

EPC Questions – May 5, 2021

Item 5.1 - Downtown Precise Plan Update (Phase 1)

1. There are large parking garages in these 3 areas. How do these play into the overall parking calculations?

The Downtown Parking Strategy is taking a comprehensive look at downtown parking supply and demand. This included reviewing past plans, analyzing historical data, and collecting new data related to parking in downtown Mountain View. City Council will be discussing the strategy at the May 11, 2021 meeting as a Study Session item.

2. Palo Alto has parking time limits (90 or 120 I don't recall) and prohibit reparking in the same area within a certain amount of time. Has this been considered for Downtown?

Downtown Mountain View has parking time limits within the public parking facilities and on-street parking surrounding the commercial core. However, downtown does not have a similar reparking policy like Palo Alto. Staff can consider this as part of the Downtown Parking Strategy under the best practice review. The strategy is pulling in best practices from other cities that could be implemented in Mountain View to support parking needs.

3. The form based zoning used in Hercules, CA included architectural styles in them. Could something like that be used as the objective standards for DTPP?

Based on Council direction, staff will look at ways to further update design guidelines and design standards. Council did not support a “form-based code” like Hercules when they reviewed the scope of work for this task, instead preferring to keep the scope targeted to key areas and specific standards. In phase 2, staff could look into more detailed, style-based standards, but this may constrain good design and opportunities for diversity and interest, as downtown Mountain View has multiple architectural styles.

4. Council asked for compatibility of materials. This is not mentioned by staff in what would be included in the plan. Is this just an oversight?

Staff can look into standards regarding material compatibility. However, under State law, new standards must be objective, and there are challenges creating objective standards for materials, since materials technology changes over time, and limiting palettes can detract from a dynamic, diverse and interesting streetscape.

One option is to look at standards that limit the number of different materials on a façade, which reduces opportunity for incompatibility and is generally more consistent with older architectural styles.

5. The differentiation between Administrative Office and some of the items listed in Office on page 16 of the staff report does not seem to be significant. Is staff proposing additional clarification on how a property "...will generate pedestrian activity and streetside interest" in an objective way?

If so directed, staff will look into further clarifying those terms.

6. Why would it be necessary to include language for current Administrative Offices? Aren't the grandfathered as an existing use automatically?

Staff would need to look in detail at the different scenarios. For example, some offices are in spaces that are designed for office, in which case, they may be allowed to continue as nonconforming uses. In other cases, the offices are in spaces that are designed for retail. These may not be allowed to continue past an amortization period of five years. More information will be provided at a future hearing date.

7. Something like the new Wells Fargo branch office would seem to be permitted in area H as presented. Is that correct? This property takes up a large amount of street frontage and does not support the active frontage idea with such a large area. How might this be prevented?

The Wells Fargo would be provisionally allowed. Pursuant to the Provisional Use Permit, they would be allowed if they maintain transparency, so that the streetscape can be activated with views of tellers and bankers talking to customers and other activity.

8. Staff report page 8: first item of list of available historic benefits and incentives "Variances". Question: What does Staff mean by "variances"? Please provide some examples.

It is important to highlight that the historic benefits and incentives apply to all historic resources, not just to historic resources in downtown. A variance is a planning approval that acknowledges unalterable constraints of a lot in the approval of exceptions to standards. For example, a parcel with a peculiar shape may be entitled to a variance of setbacks if they cannot otherwise build a reasonable structure. In this sense, the historic building is considered an unalterable constraint of a lot, and development standards may be waived if a reasonable use of the property cannot be implemented around or within the historic building.

9. Staff report page 15 figure 3: Please provide more data on current existing administrative office uses in downtown, e.g., how many administrative offices are there now, what percentage, on which streets, etc.

There are (or have recently been) administrative offices facing on Castro Street and cross streets in Area H at 282 Castro Street, 701 West Evelyn Avenue, 899 West Evelyn Avenue, 280 Hope Street (which is on the corner of Dana) and 303 Bryant Street (which is on the corner of Dana). There may also be some other, smaller locations that we are currently unaware of. In other parts of Areas A, G and H, there are Administrative offices at 655 West Evelyn Avenue, 100 View Street, 650-682 Villa Street, 660 West Dana Street, 278 Hope Street, 990 Villa Street, 900 Villa Street and the rears and upper floors of buildings along Castro and the cross streets. Outside of Areas A, G and H, there are significant amounts of administrative office, including multiple large and small office buildings.

10. Staff report, last paragraph of page 17: “Other activating commercial uses may be appropriate for these ground-level areas and may provide additional opportunities for property owners to fill spaces without viable tenants, especially off Castro Street.” Question: I feel it’s important to find ways to provide more opportunities to property owners to rent out vacant spaces. What can the City do in phase 1 to help property owners if more active uses are not added until phase 2?

The existing allowed uses cover a broad range of uses, which are similar to those allowed in downtowns in other nearby cities. In some cases, other constraints are limiting property owners, such as parking requirements—which the City is studying in the Downtown Parking Strategy, currently under way. If the EPC is concerned about vacancy, they can reject the staff recommendation to prohibit administrative office, or otherwise reduce the requirements for streetscape interest, though this could gradually reduce the vibrancy and attractiveness of downtown as a commercial destination for the community.

11. Staff report, last paragraph of page 17: “the listed uses in each area of the Precise Plan are interrelated—if a use is listed in one area, it is presumed to not be allowed in another.” Question: I am not sure if I understand this clearly. Can staff provide some examples? Also, I am not sure I understand the reason for this -- It does not seem to make sense that “if a use is listed in one area, it is presumed to not be allowed in another”. Please explain.

The Downton Precise Plan has several areas (A-J), each section has a list of allowed uses (permitted & provisional). As such, if a use is called out in one of the areas but not called out in other areas, it presumes the use was intentionally left out and is not allowed. Otherwise, it would have been added to the list of allowed uses.

If a use is not called out in any of the DTPP areas. The zoning administrator can make a determination that the proposed use is similar to one of the existing uses.

12. Please provide additional detail on the progress of the Castro Street Pedestrian Mall study, including any provisional findings and expected final delivery date.

The City staff/consultant team has recently reinitiated the Castro Street Pedestrian Mall Feasibility Study that was delayed by a year because of Covid-19. The project key milestones include developing concept alternatives, public & business outreach and engagement and presentation to the City Council. Tentative plans are to begin community and business outreach on concepts this summer with a report to City Council by end of 2021.

13. Please comment on how the creation of a permanent pedestrian mall Downtown would influence staff's DTPP recommendations for areas A, G & H.

The creation of a permanent pedestrian mall does not affect staff's recommendation in this report. Pedestrians are already the highest-priority mode on Castro Street, and vehicle access does not influence the approval of uses, development design or historic preservation. It may affect the feasibility of development of different uses, which will be studied after these study sessions and reported with the project hearing. In phase 2, it may have some effect, such as on the parking demand of restaurants due to the expanded outdoor dining.

14. Please provide current and historical data on vacancy rates of storefronts in the Downtown area, if possible. Please also provide data on the number/percentage of businesses currently located Downtown that would be classified at Administrative Offices.

The Q1 2021 downtown office vacancy rate is 18.68% (Source: <https://www.nmrk.com/insights/market-report/south-peninsula-market-reports>)

We don't have a downtown-specific retail rate, but for Palo Alto/Los Altos/Mountain View area, the Q4 2020 retail vacancy rate is 3.9% (Source: https://cw-gbl-gws-prod.azureedge.net/-/media/cw/marketbeat-pdfs/2020/q4/us-reports/retail/siliconvalley_americas_marketbeat_retail_q42020.pdf?rev=20d94da2b4154c2380cf6ff1acdb99f7)

See above regarding admin offices in Areas A, G and H.