

CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW**ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING COMMISSION****STAFF REPORT****WEDNESDAY, MAY 16, 2018****5. STUDY SESSION****5.2 Residential Architecture Discussion****RECOMMENDATION**

That the Environmental Planning Commission discuss and provide input on architectural design objectives for residential developments.

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION

The Commission's agenda is advertised on Channel 26, and the agenda and this report appear on the City's Internet website at www.mountainview.gov.

PURPOSE OF MEETING

Over the last several months, the Environmental Planning Commission (EPC), City Council, and community members have identified some recurring concerns about the design of higher-intensity residential developments. The purpose of this meeting is to provide an opportunity for a broader discussion of design objectives for upcoming multi-family residential development. EPC input at this Study Session will be forwarded to the City Council for consideration at a Study Session tentatively scheduled for June 19, 2018. This cumulative input will help staff better understand design expectations and guide the design review process.

BACKGROUND

This Staff Report provides general background information, in preparation for the Study Session presentation and EPC discussion at the meeting. Based in part on input from the Mayor and Vice Mayor, the presentation at the meeting will be graphics-heavy and led by two consulting architects providing:

- *A Primer on Residential Design Features*, using photos of older/more traditional buildings and newer/more contemporary buildings in Mountain View to show how key residential features are implemented in different ways.

- *A Survey of New Development*, providing photos of development in other Bay Area communities as a basis or reference for EPC to discuss features/buildings that successfully achieve objectives for residential design.

The presentation is intended to help provide a common language and development examples as a starting point for EPC discussion. Gaining greater clarity about the concerns with recent residential designs, and more specific input on what EPC and Council would like to see in future development designs, will help staff provide better direction to applicants in the development review process. This input will also allow staff to evaluate if more substantial changes are needed (e.g., updates to development standards or design guidelines) to meet community design goals.

Development Context

Since adoption of the 2030 General Plan, which identified key areas of targeted growth (“Change Areas”), Mountain View has seen a substantial amount of residential development. Over the last six or so years, new residential development (e.g., constructed and approved but unbuilt projects) has included:

- Over 4,000 constructed/approved residential units, in approximately 60 residential development projects.
- Higher-intensity residential developments comprise roughly two-thirds of the constructed/approved residential units.
- Of the approximately 20 higher-intensity residential developments, roughly one-half are complete and the other half are approved but unbuilt or under construction.

Residential development has been proposed Citywide, but larger residential developments have predominantly been constructed in Precise Plan areas, including the El Camino Real, San Antonio, South Whisman, Downtown, and Evelyn Corridor Precise Plans. New development in these locations is noticeable not just because it occurs in prominent locations, but also (in many cases) due to the significance of the change from previous or adjacent site conditions. (See Exhibit 1 to the EPC Staff Report—Recent Higher-Intensity Residential Projects).

The City is currently in the process of reviewing and continues to receive applications for new higher-intensity residential developments, including projects in existing Precise Plan areas, residential Gatekeeper applications, and medium-

density rowhouse projects. Given recent design concerns, this report and meeting is focused on larger/higher-intensity residential development. However, it is worth noting that the City has also approved and continues to see a large number of applications for rowhouses or similar medium-density, multi-family development projects constituting roughly one-third of new housing units.

Design Review Authority

Design review is a component of any City's development review process. The fundamental objective for design review is to ensure new development is of high quality and consistent with the City's vision for future development conditions.

Design direction must be reasonable and nondiscriminatory, not arbitrary. Most communities use a standardized process for development review and adopt both development standards and design guidelines to provide clear, proactive design direction reflecting community values. Using a mix of standards and guidelines aims to balance providing clarity and flexibility to meet local design objectives.

The City's General Plan is the starting point for articulating the community's design direction, providing core policy direction, such as:

- ***LUD 1.5: Development review process.*** Use the City's development review process to ensure well-designed projects.
- ***LUD 6.1: Neighborhood character.*** Ensure that new development in or near residential neighborhoods is compatible with neighborhood character.
- ***LUD 9.3: Enhanced public space.*** Ensure that development enhances public spaces through these measures:
 - Encourage strong, pedestrian-oriented design with visible, accessible entrances and pathways from the street.
 - Encourage pedestrian-scaled design elements such as stoops, canopies, and porches.
 - Encourage connections to pedestrian and bicycle facilities.
 - Locate buildings near the edge of the sidewalk.
 - Encourage design compatibility with surrounding uses.

- Locate parking lots to the rear or side of buildings.
 - Encourage building articulation and use of special materials to provide visual interest.
 - Promote and regulate high-quality sign materials, colors, and design that are compatible with site and building design.
 - Encourage attractive, water-efficient landscaping on the ground level.
- ***LUD 10.1: Sustainable design and materials.*** Encourage high-quality and sustainable design and materials.

The City's regulations (e.g., adopted Precise Plan standards and design guidelines, and R3 PUD development guidelines) implement this General Plan policy direction. These materials provide specific guidance for project design work before applications are submitted to the City, and staff and Development Review Committee (DRC) review of projects throughout the development review process.

Mountain View Development Review Process

The development review process includes a few key stages, as described in the following sections. Design review plays some role in each of these stages.

Preapplication/Informal Application

Before a development application is submitted to the City, a developer has already spent time and money to acquire property, conduct due diligence, and work with their design teams to draft plans for a proposed project. Adopted development standards and guidelines, as well as City action on other similar development, are inputs to this preapplication process. Sometimes, a developer will submit a preliminary, conceptual proposal ("informal application") to gain early, multi-departmental input on potential project issues. This input can be a factor in whether a developer ultimately pursues a development and can help improve the quality of any subsequent formal application submittal.

Entitlement Process (Formal Application)

The development review process is fundamentally reactive to project proposals by a developer and incorporates input from a variety of sources. Core design topics typically discussed in the development review process include:

- *Site Plan* – Building locations, building separation, circulation, landscaping, utilities, street improvements, etc.;
- *Building Form* – Massing, transitions, articulation, etc.; and
- *Building Character* – Individual building elements (e.g., porches, bays, and windows); architectural style and design details; materials; colors; etc.

Project direction often has to balance design objectives with diverse code requirements and constraints, to achieve a project design that decision-makers will support, and that the developer/property owner feels they can build. Planning Division staff reviews applications from a few different perspectives:

- *Completeness*: Does the application include all necessary information for project review?
- *Codes and Regulations*: Does a project proposal conform to applicable development standards and regulations? Are any exceptions proposed? How does the design implement applicable site and building design guidelines? Does the proposal comply with regulations from other reviewing departments? How do applicable codes/regulations affect design input?
- *Context*: Are there site conditions (e.g., environmental constraints, Heritage trees, etc.) or adjacent property conditions (e.g., scale of development, circulation conflicts, etc.) that trigger special design interventions?
- *Community Input*: Has staff received feedback from the City Council or the EPC regarding opportunities or concerns for project design?

Big-picture design direction or issues are identified by staff as early as possible in the application process. Some developments are also reviewed by EPC and/or City Council at a Study Session, which allows staff to highlight key issues for early EPC/Council input and guidance for the development review process.

Although not all projects will have early Study Sessions, the entitlement process for a larger residential development often includes several steps and stages of its own for review and input, such as: at least a few rounds of technical review by staff; at least two rounds of design review by the DRC; at least one applicant-hosted community meeting; and CEQA analysis. City staff and the DRC generally work with an applicant to refine the project design to the point where it can receive a recommendation for approval. For larger projects, the entitlement process can often take a year or more before final action by the City Council.

Building Permit and Construction Process

The building permit phase is a ministerial process, wherein projects are reviewed for detailed construction code compliance and consistency with the entitlement decision (including approved design and conditions of approval). Some design changes may occur through the building permit and construction processes for a variety of reasons, such as code compliance, constructability, material availability and warranties, cost containment (“value engineering”), etc.

ANALYSIS

While Councilmembers, Environmental Planning Commissioners, and community members have generally supported increased housing development in the City, staff has heard the following concerns expressed about the design of recent developments:

- Recent development with contemporary architecture all looks the same;
- More architectural variety is needed, including buildings with more traditional architectural styles; and
- New contemporary buildings look too blocky and commercial.

Some of this feedback has been easier to understand and address. For example, staff has already started working with applicants on several projects currently under review to use more traditional architectural styles, where appropriate. Staff has primarily done this with projects located within existing multi-family neighborhoods, as opposed to in General Plan Change/Precise Plan areas, as discussed in more detail later in this report.

Other aspects of recent input have not been as clear or easy to understand and address. Staff has interpreted the other recent feedback to be predominantly about

the character and “feel” of new, taller residential buildings rather than the overall size of the residential development projects, which have conformed to applicable development standards (except when a State density bonus has been proposed). In design review on current applications, this has translated to working with applicants on achieving more diversity in architectural styles but also focusing on key characteristics such as ground-floor entries, roof forms, window design, and materials so residential developments feel more residential.

This Study Session is an opportunity for the EPC, and ultimately Council, to discuss and clarify the elements of recent contemporary designs that have felt blocky, commercial, and too similar across multiple recent developments. In addition, this is an opportunity for EPC and Council to more specifically address what should be strengthened/improved in future development.

The rest of this report provides additional reference information on Precise Plan direction, recent development projects, and strategies staff has taken to try to address recent concerns. This is provided as additional insight into the City’s review process, and how that can affect project design, to complement the presentation the EPC will receive at this meeting.

New Precise Plans – Development Review Framework

The vast majority of recently constructed/approved higher-intensity residential developments have occurred in new Precise Plan areas; project design in those areas is guided by applicable development standards and design guidelines from these regulatory documents.

The Precise Plans are also sometimes referenced in review of Gatekeeper projects of similar scale and/or context, when a “P District” rezoning is proposed rather than a new standard zoning district (which would have its own development standards and design guidelines). Recent Gatekeepers have predominantly been higher-intensity residential developments.

It would be challenging to provide detailed summaries of all of this design direction in the scope of this report (See Exhibits 2, 3, and 4 to the EPC Staff Report for links to the San Antonio, El Camino Real, and North Bayshore Precise Plans). However, there are some common themes to design direction in the newly adopted Precise Plans:

- New development will be taller and more dense than prior conditions, with buildings located near/at public sidewalks.

- Quantitative and qualitative development standards and design guidelines identify desired size, placement, and character of new development. This direction generally aims to change existing conditions to create varied, human-scaled buildings/building elements located closer to the public realm, while maintaining compatibility with surrounding conditions.
- There are no prescriptive requirements for architectural style. The North Bayshore and San Antonio Precise Plans encourage innovative, contemporary/urban architecture; the El Camino Real Precise Plan is silent on architectural style.

The design guidelines focus on general compatibility and building form and character objectives for each respective area. This is in part because architectural style preferences are subjective, and restricting architectural styles can lead to less overall design variety and visual interest. It is also because, in general, design guidelines do not tend to prescribe a particular architectural style(s) for new development, except when there is a strong basis that can be consistently applied, such as in a historic district with architecturally significant structures.

Existing development in Mountain View is fairly eclectic, including a wide range of building sizes and architectural styles; these Precise Plan areas also generally cover locations where the City objectives were to substantially change existing conditions. As such, the Precise Plans largely address compatibility goals through height and setback standards, rather than by prescribing architectural design styles.

Even with flexible design guidelines and an eclectic context, it is not uncommon for development constructed within specific time periods and locations to have design similarities. For Mountain View residential development, you can see this in the similarities within and differences between early farmhouses; postwar tract homes; 1970s- through 1980s-style soft-story, lower-density apartments; small-lot, single-family and rowhouse units in the 1990s (and today); and now with new higher-intensity, multi-family developments.

There are a variety of reasons that buildings of an era can feature similar designs, such as personal tastes of a property owner/developer; design preferences of new renters/buyers; availability of trusted, common materials and construction trades to install them; common construction practices; construction/material costs, liability, and warranties; implementation of updated construction technologies and building codes (including green building/sustainability inputs); direction from

adopted zoning regulations and design guidelines; and the knowledge that similarly designed projects have been approved by a municipality.

Current Development Applications

Current applications include a mix of residential Gatekeeper projects and further development within existing Precise Plan areas. Staff has already begun to work with applicants to try to address design concerns in these projects. Some applications were already far along in the development review process as these concerns were raised. In those cases, applicants were advised of concerns, but substantial changes were generally not required. This includes some developments that the EPC reviewed last year at public hearings.

In cases where earlier input has been feasible, staff has been strategic in how and where changes were recommended to try to maintain a clear and consistent development review process. Staff strategies have included:

1. Not requiring all projects to employ traditional architectural styles; using location and type of development as design inputs. This helps avoid circumstances where everything uses more traditional architecture styles and includes strategies where design variation and improvement of contemporary designs is emphasized.
2. Recommending changes to projects with contemporary architecture, particularly in newer Precise Plan areas transitioning from lower-intensity commercial to higher-intensity mixed-uses in order to:
 - Create more differentiation from other recent contemporary developments;
 - Include more residential character-defining features; and
 - Prioritize more traditional elements on portions of sites that are immediately adjacent to existing development that has traditional architecture.

This was the approach taken for the 2560 California Street (Greystar) development in the San Antonio Precise Plan area, where staff brought the project back to Council for a Study Session to confirm the overall design direction was on track, including specific staff/DRC recommendations on ways to improve or deemphasize the contemporary appearance of certain

- buildings. A majority of the Council supported staff's approach to improving the design of the project, without substantially changing the overall architectural style.
3. Recommending more traditional/transitional architectural style and recognizably residential features in higher-intensity residential developments within or immediately connected to existing, lower-density neighborhoods. This strategy has been implemented with some active Gatekeeper projects, and developments in the El Camino Real Precise Plan area, such as:
 - 555 West Middlefield Road (Avalon Bay) and 555 East Evelyn Avenue (Prometheus)—Staff recommended the projects use more traditional/transitional design and highlighted this topic as part of early EPC Study Sessions on the projects.
 - 777 West Middlefield Road (Fortbay)—Staff and the DRC worked with the applicant to substantially change the design to incorporate features with more traditional residential character facing the Middlefield Road frontage, while retaining more contemporary character along Shoreline Boulevard.
 - 1411 West El Camino Real (Steve Saray)—Staff and the DRC have been working with the applicant to utilize more traditional residential character-defining features, which can be more easily achieved on a three-story residential building, given the adjacent single-family context and planned public bike path connecting the areas.
 4. Prioritizing traditional architectural styles for rowhouse developments in R3 (Multiple-Family Residential) neighborhoods.

In these ways, staff has incorporated recent design input from City decision-makers to both clarify and support design feedback to applicants in the development review process. The overall goal has been to encourage greater architectural variety and residential character in new developments that are otherwise code-compliant, in order to meet City objectives for compatible developments given recently expressed concerns, while maintaining flexibility for creative designs.

NEXT STEPS

Feedback from this EPC meeting will be forwarded to the City Council for consideration as part of a subsequent Study Session on residential architectural design. Depending on the scope and nature of City Council direction, the feedback will be incorporated into the development review process for current and future residential developments, and/or new work plan items may be identified for additional tasks such as modifications to Precise Plan standards and guidelines.

CONCLUSION

Staff requests the EPC provide feedback and direction on the architectural design of higher-intensity residential developments. Staff recommends the EPC consider providing feedback in the following categories/topics; the EPC may also wish to consider the following questions in evaluating input on these topics:

- Clarification of design concerns with recent Mountain View projects:
 - Based on the discussion in this Staff Report and the meeting presentation, does the EPC have additional input to clarify concerns about the design of recent higher-intensity residential developments in Mountain View?
- Specific objectives for future development:
 - What building elements does the EPC think need the most work?
 - What are the design features the EPC finds most effective or attractive in recent Mountain View projects or other example projects?
 - Does the EPC generally support future projects providing a range of contemporary and traditional architectural styles?

- Input on staff strategies to address recent concerns:
 - Does the EPC support the strategies staff has already taken to address recent design feedback?
 - Are there areas where the EPC is comfortable seeing more contemporary design?
 - Are there areas where the EPC would like to see more traditional styles?

Prepared by:

Rebecca Shapiro
Deputy Zoning Administrator

Approved by:

Randal Tsuda
Community Development Director

RS/5/CDD
803-05-16-18SR-E

- Exhibits:
1. Recent Higher-Intensity Residential Projects (~2012 – Present)
 2. San Antonio Precise Plan ([link](#))
 3. El Camino Real Precise Plan ([link](#))
 4. North Bayshore Precise Plan ([link](#))