSE

The purpose of the Study Session is for the EPC to review and provide a preferred direction on the strategies and options in the El Camino Real Precise Plan Briefing Book (“Briefing Book”). Staff will forward the EPC’s preferred direction and comments to the City Council for their Study Session tentatively scheduled for February 4, 2014. At that meeting, the City Council will be asked to endorse a preferred alternative which will guide the development of the Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

BACKGROUND

The following is a summary of public meetings during the Plan process:

September 18, 2013 – Environmental Planning Commission Study Session

The EPC discussed the existing issues along the Corridor. Key input included:

- Development should optimize transit usage, including subsidies for tenants and other Transportation Demand Management requirements.
- The Precise Plan should define key locations clearly, to provide certainty to applicants and stakeholders.
- The Precise Plan should support neighborhood-accessible goods and services.

- Reduced parking ratios may not be working and there may be opportunities for innovative parking strategies.

September 26, 2013 – Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee (B/PAC) Meeting

The B/PAC discussed existing pedestrian and biking conditions on the Corridor. Major discussion points included:

- There are challenges accessing destinations on El Camino Real on foot, due to the way it is laid out and specific barriers, such as Highway 85.
- It is difficult for residents to get to schools on the opposite side of the Corridor and other crossing challenges.
- Bicyclists will ride on El Camino Real out of necessity; make it as safe for them as possible.
- The City should decide whether to commit to bikes on El Camino Real or alternate routes, such as Latham Street and Marich Way. If on El Camino Real, bikes must be very well protected.
- Drive-throughs are not bicycle- and pedestrian-friendly.

October 7, 2013 – Corridor Advisory Group (CAG) Meeting

The CAG discussed existing conditions and issues along the Corridor. Input included:

- Local businesses have challenges getting started, including finding affordable space and getting through the permitting process.
- Public benefits should be significant, certain, and serve a large population.
- Activity centers should be located at major cross-streets, have existing retail, and should build on existing assets, such as strong tenants or good transit accessibility.
- Street parking is important for businesses and buffers pedestrians.
- There are a lot of challenges crossing the street.

October 15, 2013 – City Council Study Session

Council provided general direction on existing conditions and potential direction for the Plan. Input included:

- Sidewalks need to be comfortable and wide.
- Land use regulations should be flexible to support viable development.
- Higher intensities are appropriate near transit and retail nodes.
- El Camino Real is not a safe route for bicycles.

December 16, 2013 – Corridor Advisory Group Meeting

The CAG discussed content from a draft of the Briefing Book. Input included:

- Avoid overly rigid requirements on ground-floor uses.
- Bike facilities on Church Street and Latham Street should consider potential conflicts with residential parking.
- Support for focused pedestrian improvements, with resources towards more frequent crossing locations.
- Support for differentiation of heights and intensities in different areas.

A detailed summary is provided in Exhibit 1.

January 11, 2014 – City-Wide Public Workshop

Approximately 150 attendees at this workshop discussed and provided input on primary strategies and options. This information was developed from the Briefing Book. A summary of public input from the workshop is integrated into the discussion of the alternatives below.

DISCUSSION

The Precise Plan Briefing Book

Exhibit 2 is the Precise Plan Briefing Book, a roadmap for the strategies and key questions for Precise Plan content. The Briefing Book was developed consistent with the General Plan’s El Camino Real goals and policies, and general direction from the community and decision-making bodies during the Precise Plan process.

The Briefing Book contains *Strategies*, which are the high-level alternatives for development and improvements along the Corridor, and *Options*, which are the more detailed alternatives within each topic section. The strategies are *Uniform*, in which land use, character, and access are treated similarly along the length of the Corridor, and *Focused*, which designates areas for higher activity, levels of growth, and improvements. While specific options are generally consistent with one strategy, it is possible to mix and match options to create a unique alternative for the Plan. The following table summarizes how strategies and options are related.

<u>Topics</u>	<u>Strategies</u>	
	<i>Uniform</i>	<i>Focused</i>
1. Ground-Floor Land Use	Option 1A No Specific Concentration	Option 1B Active Frontages Focused
2. Pedestrian Improvements	Option 2A Uniform Pedestrian Improvements	Option 2B Focused Pedestrian Improvements
3. Bicycle Improvements	Option 3A El Camino Real Bicycle Focus	Option 3B Parallel Route Focus
4. Small Parcels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage Parcel Aggregation • Targeted Standards and Development Types 	
5. Adjacency and Transitions	Strong Transitions Policies and Standards	
6. Height and Scale	Option 6A Uniform Intensity Regulations	Option 6B Intensity Focused on Activity Areas
7. Public Benefits	Range of potential benefits	

Following an overview of the strategies, this report discusses each topic and a summary of the community's input on each topic from the January 11 workshop. More detailed information on strategies, topics, and maps are provided in the Briefing Book.

Strategies

Uniform Strategy

The Uniform strategy would create a more general set of uses, intensities, and standards throughout the Precise Plan area. These standards would include transition and adjacency rules for all areas. They could also include tiered intensities based on site conditions such as size, but would not define locations within the Plan. In addition, pedestrian improvements, including the potential for new crossings, would be spread along the Corridor.

Some advantages of the uniform strategy include:

- Greater flexibility for the location of development and new uses; this could lead to more redevelopment opportunities for vacant or underutilized sites.
- Smaller distances between pedestrian crossings.
- More consistent sidewalk and streetscape character along the Corridor, which could reduce range of designs that would need to be implemented.
- Development opportunities spread more equally among landowners along the Corridor.
- Fewer changes from existing standards and regulations along the Corridor.

Focused Strategy

The Focused strategy creates targeted standards, intensities, and uses for different subareas and activity centers along the Corridor. Activity centers are areas where active uses—including retail, restaurants, and personal services—and higher-intensity buildings would be concentrated. In addition, focused sidewalk improvements, streetscape treatments, and improved pedestrian crossings may be established within the activity centers, reinforcing a focus on the areas of highest pedestrian activity. A map showing a draft distribution of activity centers within the Focused strategy is on Page 8 of the Briefing Book.

Some advantages of the focused strategy include:

- More destinations near major cross streets, bicycle routes, transit stops, and areas of existing pedestrian activity. This improves access for alternate modes of travel.
- Fewer locations along the Corridor where vehicles enter and leave the roadway, which could improve traffic flow.
- Fewer locations along the Corridor where there may be crossing conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians.
- Retail and active uses tend to be more successful when close to other retail and active uses.
- Public improvements, such as parking and improved sidewalks, benefit more people when they are in active locations.
- More detail on the locations of larger buildings can provide greater predictability for residents and applicants on the desired vision and character for the Corridor.
- Differentiation of streetscape character along the Corridor can help neighborhoods and activity centers establish their own identity.

Workshop input on the strategies included:

- **Focused Strategy Preference.** Six of the seven tables expressed a general agreement with the idea of “nodes” and clustering activity around certain locations. Participants noted that this strategy would promote a greater sense of community at specific sites and accelerate place-making on the Corridor.
- **Important to plan for the right activity centers.** Community members who supported the Focused approach emphasized that identifying the focus sites should be done carefully and deliberately. Many mentioned the significance of the Castro Street/El Camino Real intersection and the need for additional ground-level retail at this location.
- **Importance of maintaining flexibility.** Some participants appreciated the flexibility with a more uniform approach, allowing for development over time to naturally shape the Corridor. They noted that the City should look to

align its interests with developer interests in order to encourage redevelopment.

Topic 1: Ground-Floor Land Use

The options for ground-floor land use emphasize the locations of “active frontages.” These are spaces designed to accommodate uses such as retail, restaurants, personal services, entertainment, and some offices that foster pedestrian activity. The options include:

OPTION 1A: Retail/Active Frontages Focused in Activity Centers. Active frontages would be concentrated within activity centers with convenient access to neighborhoods, transit, and other activity centers. The standards could be set up to require active frontage, or to encourage it with a set of incentives. Other areas could have retail, but they could also gradually transition to office, residential, or other uses to respond to market conditions.

OPTION 1B: No Specific Retail Concentration. There would be no City policy requiring or encouraging active ground-floor frontages in a particular location. This would continue the current practices; for example, some uses may be permitted everywhere and other uses would be considered for specific locations on a case-by-case basis. In addition, new buildings may be required to provide certain frontages on a case-by-case basis (such as the recent Gatekeeper project at 801 El Camino Real West, which includes retail along El Camino Real and Castro Street).

Workshop Input on Ground-Floor Land Use

- **Focus on existing activity centers.** Most tables supported the idea of building on “what is already there,” and either strongly encouraging or requiring retail for new projects in existing retail clusters.
- **Desire for more ground-floor commercial uses.** Participants in all groups agreed that the Corridor could use more active storefronts in general, especially shops and food retail. The community was strongly in favor of small-scale retail.
- **Concern over existing businesses.** Participants repeatedly mentioned their desire to see current viable businesses protected and maintained. New development should assist any displaced businesses.

- **Difficulties for small businesses.** Business owners who attended the meeting stressed that the City should allow more flexibility in regulations for small businesses, in particular parking requirements, landscaping maintenance, and facade improvements. The City should ensure that development or maintenance requirements do not unintentionally discourage investment in properties (businesses are afraid of triggering more expensive requirements when they do minor upgrades or rehabilitations).

Ground-Floor Land Use Questions

- **Primary Question:** What is the EPC's preferred option for ground-floor uses? Does the EPC wish to adjust the preferred option?
- **Secondary Question:** What are desired ground-floor uses in active areas and less pedestrian-oriented areas? For example, are auto-oriented uses like service stations appropriate in less pedestrian-oriented areas?

Topic 2: Pedestrian Improvements

The Pedestrian Improvements options include the distribution of particular sidewalk improvements, such as pedestrian crossings, lighting, landscaping, plazas, and median refuges. The options include:

OPTION 2A: Uniform Pedestrian Improvements. This option would create a uniform sidewalk standard that could apply to all new development and street improvements. It may also create more frequent pedestrian crossings where there are currently large crossing distances.

OPTION 2B: Focused Pedestrian Improvements. Higher-quality, more intensive pedestrian improvements would be located where more pedestrian activity is expected and encouraged. Other locations, where there are fewer destinations or space is more constrained, would have smaller increases in sidewalk width, fewer pedestrian crossings, and/or less landscaping.

Workshop Input on Pedestrian Improvements

- **Safety first.** Many participants shared stories of the dangers of crossing El Camino Real. Participants were in strong agreement that all intersections need to satisfy a basic level of safety and security for pedestrians. The lack of sufficient midblock crossings was also highlighted at numerous tables.

- **Pedestrian improvements are critical to activating the potential of the Corridor.** Most groups supported the idea of relating major pedestrian investment to areas of the Corridor with the highest pedestrian volumes. Many supported the idea of smaller setbacks with pedestrian-oriented facades. Some participants explained that the City could start with a focus on the nodes and then expand outwards to address the areas in between.
- **Disagreement over the need for a “consistent” character.** Some tables agreed that having a consistent set of improvements would be the most equitable, serving all adjacent neighborhoods equally. However, participants at multiple tables raised the question of whether pedestrians utilize the whole Corridor or merely short stretches at a time, implying that focused investments may be more useful than distributed ones.

Pedestrian Improvements Question

- What is the EPC’s preferred option for pedestrian improvements? Does the EPC wish to adjust the preferred option?

Topic 3: Bicycle Improvements

The Bicycle Improvements options describe the potential locations of a new cross-town bicycle route from Los Altos and Palo Alto to Sunnyvale. Both options contain north-south bicycle facilities on major arterials such as Shoreline Boulevard. In addition, both options are the same east of Calderon Avenue, where there is no viable alternative to El Camino Real over the Highway 85 overpass. The options include:

OPTION 3A: El Camino Real Bicycle Facilities. This option would create a dedicated bicycle facility along El Camino Real from Rengstorff Avenue, where the City of Los Altos begins, to Sunnyvale. This facility may need space currently used by street parking or landscaping.

OPTION 3B: Parallel Route Facilities. This option would include bicycling improvements on Latham Street and Church Street, with access to El Camino Real occurring on major north-south cross streets or additional future cut-throughs.

Workshop Input on Bicycle Improvements

- **General support for biking.** Many participants were active or occasional cyclists and supported the improvement of facilities throughout the City, both on and off El Camino Real.
- **Considerable support for both El Camino Real and Church Street/Latham Street bicycle facilities.** More than half of the groups supported a protected bicycle lane on El Camino Real, with many noting that it was a major destination with shops and offices, while Latham Street/Church Street was not. They stated that a buffered cycle track would also increase pedestrian safety by putting a physical barrier between fast-moving cars and the sidewalk area. Other groups supported an improved bicycle route along Latham Street/Church Street, including lanes and/or a “bicycle boulevard” treatment.
- **Concerns over vehicle conflicts, parking loss, and business impacts.** Other participants disagreed with a bicycle facility along El Camino Real, highlighting the potential tradeoffs of parking loss and vehicle impacts. They brought up concerns over driveway conflicts with a buffered bicycle lane. These participants emphasized that any potential bicycle facilities should not seriously impact the economic viability of small businesses on El Camino Real.
- **Safety or crossings is paramount.** Whether facilities are eventually constructed on or off El Camino Real, nearly all participants agreed that crossings of El Camino Real needed serious work in order to be safe. The crossing at El Monte Avenue was called out as especially poor.

Bicycle Improvements Question

- What is the EPC’s preferred option for bicycle improvements? Does the EPC wish to adjust the preferred option?

Topic 4: Small Parcels

Tools for small parcels can encourage revitalization of sites that are underutilized because of their small size. Each of the tools can be used with either strategy

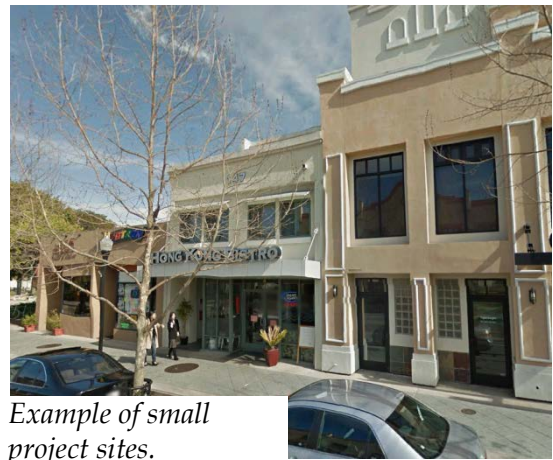
(Focused or Uniform). However, the tool used can have an impact on the character of an area. The tools include:

Encourage Parcel Aggregation. This set of tools can encourage redevelopment by creating larger project sites that are more economical to develop than small sites. Examples of encouraging parcel aggregation include tiered intensities based on parcel size, shared parking, or an intensity bonus. It may ultimately result in larger project sites in the area (see pictures).

Targeted Standards and Development Types. This set of tools makes certain entitlements easier for small parcels, which would incentivize revitalization on their own. Incentives for small parcels may include special zoning or reduced side setback requirements, reduced parking requirements, and/or land use exemptions. They may ultimately result in smaller project sites in the area (see pictures).



Example of a large project site.



Example of small project sites.

This issue was not discussed specifically at the workshop. However, many participants mentioned that maintenance, development, and improvement of small parcels can be challenging and supported the concept of regulations and standards specifically targeted at small parcels and existing small businesses.

Small Parcels Question

- Are there any general comments about regulatory tools related to small parcels?

Topic 5: Adjacency and Transitions

This topic describes the regulatory tools for ensuring that new development appropriately transitions to surrounding neighborhoods. This is a priority for all new development on El Camino Real as it is a key policy in the General Plan and it will be carried forward in the Precise Plan.

This issue was not discussed specifically at the workshop, but many participants stressed that the interface between new development and existing residential neighborhoods is very important.

Adjacency and Transitions Question

- Are there any general comments about how transition regulations can be considered in the Plan?

Topic 6: Height and Scale

The Height and Scale options consider how intensity would be distributed along the Corridor. In all cases, shallow parcels near neighborhoods would be limited in overall height because of transition policies. The options include:

OPTION 6A: Uniform Intensity Regulations. A similar range of intensities would be available to all sites along the Corridor. Different levels of Floor Area Ratio (FAR) would be associated with different levels of review and public benefits.

OPTION 6B: Intensity Focused in Activity Areas. Higher ranges of intensities would be allowed for certain locations within activity areas and lower ranges would be for areas outside activity areas. Different levels of intensity could also be set up under this option, but this option would specifically call out the activity areas for more growth.

Workshop Input on Height and Scale

- **Strong support for mixed-use development.** All tables strongly supported mixed-use development along the Corridor. The notion of clustered ground-floor retail was very attractive to residents.
- **Interest in a focused strategy as long as nodes do not overwhelm their surroundings.** Most tables supported having higher-density development

clustered in limited locations to focus needed investments and active storefronts. Some participants wanted to limit any increase in density and others wanted to distribute uniformly across the Corridor. There was general interest in ensuring that future development be compatible with adjacent uses.

- **Building use and character is important.** Many participants' comments focused on building use and character (diversity of uses such as active retail, office, grocery, community uses, residential, entertainment, services). There was support for upper-story setbacks and diversity of building types and architecture.
- **Disagreement over building heights.** Some tables were supportive of multiple six-story buildings at important nodes, while other tables felt four stories should be more common, or even a maximum that is never exceeded.
- **El Camino Real is an appropriate place for additional residential density.** Many residents agreed that El Camino Real is a good place to add more housing units in the City. Some residents had concern over the traffic impacts of new development.

Height and Scale Questions

- **Primary Question:** Which is the EPC's preferred option for height and scale? Does the EPC wish to adjust the preferred option?
- **Secondary Question:** Does the EPC have guidance on the range of appropriate heights for new development in different parts of the Corridor?

Topic 7: Public Benefits

This topic discusses the range of desired public benefits the City could require in exchange for higher-intensity development, such as open space and below-market-rate housing. The options included a list of categories and specific benefits, and is provided on Page 32 of the Briefing Book.

Workshop Input on Public Benefits

- **Very broad support for below-market-rate housing.** Nearly all participants mentioned the value of affordable housing—both for low-income people as well as for working-class, middle-income workers, and families. Many

participants supported inclusionary housing, development incentives for affordable housing, incentives for preserving existing affordable housing in existing buildings, or other mechanisms to encourage housing affordability.

- **Desire for better pedestrian amenities and community facilities.** Items mentioned include better pedestrian-scale lighting, wider sidewalks, repair of uneven sidewalks, new street trees, and other greenery. Some participants mentioned the lack of “sense of community” and felt that new facilities could bring neighbors together.
- **Interest in shared parking, parking management, or “Park Once” districts.** Many participants agreed that parking management and supply will continue to be an important issue for El Camino Real. Participants mentioned various strategies to ensure a more efficient, convenient use of parking.

Public Benefits Question

- Are there any general comments about public benefits?

Additional Workshop Input

In addition to the discussion of strategies and options, workshop attendees were given a visual preference survey. The survey showed images of buildings and sidewalks and asked participants to rank the image and to state whether it was a good or bad example of sidewalk design, ground-floor design, and overall building shape.

These images were the highest ranked overall:



These images were the lowest ranked overall:



Other notable images include:



Most Favored Ground-Floor Character



Most Favored Overall Building Shape (tie)



Least Favored Ground-Floor Character and Least Favored Overall Building Shape (tie)



Least Favored Overall Building Shape (tie)

The highest ranked pictures have wide sidewalks, good tree canopy, lush landscaping, good amenities, and variations in building facade. The lower ranked photos have large, flat facades, less landscaping, narrower sidewalks, and less variety of materials and colors. These images may help inform how design guidelines and standards are created for the Precise Plan.

GATEKEEPER PROCESS

The Precise Plan will include an administration section, which will describe the review process for new developments. The Precise Plan team is beginning to discuss ideas for the level of review for developments larger than 1.35 FAR (the current maximum under existing zoning).

Currently, there is a Gatekeeper process for projects that require a rezoning or General Plan amendment. The Gatekeeper allows Council the opportunity to assess staff capacity prior to review of the project, and the EPC is given recommendation authority over the project. However, the Gatekeeper process results in significant uncertainty for applicants since many details of the development must be negotiated through its review.

There are mechanisms, similar to the City's Transit Overlay Zone ("T-Zone"), that support both specific direction on the design, scale, and location of new development, as well as allowing City discretion through the Gatekeeper process. This or a similar tool may be included within the Plan if it is determined appropriate.

Most of the discussion of development review process will happen during the drafting of the Plan. In addition, before a recommendation can be made on the FAR threshold where a Gatekeeper process may be most beneficial, guidance will be needed on the strategies and options above and other topics. Development review and Gatekeeper process information is being provided now to the EPC so they can consider the issue prior to making a recommendation on it at a later date.

NEXT STEPS

The EPC's input will be forwarded to the City Council on February 4. The City Council will select a preferred strategy or set of options which will inform the drafting of the Precise Plan and the EIR. In March or April, the Precise Plan team will return to the EPC with more detailed questions about building character, parking, and other issues.

CONCLUSION

The Precise Plan team is seeking the EPC's preferred strategy or set of options for the development of the El Camino Real Precise Plan. Specifically, the EPC can answer the following questions:

- What is the EPC's preferred option for ground-floor uses?
- What is the EPC's preferred option for pedestrian improvements?
- What is the EPC's preferred option for bicycle improvements?
- Are there any general comments about regulatory tools related to small parcels?
- Are there any general comments about how transition regulations can be considered in the Plan?
- What is the EPC's preferred option for height and scale?
- Are there any general comments about public benefits?
- Does the EPC wish to adjust any of the preferred options?

In addition, the following questions will help in beginning to develop the Plan:

- What are desired ground-floor uses in active areas and less pedestrian-oriented areas? For example, are auto-oriented uses like service stations appropriate in less pedestrian-oriented areas?
- Does the EPC have guidance on the range of appropriate heights for new development in different parts of the Corridor?

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

A notice was sent to every City address, property owners within 300' of the Precise Plan area, and interested parties for the January 11 workshop. The notice also contained information about this EPC meeting. Meeting notices were also provided by e-mail to interested parties. In addition, the meeting agenda and staff report were posted on the City's website under "Public Records," the El Camino

Real Precise Plan website, and announced on cable television Channel 26 and the City Calendar.

ENVIRONMENTAL STATUS

This is an informational report only and is not subject to review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) under Section 15262 (Feasibility and Planning Studies). Environmental review of the eventual draft Precise Plan will be conducted as part of the project in conformance with CEQA requirements.

EA/2/CDD
899-01-22-14SR-E-1

- Exhibits:
1. ECR Corridor Advisory Group Meeting No. 2 Summary – December 16, 2013
 2. El Camino Real Precise Plan Briefing Book