DATE:	May 20, 2014	
TO:	Honorable Mayor and City Council	STUDY
FROM:	Eric Anderson, Associate Planner Martin Alkire, Principal Planner Terry Blount, Assistant Community Development Director/Planning Manager Randal Tsuda, Community Development Director	SESSION MEMO
VIA:	Daniel H. Rich, City Manager	
TITLE:	El Camino Real Precise Plan Review of Policy and Standards	

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Study Session is for the City Council to provide input on policy topics for the El Camino Real Precise Plan. The topics include draft guiding principles and standards, and several follow-up items from the February 4, 2014 City Council Study Session. City Council direction on these topics will be incorporated into the Public Precise Plan Draft, to be released in July.

BACKGROUND

Council and the Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) have held a total of five Study Sessions on El Camino Real Precise Plan topics. Recent meeting dates and topics included:

- January 22, 2014 (EPC) and February 4, 2014 (City Council)—Land use and mobility strategy endorsement.
- April 2, 2014 (EPC)—Review of the key policies and standards included in this report.

February 4, 2014 City Council Meeting

The following is a summary of City Council comments from the February 4, 2014 study session:

- **Strategy Endorsement:** Support for the Focused Strategy, in which retail, public improvements, and higher-intensity development is focused to activity centers.
- **Ground-Floor Uses:** Concern about car-oriented uses (such as drive-throughs and gas stations) along the corridor, especially near downtown and activity centers.
- **Pedestrian Improvements:** Need for uniformly good sidewalks, safer crossings, and improved access to the corridor from surrounding neighborhoods.
- **Bicycle Improvements:** Prioritize improvements along Latham Street, but consider ways to make improvements to El Camino Real more viable over time.
- Height and Intensity: Create different floor area ratio (FAR) levels, allowing greater FAR in return for increased public benefits. Concern about potential "tunnel effect."
- **Small Parcels:** Support for a range of special standards to help revitalize small parcels.

The following is a summary of requests for further information:

- Analysis of the opportunities and constraints for bike improvements along El Camino Real.
- Request for data on reasonable distances between pedestrian crossings.
- Analyze feasibility of small parcels and provide a range of special standards and strategies.
- Provide strategies to address the "tunnel effect."
- Provide character and feasibility analysis of development prototypes at Village Center FARs.

April 2, 2014 EPC Meeting

At their April 2 Study Session, the EPC discussed draft principles, draft standards, and other policy topics. Their recommendations and comments are included in each of the topic sections of this memo.

Public comment at this meeting included:

- Concern about rising rents and need for affordable housing.
- Support small businesses.
- Concern about compatibility and impact of large buildings.
- Support for Precise Plan's direction on pedestrian improvements.

May 5, 2014 Corridor Advisory Group Meeting

At their May 5 Study Session, the Corridor Advisory Group (CAG) discussed draft principles and standards. Their comments are included in each topic section of this memo. A summary of their comments is included in Attachment 1–Summary of May 5, 2014 Corridor Advisory Group.

DISCUSSION

This memo discusses the following draft Plan topics:

- 1. Draft Principles
- 2. Draft Intensities
- 3. Active Ground-Floor Spaces
- 4. Small-Lot Standards and Strategies
- 5. Parking Strategies
- 6. Bicycles on El Camino Real

In addition, the issues of residential open area and crosswalk frequency are addressed briefly at the end of the report. Discussion of these items is for information only, unless the City Council has questions or concerns.

1. Draft Principles

The draft principles were developed based on the Focused Strategy, input from the January 11 public workshop, and other outreach meetings, and comments from the City Council, EPC, and CAG. They will provide the foundation for the Plan's contents.

The Draft Principles are attached as Attachment 2 and are summarized below. This draft incorporates EPC comments on topics such as small businesses, affordable housing, street-facing building character and buffering neighborhoods from impacts of increased development. The CAG had comments in support of affordable housing, quantitative goals for vehicle trip reduction, and language to improve the comfort of people crossing the roadway.

Summary of Draft Principles

- Preserve, connect, and serve adjacent neighborhoods.
- Create a more livable, walkable, beautiful corridor.
- Focus investment and development in defined catalytic locations.
- Be diverse and flexible.
- Prioritize pedestrian-oriented urban design and building form.
- Encourage creative and flexible use of small parcels.
- Improve bicycle access and facilities.
- Enable visitors to park once and then walk.
- Seek broad community benefits.
- Support existing and new small businesses.

Staff Recommendation

Include the draft principles in the Precise Plan.

Option

Modify the draft principles.

2. Draft Intensities

Overview

The Plan's Focused Strategy identifies three types of subareas: Low-Intensity, Medium-Intensity, and Village Centers (see Attachment 3-Height and Intensity Map). Low-Intensity subarea FARs and heights are to the City's existing similar CRA (Commercial/Residential-Arterial) District standards. See Table 1 for detailed draft intensities in other subareas.

Public Benefits

Based on direction from the last Council meeting to include multiple development tiers, three tiers of FAR and public benefits will be included in the Plan.

The first tier is consistent with existing zoning, 1.35 FAR. No public benefits will be required at this level of intensity. The second tier is associated with Medium-Intensity development, up to 1.85 FAR, and the Castro Village Center sites. At this intensity, the Precise Plan will contain a clearly defined community benefit

Medium Intensity				
FAR	Up to 1.85			
Height	4 stories			
Village Centers				
FĂR	Up to 2.35*			
Height	6 stories			
Castro-North				
FAR	Up to 2.0			
Height	4 stories			
Castro-South				
FAR	No Limit			
Height	3 stories			
<u>Office</u>				
FAR	Up to 0.5			
*With overlay zone, "gatekeeper"				
process and the provision of				
significant public benefits				

CRA Standard: 1.35 FAR/3 to 4 stories 0.35 FAR Office

contribution, proportional to the additional floor area requested. The third tier is associated with Village Center development higher than 1.85 FAR. At this intensity, the Precise Plan will have a negotiated process for exceptional contributions of community benefits in addition to the proportional contribution requirement.

Table 1: Draft Intensities

Medium-Intensity Subarea

The Medium-Intensity subarea includes parts of the corridor outside Village Centers where development consistent with recently approved apartment projects would be compatible with surrounding neighborhoods. See Figure 1 for a rendering of a recent apartment project. Projects larger than current zoning would be required to provide public benefits proportional to the additional floor area.



Figure 1: Recent Apartment Project at 1616 El Camino Real West

Village Centers

Village Centers will allow higher intensities consistent with the General Plan's "key locations" language. This language, based on Council direction, says:

"... intensities above 1.85 FAR and up to 3.0 FAR may be permitted at key locations with significant public benefits and amenities specified within zoning or precise plan standards. Projects above 1.85 FAR may include office or commercial intensities greater than 0.5 FAR."

Staff analyzed the realistic capacity of larger Village Center sites taking into account setbacks, substantial open spaces, paseos, building articulation, gradual transitions to neighborhoods, and upper-floor step-backs. These are key design items that would be required with all Village Centers. Figure 2 shows a six-story, 2.35 FAR residential/retail mixed-use project. Office intensities up to 1.0 FAR could also be accommodated with these characteristics. These intensities are similar to the Mixed-Use Center General Plan designation (for example, at the San Antonio Center).



Figure 2: 6-story Village Center

The EPC reviewed earlier drafts of these project prototypes at 2.3 FAR at five stories and 2.6 FAR at six stories. Based on their comments and further refinement of the example project, staff's recommended FAR has been reduced to 2.35. However, to provide flexibility for greater open area and special site characteristics, staff recommends six stories for the overall height.

The process for Village Centers above 1.85 will include an overlay zone, with a "Gatekeeper" process and considerable City discretion over allowable FAR, required public benefits and resulting character. Through this process, applicants may be

required to provide evidence their requested FAR is necessary to provide the required retail and public benefits, and will have limited effect on neighborhood character. Staff recommends an absolute maximum of 2.35 FAR in these areas, with City discretion to determine appropriate FAR on a case-by-case basis.

Castro Village Center

Projects on small lots in the Castro Village Center subarea (see Attachment 3) will be limited to three to four stories (depending on location), but will be allowed FAR above 1.85. This will allow improvements to underutilized sites while keeping projects within the scale of the surrounding neighborhoods.

Office

New office development at the current standard (0.35 FAR) is challenging, according to analysis from the Grand Boulevard Initiative ECHO Study. The Draft El Camino Real Precise Plan would increase office FAR, which could improve development feasibility and add to the diversity of uses along the corridor. Office buildings at 0.5 FAR would still be limited by the Plan's height limits.

Strategies to Reduce the "Tunnel Effect"

At the February 4, 2014 City Council Study Session, the Council requested additional information on how to reduce the "tunnel effect" of tall buildings along the corridor. The following special strategies are designed to reduce these character concerns.

- *A. Landscaping:* The Plan will have specific direction to support large-canopy trees and landscaped open areas along the corridor. This will soften the edges of the corridor and reduce the visual impact of large buildings. The sidewalk realm will be wider, which will reduce the visual impact of buildings close to the street.
- *B. Building Character:* The Plan will include requirements to break up long buildings with plazas, landscaping, and pedestrian access and will include design guidance to create variation and interest.
- *C. Focused Development:* The Focused Strategy will only allow taller buildings in Village Centers, and portions of the corridor where the lots are shallow are limited to three stories. This will create height variation along the corridor.

General Plan and Focused Strategy Direction

These heights and intensities are consistent with those allowed by the General Plan mixed-use corridor designation. There will be minimum lot sizes for higher FARs, consistent with General Plan direction to promote parcel assembly.

Corridor Advisory Group Comments

Taller buildings should be designed to limit shadow impacts on neighboring properties. Also, ensure that tall buildings are not out of scale with side streets that intersect Village Centers. Clear design guidance to ensure place-making must be included in the Plan. There was concern about high office occupancy rates. Also, office can be used to help increase the efficiency of parking and reduce trips, when combined with complementing uses such as residential.

EPC Recommendation

The EPC did not make a recommendation on the Medium-Intensity subarea as their straw vote was 3-3. EPC members were concerned with how these intensities would be affected when the State Density Bonus Law was applied to projects.

The EPC made the following recommendations on other intensity issues:

Limit the FAR at Village Centers to five stories and 2.3 FAR since six stories and 2.6 FAR would be incompatible with surrounding neighborhoods. However, this intensity is not appropriate at the Escuela/El Monte Village Center due to special concerns about neighborhood compatibility.

In the Castro Village Center, allow the FARs above as long as buildings transition appropriately to neighborhoods.

Allow office FAR up to 0.5. Special regulations supporting underground office parking should also be included in the Plan to limit the bulk of aboveground parking garages.

Option

Change the maximum FARs in the Medium-Intensity areas and Village Centers, and for offices.

3. Active Ground-Floor Spaces

Overview

Active ground-floor spaces are tenant spaces and amenities designed to promote pedestrian activity and visual interest, regardless of use. Some examples of active spaces include retail and restaurant storefronts, outdoor dining and display areas, office space with street visibility, and residential or hotel lobby or amenity areas.

The standards will contain design and character requirements, rather than use requirements. This will provide flexibility to allow different uses but still maintain active pedestrian areas. For maximum setbacks example, will prescribe the farthest distance allowable between the sidewalk and active groundfloor spaces.

The Precise Plan will identify areas where a minimum amount of ground-floor



active spaces will be required, specifically the Neighborhood Corners and Village Centers (see Attachment 4—Active Ground-Floor Space Map). Outside these areas, no ground-floor active spaces will be required, but the Precise Plan will still provide guidance for the design and character of spaces near the sidewalk as these should promote pedestrian activity and interest.

General Plan and Focused Strategy Direction

The General Plan's vision, policies, and form and character guidance promote pedestrian accessibility and a vibrant sidewalk environment. The Focused Strategy includes requirements for active frontages in Neighborhood and Village Centers.

Corridor Advisory Group Comments

The CAG emphasized the importance of design on the appeal and value of active ground-floor spaces, and said it would be a challenge in the El Camino Real environment. Gathering places such as cafés are the most valuable type of space. However, El Camino Real is different from Castro Street. There was discussion that the required amount be characterized differently (e.g., "most of the ground floor"). There was general support for shared parking to make these spaces more viable.

EPC Recommendation

Include the draft standards and the above definition for active ground-floor spaces. Include maximum setback standards. Do not provide automatic incentives for Neighborhood Corners, such as FAR exemptions and reduced parking; incentives should be on a case-by-case basis.

Option

Require particular ground-floor uses in activity areas, such as retail.

4. Small-Lot Standards and Strategies

Overview

Small lots are difficult to redevelop due to design and cost constraints. It is also challenging for them to comply with existing standards, such as parking, which makes it more difficult to lease space to tenants.

Aggregation

One set of strategies to address this issue encourages parcel aggregation. This would allow higher intensities for developments that incorporate multiple small sites.

- A. *Minimum lot width:* Higher-intensity projects and subdivisions would not be allowed on lots with shorter frontages if there is a driveway onto El Camino Real. This would support pedestrian and bicycle safety and comfort by reducing the number of driveways along the corridor over time.
- *B. Minimum lot size to reach higher intensity:* If small lots are offered additional intensity, then this provides an incentive to merge with other lots. This will be most effective in the Medium- and High-Intensity subareas, where lots are not constrained by depth and higher intensities are more appropriate. The recommended minimum lot size for projects with FAR over 1.35 is 15,000 square feet; for projects in Village Centers (other than Castro) with FAR over 1.85, it is 60,000 square feet.

Targeted Standards

A second set of strategies create targeted standards and development types for small sites to support their redevelopment.

- C. *More flexibility for residential:* Small residential projects, such as live/work, rowhouses, senior housing, or other projects, could develop on lots smaller than the 20,000 square foot current minimum. The CAG felt that smaller residential projects, such as rowhouses, are appropriate on El Camino Real as long as they are designed appropriately, such as with front doors elevated over the sidewalk, recessed entries, and tree screening.
- *D. Range of requirements based on lot size:* Standards often have a range of requirements based on lot size. For example, smaller lots may be allowed smaller setbacks than larger lots. The Precise Plan will contain adjustments to the following standards based on lot size:
 - *Maximum parking frontage.* Lots that are too shallow to fit the parking behind the structure will be allowed to have the parking next to it.
 - *Setbacks adjacent to residential.* Deeper lots would be required to have a greater setback than shallower lots. Even for shallow lots, the new standard will be larger than the existing one.

EPC Recommendation

The EPC supported all of these strategies with no additional comments.

Option

Modify the small-lot strategies identified above.

5. Parking Strategies

Overview

One Precise Plan objective is to plan for more efficient parking use to reduce redevelopment costs and create a more pedestrian-friendly environment. At this time, the Precise Plan team has not developed specific parking standards. However, the following draft strategies may help achieve this objective.

A. Fewer different parking ratios: The Zoning Ordinance has many parking ratios for different uses, with often insignificant differences. For example, the retail parking ratio is one space per 180 square feet of floor area, medical offices is one space per 150 square feet, and fitness clubs is one space per 200 square feet.

The difference between categories is often minor compared to the difference among users within a particular category. Small differences in ratios among categories have a minimal effect on parking impacts from a particular user. However, this can have a large effect on the Plan's complexity, clarity, and the ease of implementation for new tenants wishing to occupy existing tenant spaces.

- B. Reduced parking ratios where appropriate: The EPC and City Council have approved recent apartment projects along El Camino Real using the City's "model parking standard," which is less than the existing requirement. The City has not studied parking ratios for nonresidential uses, but Mountain View has among the highest ratios in the area (see Attachment 5–Parking Comparison of Nearby Cities). This may affect the City's competitiveness to attract nonresidential uses along the corridor.
- *C. Shared parking opportunities:* Office, residential, and retail all have different peak parking times. Mixing these uses may support reductions below the sum of their individual parking needs. For example, the Avalon Towers project and the neighboring office building share much of their 740 parking spaces. According to standard parking ratios, these two developments would need 930 parking spaces if they did not share; together they have a reduction of 20 percent.

In addition, when parking lots serve multiple tenants, the chances are low that all those users will be highly popular and demand the same amount of parking. To address this, the Precise Plan could allow parking reductions when shared among multiple users.

D. Neighborhood Corners: A small amount of ground-floor space that could be used for retail may be required in Neighborhood Corners. To reinforce the neighborhood focus of the use and limit the cost of development, reduced parking ratios, such as one parking space per 1,000 square feet, may be appropriate.

EPC Recommendation

The EPC supported all of these strategies with the following comments:

- Concerns about reducing the parking minimum for office based on its particular parking demands, except when higher-intensity offices are required to have Transportation Demand Management.
- Request further study on reduced parking in Neighborhood Corners, but did not recommend a particular parking ratio.

Option

Modify the parking strategies identified above.

6. Bicycles on El Camino Real

The City Council previously supported a Parallel Route Alternative for bicycles instead of a bicycle route on El Camino Real (see Attachment 6–Parallel Route Alternative and El Camino Real Route Alternative). At the February 4 Study Session, the City Council requested more analysis of the opportunities and constraints of bicycles on El Camino Real. The following are findings and analysis on this topic.

Analysis Supporting Bicycles on El Camino Real

A. Bicycle access to midblock properties: About half of the Plan's properties are only accessible from El Camino Real (see Figure 4, sites colored orange and dark red). Many of these sites have potential destinations for bicyclists. Without adequate bicycle facilities on El Camino Real, access to these locations is difficult.

The Parallel Route Alternative can address this issue through the following strategies:

- Bicycle improvements east of Calderon Avenue.
- Focus retail destinations near bicycle-friendly cross streets.
- Provide design guidelines for bicycle improvements within new development.

Figure 4 shows the sites that could add bicycle access through these strategies (sites colored orange).



- *B. Connectivity to Sunnyvale:* Sunnyvale recently decided to convert parking to bicycle lanes on a short segment of El Camino Real near their downtown. The City's Bicycle Plan considers the whole corridor for potential future bicycle lanes. This means Mountain View will have good bicycle connectivity to the east. The Parallel Route Alternative could connect with Sunnyvale's improvements, if they are implemented.
- *C. Bicyclists use El Camino Real:* Bicyclists are already using El Camino Real, even without improvements. A recent census of bicyclists on El Camino Real counted over 20 during the peak commute hour.

Analysis Supporting a Parallel Route

- A. Connectivity to Los Altos and Palo Alto: In 2012, Los Altos adopted a new Bicycle Transportation Plan, but did not identify El Camino Real as a potential location for improvements. Palo Alto also adopted a new Bicycle Transportation Plan in 2012, but identified El Camino Real near Mountain View as a place where further study was needed. This means Mountain View may not have good bicycle connectivity on El Camino Real to the west.
- *B. Driveways:* Commercial uses on arterials have many cars leaving and entering the roadway, a major source of car/bicycle conflict. Driveways also reduce the viability of many kinds of barriers that protect cyclists from the traffic flow. Our transportation consultants recommend up to about 20 commercial driveways per mile as a guideline for a safe bicycle facility. Table 2 shows the number of driveways in several segments of the corridor. These do not include cross streets. Over time, the number of driveways can be reduced with shared parking, lot mergers, and redevelopment.

Segment	Driveways	Driveways/Mile		
Phyllis Avenue/Calderon Avenue to Castro Street				
North Side	11	28		
South Side	11	28		
El Monte Avenue to Shoreline Boulevard/				
Miramonte Avenue				
North Side	13	28		
South Side	16	35		
Escuela Avenue to Rengstorff Avenue/City Limit				
North Side	15	44		
South Side	8	23		

Table 2: Driveway Count

C. Street parking: Street parking is lightly used in some locations, but customers and employees depend on it in areas with older development, or where the road has been widened and on-site parking was removed. Table 3 shows average street parking utilization from a VTA survey conducted in October 2012.

Location	Average Stalls Occupied	Total Stalls	Average Percent Occupied	Number of Buildings with Less than Required Parking
Calderon Avenue to Castro Street	34	66	52%	6
Shoreline Boulevard to Mariposa Avenue	17	58	29%	10

Table 3: Street Parking Utilization

The Plan may reduce the demand for street parking over time through the following strategies:

- More residential uses could be developed, which need fewer parking spaces than commercial uses.
- Shared parking facilities may reduce the need for small sites to rely on street parking.
- *D. Conflicts with other modes:* Buses on El Camino Real run approximately every 10 minutes, and frequently pull into the parking lane (where a bicycle lane would be) at bus stops.

Improving the crossing experience is one of the major community priorities for El Camino Real. Bulb-outs are an effective way to achieve reduced crossing distances. However, they often obstruct continuous bike lanes.

There are alignment solutions to these problems, but these often require more space than is currently available.

Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends the Parallel Route Alternative for bicycle improvements, including the following Precise Plan strategies to improve bicycle comfort on El Camino Real:

- Policies and standards to reduce the number of driveways.
- Standards and guidelines to increase bicycle access through private properties, such as new midblock cut-throughs.
- Provisions for shared parking and land uses that require fewer parking spaces.
- Continue to work with Sunnyvale, Palo Alto, and Los Altos to create a viable regional bicycle network.

Option

Pursue the El Camino Real Alternative for bicycle improvements.

Residential Open Area

"Open area" refers to any area accessible and unenclosed, including plazas, gardens and decks on podiums and rooftops, balconies, as well as open areas within setbacks. It does not include any auto-oriented paved areas. The draft standard, 40 percent of lot area, would be consistent with recent apartment projects, except smaller lots would have a more lenient standard, 35 percent, to help feasibility of residential projects on those sites.

Corridor Advisory Group Comments

- Residential open area should have useful dimensions and design.
- Utilize in-lieu fees for open space to create beautiful streetscapes.

EPC Recommendation

The EPC recommended the draft standards, but commented that publicly accessible open space and neighborhood connections are better than private open area.

Crosswalk Frequency

The City Council requested more information on minimum distances between pedestrian crossings along El Camino Real. Findings and analysis on that topic are

included in Attachment 7–Crosswalk Frequency Analysis. The Precise Plan includes new crossings at Bonita Avenue, Pettis Avenue, and Crestview Drive. This would eliminate all gaps in crosswalks over 2,000'. This analysis is provided for information only.

CONCLUSION

For the following Plan materials, staff recommends the principles, standards, and strategies included in this memo:

1. Draft Principles

The Draft Principles are included as Attachment 2. They have incorporated the EPC comments.

2. Draft Intensities

The Draft Intensities are provided in Table 1 on Page 5. The Draft Intensities differ from the EPC recommendation in the following ways:

Areas	Staff Recommendation	EPC Recommendation
Village Centers	6 stories and 2.35 FAR	5 stories and 2.3 FAR Lower at Escuela Avenue/ El Monte Avenue
Medium-Intensity Areas	4 stories and 1.85 FAR	Straw vote tied (no formal recommendation)

3. Active Ground-Floor Spaces

The Draft Precise Plan contains minimum floor area requirements for active ground-floor spaces in Village Centers and Neighborhood Corners, design requirements for these spaces, and maximum setbacks.

4. Small-Lot Standards and Strategies

The Draft Precise Plan contains strategies to encourage parcel aggregation and targeted standards and development types to support the redevelopment of small lots.

5. Parking Strategies

The Draft Precise Plan contains strategies to improve the efficiency of parking requirements through shared parking, reduced ratios where appropriate, fewer different ratio requirements, and special standards for Neighborhood Corners.

6. Bicycles on El Camino Real

Staff recommends maintaining the Parallel Route alternative, but including strategies to improve the comfort of bicycles on El Camino Real over time. The EPC did not comment on this issue due to the timing of deliverables.

NEXT STEPS

Based on City Council input, staff and the El Camino Real project team will complete a draft Precise Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The Precise Plan Public Draft will be available in July 2014. In the fall, the EPC and City Council will review the Public Draft. Final action is expected before the end of 2014. The EIR will also be released in July 2014. The EIR will include analysis and mitigation measures for traffic, air quality, and other potentially significant impacts of the Plan.

PUBLIC NOTICING

Notices were sent to all residents and property owners within 300' of the Precise Plan boundary, e-mail notices were sent to an interested parties list, and a notice was placed in the local newspaper.

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Attachments: 1. Summary of May 5, 2014 Corridor Advisory Group

- 2. Draft Principles
- 3. Height and Intensity Map
- 4. Active Ground-Floor Space Map
- 5. Parking Comparison of Nearby Cities
- 6. Parallel Route Alternative and El Camino Real Route Alternative
- 7. Crosswalk Frequency Analysis