

**CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW****ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT  
MARCH 15, 2017****5. PUBLIC HEARINGS****5.1 Study Session to Discuss Proposed General Plan and Zoning Map Amendments for a Residential Development Consisting of a 348-Unit Addition to an Existing 402-Unit Apartment Complex with Three New Underground Parking Garages and a 1.48-Acre Public Park (Dedicated to the City) at 555 West Middlefield Road****RECOMMENDATION**

That the Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) provide input on the proposed residential development at 555 West Middlefield Road.

**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 residents within a 300' radius and other interested stakeholders were notified of this meeting.

**MEETING PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE**

The purpose of this Study Session is to introduce the proposed development, identify major issues for further study, and receive EPC input on key topics.

**BACKGROUND AND ANALYSIS****Gatekeeper Authorization**

On July 2, 2015, the City Council authorized staff resources for the consideration of a General Plan Amendment from Medium-Density Residential to High-Density Residential and a rezoning from P (Planned Community) to R4 (High-Density Residential). At the time of the Gatekeeper authorization, the proposal included a total of 726 residential units at roughly 50 dwelling units per acre (du/ac) on the 14.50-acre site. At that hearing, the City Council directed all residential Gatekeeper projects to provide a minimum of 10 percent affordable units. This

Study Session is an opportunity for early project input on the informal application materials submitted by the applicant, Avalon Bay Communities, Inc.

### Project Location and Context

The 14.5-acre project site (referred to as 555 West Middlefield Road) is located on the south side of West Middlefield Road, and comprises nearly the entire block between West Middlefield Road, Moffett Boulevard, Cypress Point Drive, and State Route 85 (see Exhibit 1). The parcel is currently developed with 402 apartment units, two surface parking areas, and other residential amenities.

To the west of the project site across Moffett Boulevard are Moffett Plaza Shopping Center and Moffett Mobile Home Park. There are two-story apartment buildings to the north, across West Middlefield Road, and to the south, across Cypress Point Drive. The project shares the block with a gas station located at the southeast corner of West Middlefield Road and Moffett Boulevard.

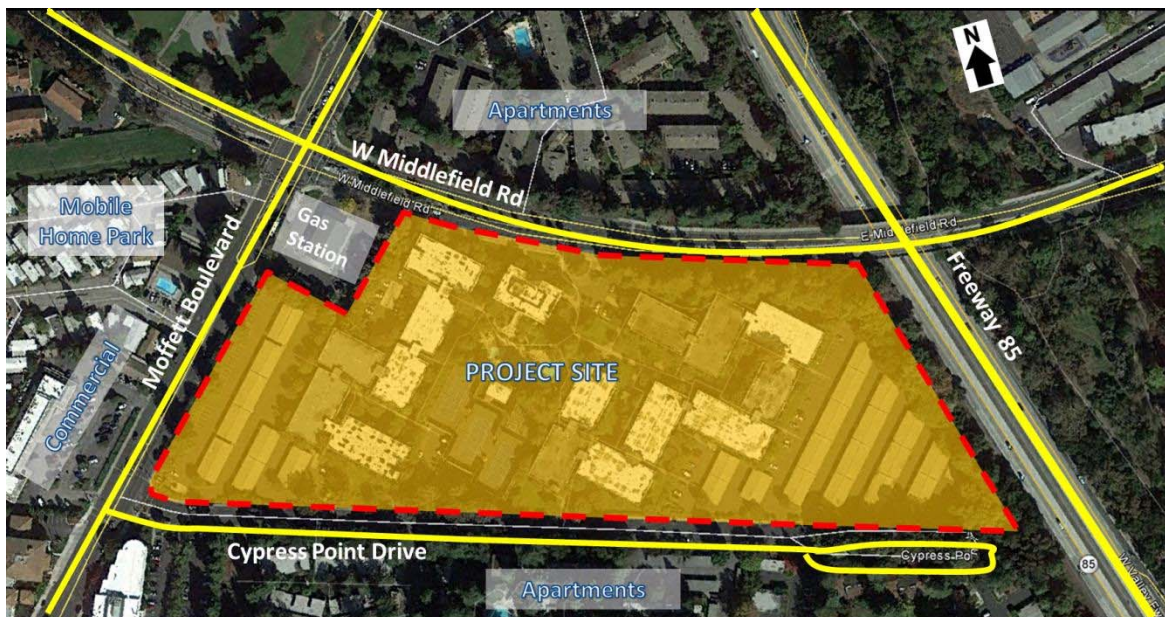


Figure 1 – Location Map

### General Plan and Zoning

The existing General Plan designation for the subject property is Medium-Density Residential, which allows a range of residential uses such as single-family, duplex, and multi-family development with densities from 13 to 25 du/ac and maximum heights of up to three stories. This designation accommodates the existing apartment development on the property, and also allows development of parks

and open space. The proposal would amend the General Plan designation to High-Density Residential, which allows higher density development up to 80 du/ac and heights of up to five stories.

The project site is currently zoned P (Planned Community/Precise Plan) District, which in this case does not have specific development standards or design guidelines. The proposal includes a rezoning to R4 (High-Density Residential) District. The requested R4 Zoning District would allow up to 60 du/ac on the site. The project design would be required to follow specific R4 development standards and guidelines, which are intended to integrate higher-density residential development with surrounding lower-density residential zones.

## ANALYSIS

The following sections will describe the proposed project and identify key topics for EPC input. EPC input will be forwarded to the City Council, with the combined direction from the EPC and City Council shaping the formal application and subsequent City review process.

### Project Overview

Avalon Bay is proposing to replace two existing surface parking lots, covering 7 acres of the site, with two new buildings containing 348 rental apartment units. Each new building will be constructed over two levels of underground parking. The new residential buildings will provide a mix of 28 studio, 180 one-bedroom, 125 two-bedroom, and 16 three-bedroom units. Project plans are included as Exhibit 2.



**Figure 2—Proposed Site Plan**

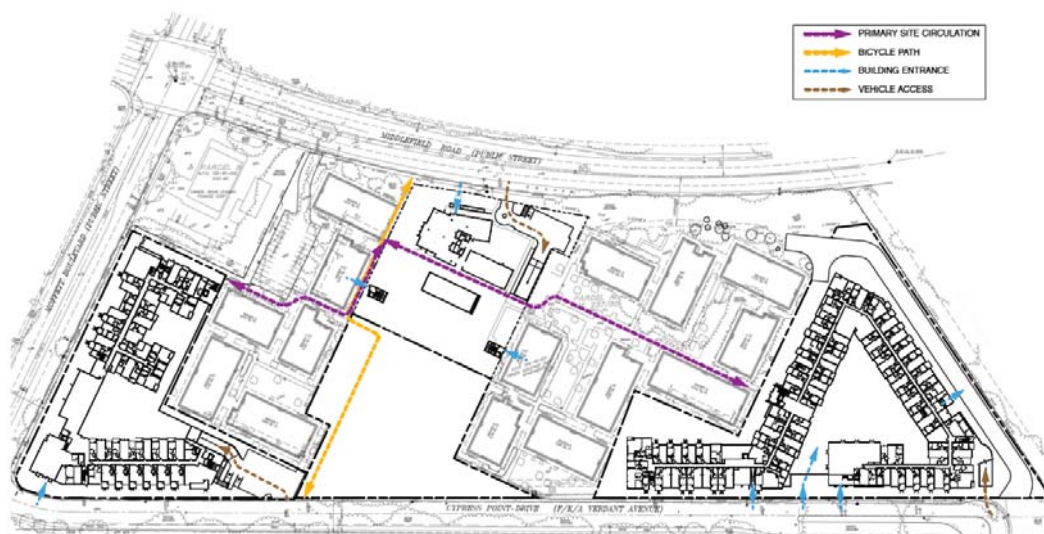


The proposal also includes renovating the existing 402 units (built in 1969), and redeveloping the existing clubhouse/leasing office and on-site amenities. The new and existing apartments will operate somewhat independently, with separate and distinct branding. Existing apartment interiors will be updated when individual units are vacated. The redeveloped clubhouse/leasing office is centrally located and intended to primarily serve the existing apartments. Although the amenities on-site will be accessible to the existing and future residents, the existing and proposed buildings will operate independently.

The new buildings will have interior courtyards containing active and passive amenity spaces, including features such as a pool, fireplace lounge, dog run, outdoor kitchen, and gathering/seating areas. The project is designed with a variety of building heights to try to achieve sensitive transitions to existing buildings and adjacent land uses. All the new buildings are proposed with an eclectic mix of contemporary and traditional architectural elements.

### Public Open Space and Circulation

Avalon Bay is proposing to dedicate a 1.48-acre public park along Cypress Point Drive, in an area currently occupied by tennis courts and other complex amenities. The City Council generally supported the proposed public park location and size at the Gatekeeper hearing, and dedication of the proposed 1.48-acre park would satisfy a portion of the project's park land dedication requirement. The remainder of the requirement would be provided in the form of park in-lieu fees.



**Figure 3—New Site Circulation**

An on-site public path is proposed along the park and leasing office, connecting West Middlefield Road to Cypress Point Drive. The proposed path is an effort to enhance the public bicycle and pedestrian connection through the site and provide access to the public park. City staff will be continuing to work with the applicant on the design of this connection. The project also includes a variety of landscaped paths between the new and existing buildings. Many ground-floor units have direct connections to public street frontages and common amenity areas.

### Parking

Two levels of underground parking are proposed under the new residential buildings and the redeveloped clubhouse/leasing office. The underground garages will contain 1,002 parking spaces, and the project will also include 49 surface spaces for a total of 1,051 parking spaces. The proposed parking areas provide spaces for both new and existing apartment units, and include guest parking.

The proposal slightly exceeds the City's "Model Parking Standard" of one parking stall per studio unit and one-bedroom unit, and two parking stalls for each two-bedroom or larger unit. The project provides 79 parking spaces more than the 972 parking spaces which would be required by the Model Parking Standard. It should be noted that staff is studying the applicability of the model parking standard to the three Gatekeeper projects around Moffett/Middlefield area (555 West Middlefield Road, 777 West Middlefield Road, and Shenandoah Square sites).

The applicant has proposed a phasing plan to offset the loss of parking for the existing units during construction. The project will be constructed in four phases where new parking will be constructed before the existing parking is demolished. The existing units will have required parking at all times throughout the project development.

### Public Benefits

Public benefits refer to development contributions to the City in exchange for approval to develop additional intensity. In order to qualify as public benefits, contributions must exceed the minimum standards and requirements applicable to the project based on City Code. Gatekeeper requests are expected to include public benefit proposals, given proposed changes in allowed intensities.

On March 7, 2017, the City Council discussed the Gatekeeper process and public benefit expectations. At the meeting, the City Council provided direction on developing a more standardized approach to what public benefits would be

expected for Gatekeeper projects like this one. The development of such an approach will be undertaken by staff at a later date. Given that, the City's existing policy of receiving a proposal from the applicant and then providing that to the EPC and City Council for comment will apply here.

### Project Changes

At the July 2, 2015 Gatekeeper hearing, the project proposal included 324 new residential units, for a total of 726 units on the site (see the Gatekeeper Staff Report, Exhibit 3). The current proposal includes 348 new units and 751 total units resulting in a site density of approximately 52 du/ac.

The change in unit count and project density is fairly minor, and consistent with the proposed General Plan designation and R4 Zoning. Consequently, the updated proposal would qualify for an increased floor area ratio (FAR) allowance under the R4 Zoning District, as summarized in the table below and shown in Exhibit 4. Despite the increased density and allowance for more FAR, the current project is proposed at a significantly lower 1.5 FAR and maximum building height of 52' than is permitted. The lower FAR and proposed building heights are generally appropriate in the context of the existing units and surrounding development.

**Table 1 – R4 Zoning District FAR and Density Standards**

Density	Floor Area Ratio (maximum)
60 du/ac Maximum	1.40 FAR for Projects up to 40 du/ac
	1.95 FAR for Projects Between 41 to 50 du/ac
	2.30 FAR for Projects Between 51 to 60 du/ac

**Table 2 – R4 Zoning District Height Standards**

Maximum Height (overall)	Maximum Height (based on stories)
52 ft. (wall height)/62 ft. (ridge height) 60 ft. (wall height)/70 ft. (ridge height)*  * This additional height may be allowed subject to design review in locations such as gateway sites, arterial streets, etc.	3 stories – 40' (wall)/50' (ridge) 4 stories – 52' (wall)/62' (ridge) 5 stories – 60' (wall)/70' (ridge)

## Building Massing and Transitions

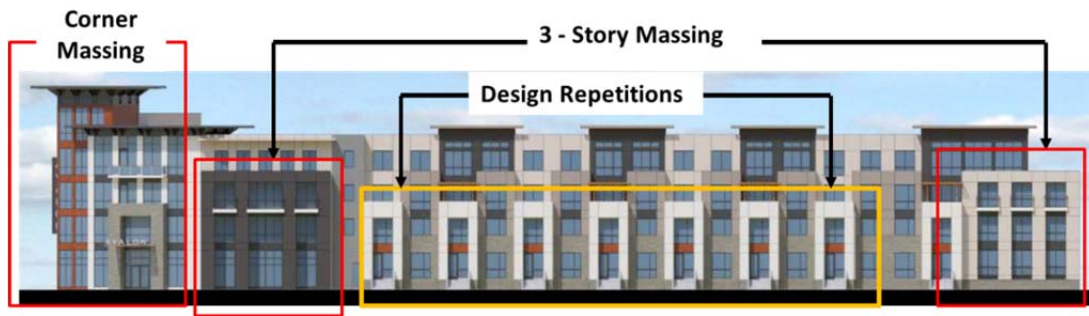
The R4 District height standards provide specific height and massing requirements intended to help coordinate R4 development with adjacent residential zones. Additional design guidelines provide direction on design elements to help integrate new development into existing neighborhoods. The guidelines encourage residential buildings to employ facade articulation which helps address the character and scale of nearby residential areas. Design elements such as porches, projecting eaves and overhangs, and other traditional architectural elements are a few tools that help provide residential scale and help break up building mass.

Existing City streets separate the project site from surrounding neighborhood areas, and effectively provide additional setback between new, predominantly four-story buildings and the predominantly one- and two-story buildings in the surrounding area. Although the project is in the early stages of design review, there are a few key areas where staff recommends additional design attention to improve integration of the project.

### 1. *Cypress Point Drive/Moffett Boulevard Frontages*

Many of the existing neighborhood buildings employ a fairly utilitarian architectural style, but with more traditional residential design elements such as gabled roofs, wood siding, etc. The proposed new residential buildings are four stories tall with a contemporary design. While new buildings should not duplicate designs from the immediate vicinity, additional work is needed to more smoothly integrate the design of the new buildings with residential development in the area. The project includes two new, long building frontages along Cypress Point Drive, which form the primary interface between new project areas and the surrounding residential neighborhood.

The R4 design guidelines provide direction to maintain appropriate scale and pattern of development that is compatible with existing neighborhoods. As shown below, the proposed four-story building includes two- and three-story elements closer to the street. However, taller elements need better pedestrian-scaled features, and the proposed materials (currently ledgestone and fiber cement panels) should provide a warmer, residential character.



**Figure 4 – Street Facade and Corner Massing, Lot 1**

Staff will continue to work with the applicant on features that promote integration with the surrounding lower-density residential area and adjacent on-site buildings, including: porches, entries, and bay features to establish a strong relationship with street frontages and to emphasize more pedestrian-scale elements; upper floor step backs and other design elements to deemphasize taller massing; variation and breaks in long facades; and color/material palettes to provide a more current/updated residential character while better integrating with the lower-density area surrounding the project site.

2. *Moffett Boulevard/Cypress Point Drive Corner Massing*

The building design at the corner of Moffett Boulevard and Cypress Point Drive has a commercial appearance, with less articulated wall areas, a tower feature with five-story massing, large window areas, and little ground-level definition. While there are commercial buildings adjacent to the site along Moffett Boulevard, the massing and character of this building corner should convey a more residential character to provide a better transition to the residential area and new public park along Cypress Point Drive.



**Figure 1 – Corner Massing, Lot 3**

Some taller building walls may be appropriate along a major road like Moffett Boulevard; however, the R4 Zoning District and General Plan policies seek to have new development sensitively transition to surrounding buildings. Therefore, staff recommends updating the corner massing with more traditional flanking elements, introducing better pedestrian scale and features, and using more residential materials/treatments. An interesting landscape design at the corner would



also help accent the building entry, and, if coordinated with frontage features along Cypress Point Drive, would create a more dynamic pedestrian environment leading to the new public park.

### 3. *On-Site Transitions*

The existing residential buildings in the complex are three stories tall, and the new residential buildings are four stories tall. Although the project integrates landscape and open space design in the site plan to create separation between existing and proposed buildings, there are a few pinch points in the design where the buildings are less than 13' apart at the ground level.

The R4 standards require a minimum of 15' separation between one- to three-story buildings, and 20' separation for four-story buildings. Staff will work with the applicant to explore adjusting massing and/or setbacks at pinch points to better coordinate on-site development. Staff will also work with the applicant on the design of the existing buildings and the new clubhouse/leasing office, since these buildings will front on the new public park and bike/pedestrian connection.

#### EPC Question No. 1:

Does the EPC support the predominant four-story building height and staff's recommendations for continuing to improve the development's massing and integration with surrounding neighborhood buildings and existing buildings on-site?

### **Heritage Trees**

This large site has over 400 existing trees, including roughly 260 Heritage trees. The Heritage trees are distributed throughout the property and many cannot be easily preserved, given the infill nature of the project and the large underground parking garages. To accommodate the proposed development, 117 of the 263 Heritage trees are proposed for removal, as shown in Figure 7. A total of 299 replacement trees will be planted as part of the proposed project, primarily around the periphery of proposed buildings and in the central courtyard areas.



**Figure 6 – Tree Removal Plan**

The existing tree canopy coverage is 25.6 percent of the lot area. The proposed tree canopy coverage will match the existing tree canopy coverage after 15 years. Though 66 percent of Heritage trees are currently proposed for removal, the proposal includes preservation of Heritage trees in some key frontage locations. Staff recommends that a priority be placed on preservation of additional high-quality trees where feasible in other key locations.

For example, 37 Heritage trees (mostly Coast live oak, Coast redwoods, Brazilian pepper, and Aleppo pine) are proposed to be removed adjacent to the State Route 85 in order to provide fire emergency access to building areas located further from public streets. Half of these trees have high suitability for preservation. In addition to the general benefit of retaining healthy, mature trees, these trees would provide a good noise and visual buffer to the highway. Staff recommends the applicant study modifications to the proposed site plan to allow additional Heritage trees to be preserved or relocated onsite.

EPC Questions No. 2 and No. 3:

- Does the EPC support modifying the site design to preserve and/or relocate additional Heritage trees on-site?
- Are there specific locations to prioritize for tree preservation and/or where relocated trees should be planted?

### **Affordable Housing**

Affordable units incorporated into market-rate developments are generally referred to as “below-market rate” (BMR) units. As part of the project’s

Gatekeeper authorization, the City Council directed a minimum of 10 percent of all the units be affordable to low-income households (or a total of 35 BMR units for this project). The household income target for the BMR units is based on City ordinance stipulations, which require BMR apartment units be rented to low-income households making 50 percent to 80 percent of area median income (AMI). The applicant is proposing to provide the City Council-directed 10 percent BMR units, but proposes the units be targeted to moderate-income households (earning up to 120 percent of AMI). Staff notes this is not consistent with City Council direction or applicable ordinance requirements.

Recent evaluations of local affordable housing have shown a need for housing affordable to all income groups, including the 80 percent to 120 percent AMI (moderate-income) range. Although rents vary based on location, housing stock, and economic conditions, in the past, many cities have not sought moderate-income affordable rental units because moderate-income restricted rents have been comparable to general market rents. Therefore, there was little benefit to cities requiring affordable moderate-income rental units. Currently in Mountain View, market rate rents are sufficiently higher than moderate-income rents to meet a public purpose. To the extent that the market softens and the gap between moderate-income versus market-rate rents closes, the benefit of moderate-income units may diminish. This should be considered for long-term BMR policy.

The City Council recently discussed the need for moderate-income units, and at the February 28, 2017 City Council meeting, directed staff to target moderate-income units when affordable units are provided to meet public benefit requirements (such as in the El Camino Real Precise Plan area). However, the provision of BMR units targeting moderate-income units to meeting minimum BMR code requirements would require ordinance amendments has yet to be discussed by the City Council.

As noted, the City Council directed that a minimum of 10 percent of all the units be affordable to low-income households. Under the City's BMR requirements, applicants that provide on-site units in-lieu of paying the impact fee need only provide them at a rate of 7.75 percent of the total number of units. Staff believes that it would be reasonable to apply the remaining 2.25 percent towards the project's community benefit.

EPC Questions No. 4 and No. 5:

- Does the EPC support the idea of applying the 2.25 percent difference towards the community benefit?

- Does the EPC have any input on public benefit priorities beyond affordable housing for this project?

## **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

All potential environmental impacts (e.g., traffic, biological resources, air quality, noise, etc.) will be studied as required by the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Staff anticipates the traffic analysis will also study potential cumulative impacts of the three Gatekeeper projects near the Moffett Boulevard/West Middlefield Road intersection (e.g., 777 West Middlefield Road and Shenandoah Square sites).

## **NEXT STEPS**

Following feedback from the EPC at this Study Session, the project will be heard at a City Council Study Session tentatively scheduled for April 18, 2017, where City Council will review the proposed project and the EPC's comments. After the City Council Study Session, the applicant will revise the project plans and begin the formal development and environmental review processes. Later in the process, the EPC will provide a recommendation to the City Council on the development application, including the CEQA analysis.

## **CONCLUSION**

Staff requests feedback on the following questions:

1. Does the EPC support the predominant four-story building height and staff's recommendations for continuing to improve the development's massing and integration with surrounding neighborhood buildings and existing buildings on-site?
2. Does the EPC support modifying the site design to preserve and/or relocate additional Heritage trees on-site? Are there specific locations to prioritize for tree preservation and/or where relocated trees should be planted?
3. Does the EPC support the applicant's proposal to target moderate-income affordable housing units or some mix of moderate- and low-income BMR units? If so, should a higher percentage of moderate-income affordable units be provided?
4. Does the EPC support the idea of applying the 2.25 percent difference towards the community benefit?

5. Does the EPC have any input on public benefit priorities beyond affordable housing for this project?

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- Exhibits: 1. Location Map  
2. Project Plans  
3. [Gatekeeper Staff Report – July 2015](#)  
4. R4 Zoning Standards