

## CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW

## ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING COMMISSION

## STAFF REPORT

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2013

## 5. STUDY SESSION

## 5.1 Study Session to Discuss a Mixed-Use Development Consisting of 10,400 Square Feet of Commercial Space and 175 Apartment Units at 801 El Camino Real West

## RECOMMENDATION

That the Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) provide input on the request for a mixed-use development at 801 El Camino Real West.

## BACKGROUND

Gatekeeper

In April 2013, the City Council authorized staff resources for the consideration of a rezoning of the project site to the P (Planned Community) District for a new mixed-use retail/apartment project by Greystar that would implement the vision of the El Camino Real Change Area of the General Plan and include the purchase of the City parking lot.

Project Site

The project site is located on the southwest corner of El Camino Real and Castro Street. The project site is referred to as "801 El Camino Real West" and consists of nine parcels totaling 2.38 acres.

The nine parcels are currently developed with commercial buildings totaling 22,380 square feet, 134 parking spaces, and landscaping. The project includes the City's public parking lot adjacent to the alleyway, which the City may sell to the developer as part of this project.



### Surrounding Land Uses

The surrounding land uses include multi-family housing and commercial buildings to the west; an office building across El Camino Real to the north; a bank, vacant lot, and single-family home to the east across Castro Street; and single-family homes to the south.

### Neighborhood Meeting

The applicant held a neighborhood meeting on August 20, 2013 to present the informal project plans to the neighborhood and to hear comments and feedback about the proposed development. Approximately 60 people attended the meeting and had the following comments on the project:

- Support the efforts to retain the existing tenants.
- Concerned that the overall height of the project is too tall and should be reduced.
- Concerned that the density is too high for this location and that the unit count should be reduced.
- Concerned about the proposed parking supply and whether one parking space per bedroom is enough.
- Concerned about increased traffic at the site given the close proximity to Graham Middle School and Bubb Elementary School.
- Concerned with potential cut-through traffic on Sonia Way for cars that want to travel north.
- Want the plaza be active and not passive open space like the plazas at the other corners of El Camino Real and Castro Street.

### Castro Street “Road Diet”

In February 2013, Council approved the application for a Vehicle Emissions Reduction Based at Schools (VERBS) grant, which is a federally funded grant with the objective of reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by promoting walking, biking, transit, and carpooling to school. The funds from the grant will be used to improve Castro Street between El Camino Real and Miramonte Avenue for pedestrians and bicycles and could include items such as reducing vehicle lanes from two to one, adding bicycle lanes, and

installing curb bulb-outs at the intersections to reduce crossing distance. Design of the improvements and public outreach is anticipated in spring 2015 with construction anticipated in 2016. Consideration of the grant funds and design were done independently of this project and before Council considered the Gatekeeper request.

## **ANALYSIS**

This report will outline the proposals consistency with the General Plan, describe the proposed development, cover issues related to open space, parking, traffic, height transitions, and architectural design and provide staff recommendations on these issues.

### El Camino Real Change Area

The General Plan envisions El Camino Real as a boulevard that connects Mountain View with other cities, links diverse neighborhoods, and is a vibrant, landscaped, comfortable, and convenient place with pedestrian activity. The General Plan Form and Character guidance encourages that residential and mixed-use buildings be compact, varied, and interesting and offer a range of places to live and work close to services and transit stops (see Exhibit 1 – El Camino Real Form and Character Guidelines). Buildings and public plazas should engage the street and create pedestrian activity, and buildings should transition gracefully to residential neighborhoods.

The General Plan land use designation along El Camino Real is “Mixed-Use Corridor,” which allows a broad range of commercial, office, residential, and public spaces. This designation establishes a 1.85 FAR, of which up to 0.50 FAR can be office or commercial, and a height guideline of up to four stories.



In general, the proposed project is consistent with the General Plan's vision for the corner, with an FAR of 1.8, heights up to four stories, and commercial and residential uses:

- *LUD 20.1: Increased redevelopment.* Encourage private properties along El Camino Real to be redeveloped and enhanced.
- *LUD 20.2: Focused intensive development.* Allow more intensive development in key locations based on factors such as lot size, character of surrounding land uses, distance to transit facilities, and opportunities to improve a site.
- *LUD 20.3: Building height variation.* Support a variety of building heights along El Camino Real to create a wide-ranging and interesting street.
- *LUD 20.5: Landscaped pedestrian amenities.* Encourage development to provide landscaped pedestrian amenities and gathering places.
- *LUD 20.6: Parcel assembly.* Support the assembly of parcels that fosters new development projects.

The development review process will study the specifics of how the project would fit into the surrounding area and identify any potential impacts that need to be mitigated.

### Proposed Rezoning

The site has a General Plan Land Use designation of Mixed-Use Corridor and a zoning designation of CRA (Commercial/Residential-Arterial). The project will require a rezone from the CRA District to the P (Planned Community) District. The P District designation allows the project to be approved prior to adoption of the El Camino Real Corridor Precise Plan and allows the City flexibility to implement development standards and features that conform to the 2030 General Plan. Staff is applying similar development standards to the proposed project from the Urban Housing Group project at 2650 and 2656 El Camino Real West and the Prometheus project at 1720 and 1730 El Camino Real West.

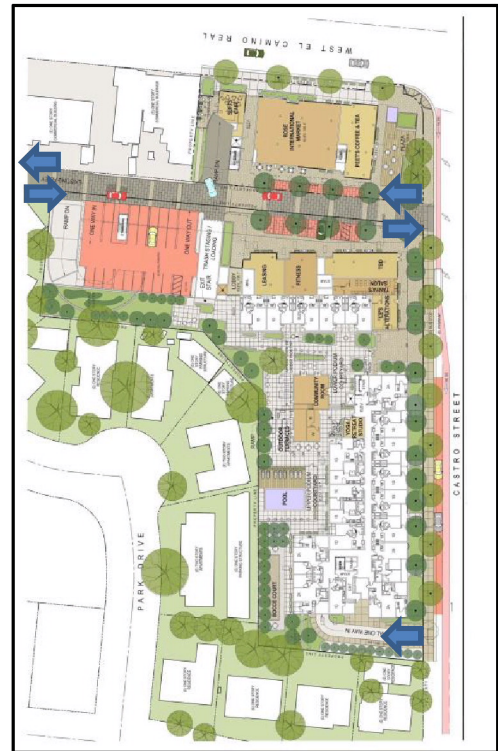


## Project Description

The applicant, Greystar, is proposing to redevelop the 2.38-acre site with up to 175 apartment units in three- and four-story buildings over underground parking garages, approximately 10,400 square feet of commercial retail space along El Camino Real and a portion of Castro Street, and a public plaza on the corner of El Camino Real and Castro Street (see Exhibit 2—Project Plans). Three floors of apartment housing are proposed above the ground-floor commercial space and City parking lot. The unit mix includes 135 one-bedroom units, 36 two-bedroom units, and 4 three-bedroom units. The project proposes 222 spaces for the residential units and 59 spaces for the commercial area.

The applicant is working on keeping the existing tenants on-site and has committed to keeping Rose's International Market, Tanya's Hair Design, Le's Alterations, Peet's Coffee & Tea, and Sufi Coffee Shop and Cultural Center. The applicant is also working on providing temporary facilities for some of them in the vicinity during construction.

The project is broken up into three main buildings with a four-story building along El Camino Real with retail on the ground floor and three floors of residential units above. The commercial tenant spaces along El Camino Real are tentatively programmed to include Peet's Coffee & Tea on the corner (adjacent to the public plaza), Rose's Market, and Sufi Coffee Shop and Cultural Center. The second building is located along the alley with retail on the ground floor and three floors of residential units above. This building would have commercial frontage along a portion of Castro Street and the alley and is anticipated to include Tanya's Hair Design, Le's Alterations, and a fitness center and leasing office for the residential units. The third building is located along Castro Street and includes three to four floors of residential units.



## Project Design Analysis

Staff believes that the project meets many of the City's General Plan policies for the El Camino Real Change Area and could be a successful Gateway project to the downtown; however, scaling back of the project mass and other project modifications are necessary. Staff has identified the following issues and provided recommendations to address them:

- *Building Height Transitions*—The General Plan allows for higher intensities and building heights, but also requires new development to include sensitive height and setback transitions to surrounding buildings. Building heights should gradually step-up from existing adjacent buildings to avoid abrupt changes in massing. This can be accomplished by reducing building heights and setting back the upper floors of the building so that the height of the new buildings are no more than one story more than the existing adjacent building, or other design approaches.

The plans provide an appropriate building height step down along the southern property edge, with the fourth floor setback approximately 70 feet from the adjacent one-story homes and building step-downs to two-stories at 36 feet. Staff recommends these building step-downs and massing reductions be done along the other sides of the buildings that interface with the adjacent residential neighborhood and that fourth floors should be setback from the lower floors along the street (see Exhibit 3—Height Transition Diagram). This is consistent with what was required of the other recently approved residential P Zone projects.

**Recommendation: provide building height step-downs along the sides of the buildings that interface with the residential neighborhood and the fourth floors should be setback from the lower floors along the street.**

- *Perimeter Setbacks*. In general, the project provides setbacks that exceed what the City has required on other P District apartment projects. A minimum of thirty-foot setbacks are provided for most of the property lines abutting existing residential uses, while other P Districts have provided between 25 to 30-foot. Along Castro Street, the building is set back 24 feet from the curb line but is set back only 15 feet from the curb line on El Camino Real. A minimum of 18 feet from the curb has been required for any new P District project with ground floor retail (see Exhibit 4—El Camino Real Streetscape Diagram).

**Recommendation: Increase the El Camino Real setback to at least 18 feet from the curb line.**



- *Public Plaza and Dining Areas*— The project provides a plaza area at the corner of El Camino Real and Castro Street that also runs along the alleyway. This provides the opportunity for an active environment that is hospitable for people to sit and relax. Peet’s Coffee & Tea will have storefront doors and windows that open directly onto the corner plaza area, with the outdoor seating reasonably located away from the street. Landscaping, white-noise features, and overall plaza design will be key in ensuring that the space is attractive and used. Small dining areas for Rose’s Market are proposed along the alley.

**Recommendation: develop plaza design features that create an active and pleasant environment for people at the street corner and along the alleyway.**

- *Site Access and Circulation*— Vehicle access to the site occurs from the alleyway at Castro Street or from a one-way resident-only entrance parking garage from Castro Street. All exiting vehicles will use the alleyway. The majority of these vehicles will exit the alley at Castro Street.



Public Works staff anticipates requiring a u-turn for Castro Street traffic at Victor Way, which would allow project traffic to get back to El Camino Real.

Neighbors raised concerns about residents using Sonia Way to get to Shoreline Boulevard and westbound El Camino Real. It is critical that the applicant develop a circulation design that provides convenient access to El Camino Real, thereby minimizing any perceived benefits to cutting through Sonia Way, while being consistent with City expectations for the eventual “road diet” on Castro Street.

In addition, a comprehensive traffic study will be prepared to review on-site circulation, adequacy of the access to and from the site, and potential traffic impacts on the City’s roadways and intersections. However, staff expects that the applicant will have alternative designs available for staff and neighborhood review well before the formal traffic studies are completed.

**Recommendation: study revised project access points, circulation, and median configurations.**



- *Parking* – The City’s parking requirement for retail uses is one space per each 180 square feet of gross floor area, which for this project would be a minimum of 58 spaces. The parking for the residential units would be based on the “model parking standard” endorsed by the EPC last year for high-density residential projects and requires one parking space per one-bedroom unit and two spaces for 2+ bedroom units, which for this project results in a minimum parking requirement of 219 spaces.

The project proposes 34 at-grade spaces located along the alley for retail customers, an additional 25 retail spaces in the underground garages (for a total of 59 retail spaces) and 221 spaces in the underground garage for residents and guests.

Staff believes the residential parking is adequate based on the original studies that resulted in the “model parking standard,” and a post-occupancy parking survey of the Madera apartment project verified that the findings of the original surveys that resulted in the “model parking standard.”

Staff is concerned that additional retail parking may be necessary, since existing businesses currently use the City parking lot. The applicant has agreed to shared the retail spaces in the project with those other businesses, but if the applicant is only providing enough retail parking for their businesses, then there may be few available spaces for the neighboring businesses.

Mixed use projects can often share parking based on the different peak hour demand of different uses. For example, residential parking may not be fully used during retail business hours, leading to potential sharing of spaces. The applicant must study this further to ensure that adequate parking is supplied for residents and the project’s businesses as well as adjacent businesses that currently use the City parking lot.

**Recommendation: study the retail parking supply to ensure adequate capacity for project and neighboring businesses.**

- *Architectural Design*—The project proposes a contemporary design. In other locations, the City has been supportive of such design. Due to the more sensitive transition along Castro Street to single-family homes and small apartments, staff suggests a more traditional architectural design be studied which better integrates the project from El Camino Real to the residential neighborhood (see Exhibit 5—Design Examples).

**Recommendation: explore more traditional architectural designs that can integrate the project from El Camino Real to the residential neighborhood.**

- *Residential Entry*—The architectural design of the project is at a very conceptual stage. But staff does want to note that there are no identifiable unit entries along Castro Street, and that identifiable entries are expected in the project design - either through individual stoops to the units that face Castro Street or from a main entrance that leads to the courtyard.

**Recommendation: identifiable unit entries should be studied for the residential units along Castro Street.**

- *Common Open Space*— The proposal meets the minimum of 175 square feet per unit in common open space area that other P District apartment projects have been required to provide. The proposed residential amenities include a pool, lounge, bocce ball court, outdoor kitchen and fireplace, fitness center, and passive outdoor seating and open space areas covering 30,000 square feet.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

An EIR (Environmental Impact Report) will be prepared for the proposed development project and will be completed in conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Potential environmental impacts (e.g., traffic, air quality, noise, etc.) will be studied in the EIR.

## **PUBLIC NOTIFICATION**

The Commission's agenda is advertised on Channel 26, and the agenda and this report appear on the City's Internet website. All property owners within a 1,000' radius and other interested stakeholders were notified of this meeting.

## **NEXT STEPS**

Following feedback from the EPC at this Study Session, the project will be heard at a City Council Study Session on September 24, 2013, where Council will review the proposed project and the EPC's comments. After the Council Study Session, Greystar will revise the project plans and begin the development and environmental review processes.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, staff requests EPC feedback on the following recommendations, and any other comments about the project:

1. Provide building height step-downs along the sides of the buildings that interface with the residential neighborhood and the fourth floors should be set back from the lower floors along the street.
2. Increase the El Camino Real setback to at least 18 feet from the curb line.
3. Develop plaza design features that create an active and pleasant environment for people at the street corner and along the alleyway.
4. Study revised project access points, circulation, and median configurations.
5. Study the retail parking supply to ensure adequate capacity for project and neighboring businesses.
6. Explore more traditional architectural designs that can integrate the project from El Camino Real to the residential neighborhood.
7. Identifiable unit entries should be studied for the residential units along Castro Street.



Prepared by:

Stephanie Williams  
Senior Planner

Approved by:

Peter Gilli  
Planning Manager (Acting)/  
Zoning Administrator

- Exhibits:
1. El Camino Real Form and Character Guidelines
  2. Project Plans
  3. Height Transition Diagram
  4. El Camino Real Streetscape Diagram
  5. Design Examples