

CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW

ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2019

6. STUDY SESSION

6.1 Request for a 259,034 Square Foot, 6-Story, Office Building and a 7-1/2-Story Parking Garage at 465 Fairchild Drive

RECOMMENDATION

That the Environmental Planning Commission provide input on the request for a Planned Community Permit, Transfer of Development Rights from the Los Altos School District Site, and Development Review Permit to construct a new 6-story office building and a 7-1/2-story parking garage to replace two existing office buildings on a 4.45-acre project site at 465 Fairchild Drive.

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 and tenants within a 750' radius and other interested stakeholders were notified of this meeting.

Additional public meetings will be held regarding this project with opportunities for further community input. Property owners, occupants, and other interested parties will be notified of these meetings as they are scheduled.

BACKGROUND

Project Site and Location

The project site is located on the southwest corner of Fairchild Drive and Ellis Street in the future East Whisman Precise Plan (EWPP) Area.

The project site consists of three parcels, totaling 4.45 acres, bordered by Fairchild Drive to the north and Ellis Street to the east. The project site is currently developed with three 2-story office buildings totaling 77,837 square feet. Two of the office buildings (totaling 63,216 square feet) would be demolished and replaced with the proposed buildings. The third building (approximately 15,000

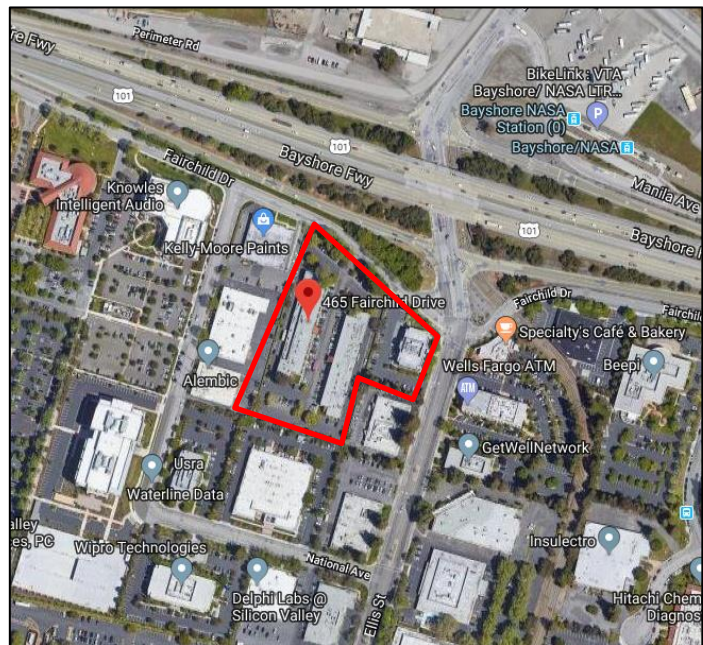
square feet and two stories) would remain, at the corner of Fairchild Drive and Ellis Street.

Adjacent uses:

- (West) office buildings (two stories)
- (South) office buildings (one story)
- (East, across Ellis Street) restaurant (one story) and office (three stories) and immediately adjacent office (one story)
- (North) Fairchild Drive (frontage road) and Highway 101

East Whisman Change Area

In 2012, the City adopted a new General Plan to guide land use and growth through 2030. One of the areas identified for growth is the East Whisman Change Area. The General Plan vision for the area is as a transit-oriented employment center with high-intensity office development, a greater diversity of land uses, an improved multi-modal transportation network with safe pedestrian and bicycle connections, and expanded retail and services to support residents and workers in the area. The General Plan also identified the need to update the area's zoning and development standards through a precise plan process, which is currently under way.



Draft East Whisman Precise Plan

The project site is located in the northern portion of the EWPP area in the Employment Character Area. The site is designated High-Intensity, which allows buildings up to a 1.0 FAR. A map of the Character Sub-Areas is available in the Public Draft EWPP on Page 71.

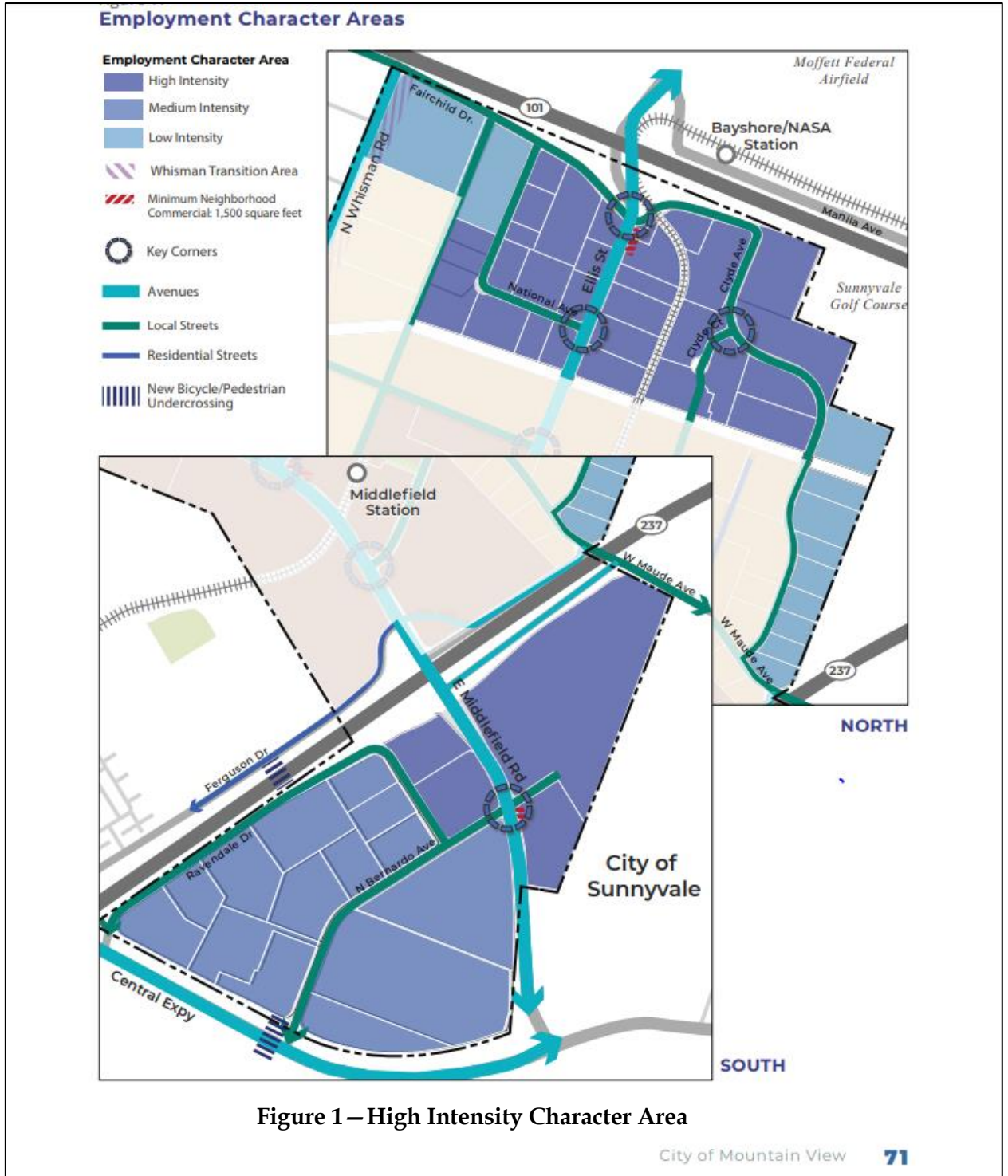


Figure 1 – High Intensity Character Area

Once adopted, the EWPP will guide the transition of the East Whisman Change Area to a mixed-use district with new residential neighborhoods, open spaces, and mobility options. The Precise Plan will also amend the General Plan to allow new residential uses and further support goals and policies to reduce the City's jobs/housing imbalance, encourage shorter commutes, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Since its public release in April 2019, the Draft EWPP has served as a basis for staff review of the project, as discussed later in this report.

Though this project is dependent on the EWPP for necessary General Plan and Zoning Map amendments, in addition to environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), should the project exceed the development standards reviewed and adopted under the EWPP then additional environmental review may be required. Staff will continue to work with the applicant to determine the appropriate environmental review prior to the project returning to the EPC and City Council for final action.

General Plan and Zoning Designations

The current General Plan Land Use Designation (see Figure 2) for the site is High-Intensity Office, which would be amended as part of the EWPP process to East Whisman High-Intensity. The project site is currently in the ML (Limited Industrial) Zoning District and would be rezoned to EWPP once it is adopted.

Prior Meetings and Hearings

Gatekeeper Authorization

On January 16, 2018, the City Council held a public hearing to discuss the Los Altos School District's (LASD) proposed Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program and authorized City staff to implement the TDR program through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and begin review of six Gatekeeper requests for development projects proposing to utilize available TDR square footage.

The 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. This project was one of the six receiving sites for the LASD TDRs, which received Gatekeeper authorization in January 2018. The project applicant, Sobrato Organization, proposes to purchase and use 80,000 TDR square feet as part of the

proposed 259,034 square foot office building development on the 4.46-acre project site on Fairchild Drive.

As part of the Gatekeeper application review, staff was supportive of the request since the project site was located in an area designated for higher-intensity office development, is adjacent to the freeway, is not in close proximity to residential land uses, and the proposed land use and height are consistent with the vision of the Draft EWPP and would be compatible with future development in the area.

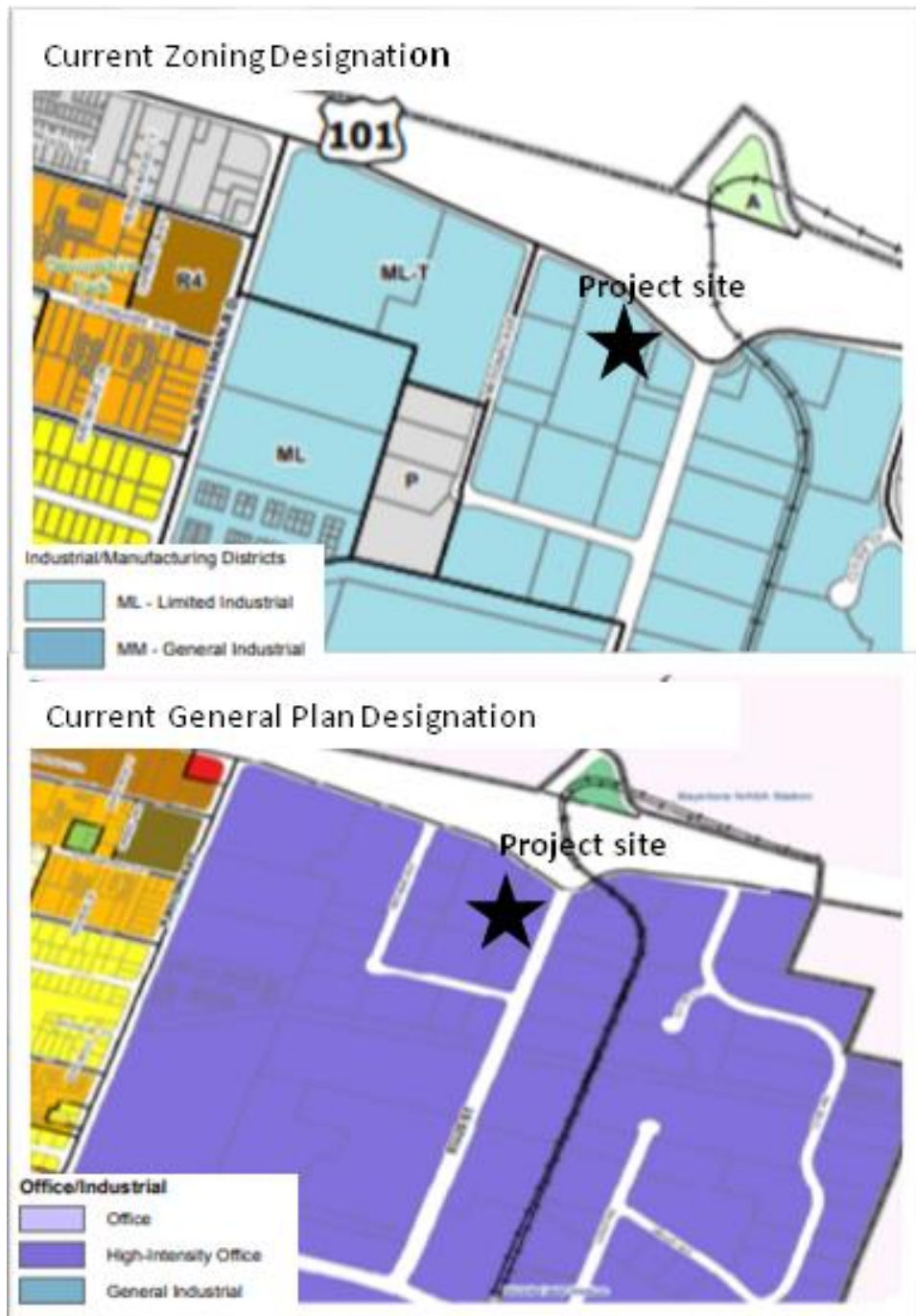


Figure 2—Current Zoning and General Plan Designation

Council authorized the Gatekeeper request, allowing the applicant to submit for development review prior to final consideration of the EWPP. At the hearing, staff noted that they would coordinate with the TDR purchasers to design their projects to be as consistent with the EWPP as possible.

Development Review Committee

On March 6, 2019, the Development Review Committee (DRC) provided preliminary, high-level comments and direction on the project. The comments were directed toward the architectural style of the building and parking structure. The DRC commented that the building was too massive and needed to better express the horizontality of the proposed design concept described by the applicant and provide a more elegant, fluid expression to achieve the desired architectural effect.

The DRC also commented that the parking structure design was not subordinate to the building and seemed loud and busy, whereas the building design was softer and more elegant. Other discussion focused on emphasizing the building entry, highlighting the key corner at the Fairchild Drive/Ellis Street intersection, closing the driveway off Fairchild Drive, reducing surface parking, and enhancing on-site pedestrian amenities, and preserving healthy trees along the Fairchild Drive frontage.

On August 7, 2019, the DRC reviewed the revised project plans in preparation for the EPC Study Session, and provided further comments on the project. Since the first DRC meeting, the elevations were revised to better express the horizontality of the building. The applicant adjusted the structural column design to allow massing and glazing adjustments aimed at better emphasizing the deep, horizontal overhangs and to frame the building entrance. A two-story expression with wood soffit was carried over from the outdoor dining area into the lobby to visually connect the Fairchild Drive frontage and the top level was also recessed to try to address DRC direction.

The parking structure was also revised to use a less busy, horizontal screen pattern to better complement the office building. DRC and staff saw more improvement in the project based on prior feedback and identified areas to study further, which include options for the building entry, building massing and accents, open space, and garage screening.

Staff has worked closely with the applicant to achieve a EWPP-compliant project, but there are still inconsistencies with some requirements of the Draft EWPP.

Because this project review is concurrent with the development of the Draft EWPP and could be one of the first projects developed under the EWPP, staff's intent is for the project to set an example for future office development in the area in terms of building design, open space, and site layout. Key areas of inconsistency with the EWPP and project design are discussed in detail in the following sections.



Figure 3 – View from the Northeast

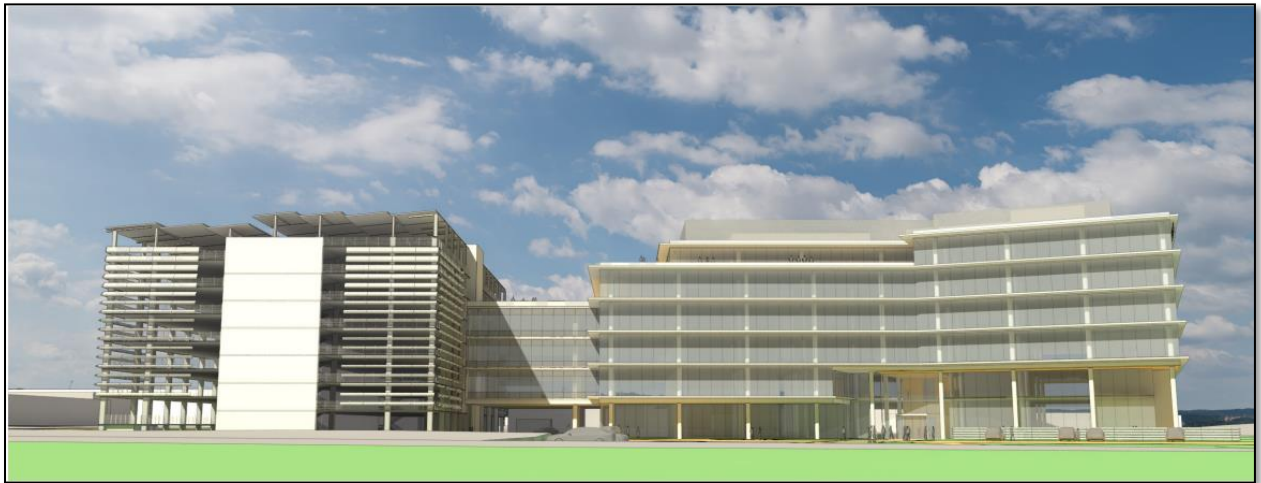


Figure 4 – View from the East

ANALYSIS

Project Description

The proposed project features a new 259,034 square foot, 6-story office building and a 7-1/2-story parking garage, connected by a three-level pedestrian bridge allowing direct access between the structures and a 6,500 square foot terrace on the fifth level. Materials include clear-vision glass, exposed cast-in-place concrete, aluminum mullion panels, and ceramic frit glass. The garage structure screen system is composed of perforated aluminum panels, folded to create a larger-scaled pattern to screen the cars, in concert with proposed large-canopy trees.

Vehicle access to the parking structure is provided by two vehicular roadways; one driveway is proposed from Fairchild Drive and one driveway from Ellis Street. The applicant is proposing 688 parking spaces in the garage and 52 surface spaces (49 of these spaces are required for the existing building as a provision of the current lease) for a total of 740 parking spaces (see Exhibit 2 for the full Project Plans).



Figure 5 – Site Plan

While elements of the proposed project design are consistent with the Draft EWPP, there are elements that are inconsistent with the Draft EWPP such as key corner, open space, and enhanced architectural features. While the discussion of the Draft EWPP development standards is outside the scope of this project's Study Session, staff has highlighted topics for EPC input on whether exceptions to certain Draft EWPP standards are appropriate to consider for this project.

The Draft EWPP describes the allowance for exceptions to development standards if the project: (a) meets the intent and purpose of the Precise Plan; and (b) results in a superior project design or outcome for the community that justifies the exception request (see Page 172 of the Draft EWPP). For each of the discussion topics in this report, the EPC may provide input on the suitability and extent of the exception(s) requested.

Ultimately, findings will need to be made to allow any exceptions to the development standards as part of staff's project review and will be considered by the EPC and City Council at the final public hearings. The EPC's input at this stage can help staff determine the policy priorities and final design direction for the project.

The architectural design for the components of the project is modern in appearance. The design utilizes a simple building form with deep overhangs of the floor slabs at each level, which drew inspiration from the four-story Apple Tantau 9 building in Cupertino. The building slab overhangs protect the building with a depth defined by a varied solar orientation. The placement of the parking structure has been purposely positioned at the rear of the site to diminish its visibility from the street.

Common Usable Open Area

The proposed project includes common usable open areas in multiple locations, including a private outdoor dining area adjacent to the main entrance, an entry plaza, a private Zen garden, key corner passive open space, private outdoor dining, and a private rooftop terrace. These areas range in size from 600 square feet to 8,400 square feet. Except for the small passive open space along the key corner area, each common amenity area is intended for use by occupants of the new office building only.

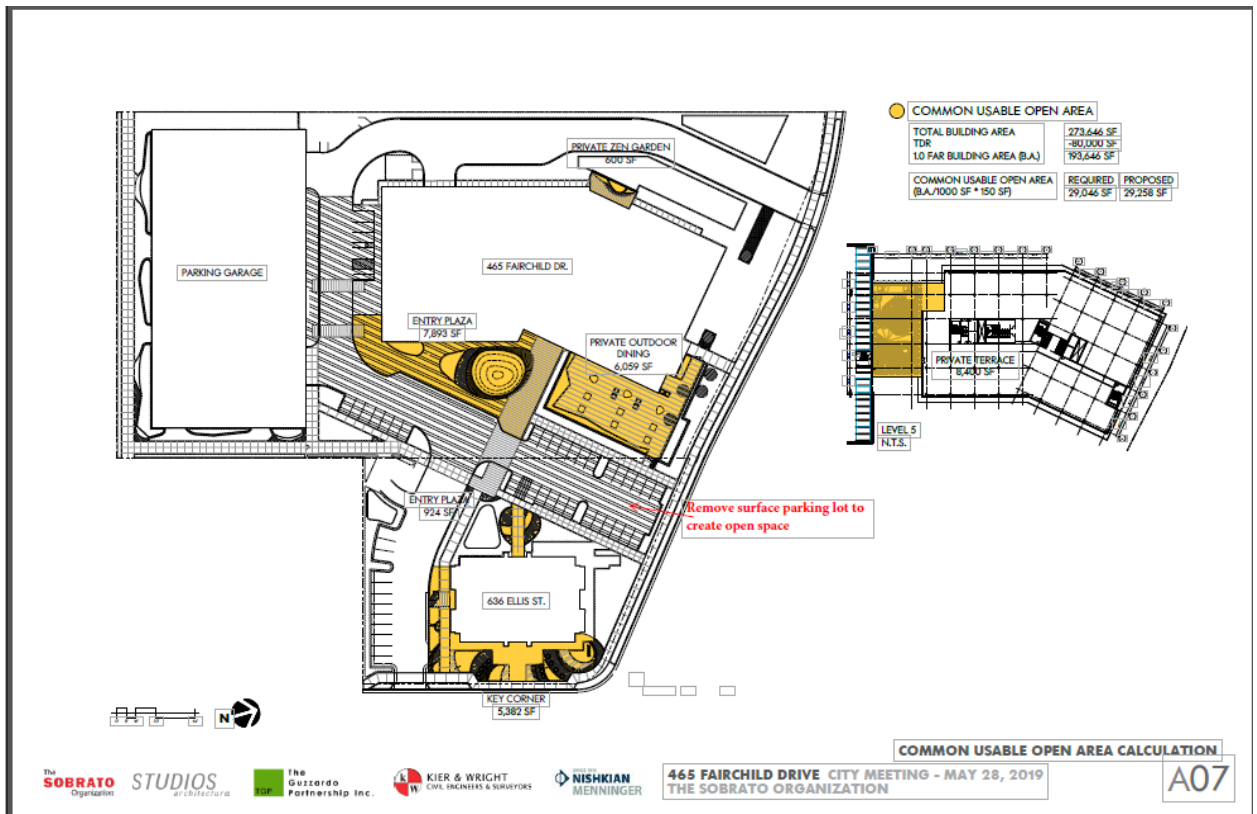


Figure 6 – Common Useable Open Area

The Draft Precise Plan requires a minimum of 150 square feet of common usable open area per 1,000 square feet of commercial building area. Under the EWPP, common usable open areas must have a minimum dimension of 25' and cannot include public parks or paths provided as EWPP-required public circulation.

The project plans identify 29,258 square feet of proposed common usable open area, and the applicant has based the required open space area calculations in the plans on the total building area without the 80,000 square feet of TDRs. However, the project also identifies several open areas that do not comply with the EWPP's required open area dimensions and use limitations. Specifically, the key corner and entry plaza is identified as a common usable open area, though most of it is provided pursuant to the public multi-modal requirements. Also, the private terrace would only be accessible to the new building tenants. The project will need to provide open space on the entire building square footage, including TDR square footage, and removing noncompliant open areas would result in the project having common usable open area substantially below the EWPP standard.

Table 1: Summary of Requested Common Usable Open Area Exceptions

Standard	Required	Proposed
Common Useable Open Area	38,855 sq. ft. (minimum) (150 sq. ft./1,000 sq. ft. of building)	Private Zen Garden – 600 Entry Plaza – 7,893 Private outdoor dining – 6,059 Key Corner – 5,382 Private Terrace – 8,400
		Total: 29,258sq. ft.

The EWPP defines the Employment Character in part by its visibility and access to Highway 101 and State Route 237. Pedestrian, bicycle, and transit infrastructure also support access to adjacent neighborhoods and regional destinations to reduce reliance on the automobile. The project site is located at one of the main entries to the EWPP area, and staff believes one way to achieve these objectives on-site may be through revisions to the site layout to make open areas a more prominent element/central theme of the project. Staff-recommended changes could also help create a synergy between the existing building to remain and the new building, and use the orientation and design of the common open space to frame and enhance the key corner.

Staff recommends removing the surface parking lot on Fairchild Drive to meet the open space requirement and to address EWPP direction to discourage surface parking lots. Programming the Stormwater Protection areas (C3) also have potential to be open space areas which could help the project achieve compliance with the EWPP standards. As noted above, the project is required to provide 38,855 square feet of common, useable open space, and these changes could help achieve a more compliant project.

EPC Question No. 1: Does the EPC support staff recommendations to remove the surface parking lot on Fairchild Drive and program stormwater areas to help achieve compliance with the common, useable open space requirements?

Project Design

Discussed below are some key design topics from the EWPP and DRC feedback on which staff is requesting EPC consideration and input. Topics include key corner elements, building entrance/lobby, building massing, and parking structure screening. Staff will continue to work with the applicant to address DRC and EWPP direction, incorporating any design input provided by the EPC.

Key Corner

The project is located on a prominent corner in the East Whisman area, where Ellis Street is anticipated to be a main gateway street. Per the EWPP, projects should design key corners with enhanced landscape design and/or enhanced architectural features such as emphasized entries, distinctive corner articulation, visually interesting materials, etc. The applicant is not proposing to modify the existing office building to remain, but has included draft concepts for corner landscaping as well as the entry drive from Ellis Street.

To address key corner direction from the EWPP, staff and the DRC recommend a more substantial gateway treatment, including vertical elements such as sculptures and specimen tree plantings; strong pedestrian features along the Ellis Street entry drive; and eliminating the surface parking off Fairchild Drive. Staff's objective is to minimize pedestrian impacts, enhance nonvehicle conditions, and create more visual interest in this gateway location. These changes would also help address EWPP direction for strong, direct pedestrian access to building entrances.

Building Massing

The EWPP provides direction on building orientation and design toward City streets but also considers how projects near freeways should reflect positively on Mountain View and East Whisman, presenting a dynamic skyline, interesting facades, and high-quality materials. The project site is considered a "gateway" site, and—though set back—will have high visibility from both adjacent City streets and Highway 101.

The building mass has been adjusted based on initial feedback from the DRC to better emphasize the linear expression of the deep overhangs, which are the prominent accent feature of the building. The applicant considered a few options but felt by connecting the massing with a band to make it feel lower and slung was the best way to emphasize the linear expression. These overhangs are formed by cantilevers of the building floor slabs, and range in depth from 3' to 7'. The DRC

has requested that the overhangs be proportional on all elevations to create the desired horizontality and deep overhang accent on all elevations, including the Fairchild Drive/freeway elevation. The Fairchild Drive overhangs are currently only 3' deep, which makes the front appear stubby and contributing to a less dynamic, interesting building appearance from the freeway and Fairchild Drive especially.

Entries and Lobbies

As discussed in the Draft EWPP, buildings should have one main entrance for staff, visitors, and the public, accessible from streets and other public areas. Building entries should provide a distinctive architectural expression, and should be coordinated with the frontage improvements. Building entries should be clearly articulated and include an inviting, well-lit, transparent, and secure lobby that is clearly visible from the outside, both day and night.

Since the first DRC meeting, the applicant has adjusted the structural design, glazing/material expression, and massing to better frame the entrance through step-backs at the top level and high-volume recesses at ground-level; however, the entrance still needs a stronger pedestrian level experience. While the warm, wood soffit is supported by staff, staff recommends the building entry provide a more distinctive architectural expression (in the lobby and/or building exterior) that is coordinated with more pedestrian-level site and frontage improvements to achieve a more pedestrian-friendly main building entry.

Parking Structure

As discussed in the Draft EWPP, garages should blend into the overall design of the building or site when not buffered by other uses or building. This can be accomplished by using attractive facades to hide structural elements, and complement adjacent building design. While the proposed parking garage is appropriately located, behind the office building in the rear of the project site, it will be highly visible given the scale of the structure as compared to surrounding development.

The applicant has made improvements to the garage design since the first DRC Review. However, as currently designed, the structure still needs more creative and cohesive screening to address EWPP design objectives for attractive garages that complement the office building. Staff recommends the project include more trees to provide a softer landscape buffer, extending the perforated panels to provide more comprehensive garage screening and providing artful

pattern/texture to the plain exterior walls portions of the garage to add visual interest.

Staff recommends the applicant continue to work on ways to increase the common open area, improve the building design through deeper/proportional overhangs on all elevations and enhanced pedestrian entries, and creating a more interesting and complementary parking structure. Most of staff's design recommendations should be easy to achieve and will not require substantial redesign. Input from the EPC on design preferences will help target this work between the applicant, staff, and the DRC.

EPC Question No. 2: Does the EPC support staff recommendations on the design of gateway features, massing, office entry, and parking structure?

EPC Question No. 3: Does the EPC have any additional site or building design input for the applicant to work on with staff and the DRC?

NEXT STEPS

Following feedback from the EPC at this Study Session, the applicant will revise the project plans and continue through the development and environmental review processes.

CONCLUSION

This Study Session gives the EPC the opportunity to provide input on key project topics to guide the applicant and staff in refining the project design through the remainder of the development review process. Staff requests EPC feedback on the following questions and any other project-related comments:

1. Does the EPC support staff recommendations to remove the surface parking lot on Fairchild Drive and program stormwater areas to help achieve compliance with the common, useable open space requirements?
2. Does the EPC support staff recommendations on the design of gateway features, massing, office entry, and parking structure?
3. Does the EPC have any additional site or building design input for the applicant to work on with staff and the DRC?

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813-09-04-19SR

- Exhibits:
1. January 16, 2018 City Council Staff Report – Item 7.1
 2. Project Plans