

**CITY OF MOUNTAIN VIEW****ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING COMMISSION  
STAFF REPORT  
JUNE 19, 2019****5. STUDY SESSION**

- 5.2 Study Session to Discuss Proposed General Plan and Zoning Map Amendments, Transfer of Development Rights from the Los Altos School District Site, and Planned Community, Development Review, and Heritage Tree Removal Permits to Construct a 464-Unit Mixed Rental and Ownership Housing Development with Structured Parking and a New 0.4-Acre Public Park Located at 355-365, 401, and 415 East Middlefield Road.**

**RECOMMENDATION**

That the Environmental Planning Commission provide input on the proposed residential development.

**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.

**MEETING PURPOSE AND PROCEDURE**

The purpose of this Study Session is to introduce the proposed development and its preliminary design, identify issues for further study, and receive Environmental Planning Commission (EPC) input on key topics to provide guidance for the project in the development review process.

**BACKGROUND****Previous Meetings and Hearings**

*Gatekeeper Request – January 2018*

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, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), and review Gatekeeper requests for development projects proposing to utilize the available TDR square footage. The program stems from the San Antonio Precise Plan policies allowing TDRs to generate funding to support development of a new public school. This project was identified as one of the six receiving sites for the LASD TDRs, with the project applicant, SummerHill Homes, requesting to purchase and use 10,000 square feet of the TDRs for a 250-unit residential development on the 6.0-acre project site on East Middlefield Road. Staff was supportive of the request as the project site is located within close proximity of transit, is adjacent to a Higher-Density Residential area in the Draft East Whisman Precise Plan (which is considering up to eight stories in building height), includes the dedication of a new public park on site, and supports the Council's goal of increasing housing supply (see Exhibit 1, January 16, 2018 Staff Report, Item 7.1).

Council authorized the Gatekeeper allowing the applicant to submit for development review prior to final consideration of the East Whisman Precise Plan (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.

#### *City Council Study Session – April 2018*

On April 17, 2018, the City Council considered changes to the scope of the authorized Gatekeeper request, which the applicant characterized as necessary for the project's financial viability (see Exhibit 2, April 17, 2018 Staff Report, Item 7.1, for details). The changes included:

- An increase in the number of residential units from 250 to 447 units;
- A mix of rental and ownership units, instead of exclusively ownership;
- Building heights up to seven stories versus the EWPP preferred alternative of five to six stories for the Medium-Intensity Sub-Area;
- An increase in FAR from 2.26 to 2.87; and
- Provide 10 percent affordable rental units and payment of the 3 percent in-lieu fee for the ownership units to meet the project's affordable housing obligation.

Council was supportive of the modified project scope with the exception of the proposed affordable housing package. The Council requested additional analysis

from both Staff and the applicant about the affordable housing package and alternative options to be discussed at a future meeting.

*City Council Study Session – October 2018*

The City Council discussed the project at the October 16, 2018 Study Session, providing direction on the project's affordable housing obligation. The majority of Council supported Alternative 4 described in the Staff Report, which identified 65 total affordable rental units—10 percent (26 units) at low-income and 15 percent (39 units) at moderate-income levels, and no ownership affordable units (see Exhibit 3, October 16, 2018 Staff Report, Item 7.1, for details). The project applicant is proposing to comply with this affordable housing package.

**Project Location**

The project site is located on the south side of East Middlefield Road, between North Whisman Road and Ellis Street. Surrounding land uses include office and industrial uses to the west, east, and north; and an agricultural use (orchard) to the south. Further south of the orchard is the City's Municipal Operations Center (MOC). The proposed project is located in close proximity to both the Whisman and Middlefield Light Rail Transit Stations, and the site is located in the Middlefield-Ellis-Whisman Superfund area, which will require the project to be reviewed by the US Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA).

The project site consists of two parcels totaling 6.0-acres and is currently developed with two 1-story office/industrial buildings, totaling approximately 84,000 square feet (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Location Map**

### **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, where the project site is located. 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 multimodal 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.

The General Plan envisions the East Whisman area to grow with new transit-oriented development emphasizing enhanced commercial and open space amenities. Key policy direction includes achieving sustainable development through a mix of uses, enhanced mobility, development of community amenities, and capitalization on location.

### **Draft East Whisman Precise Plan**

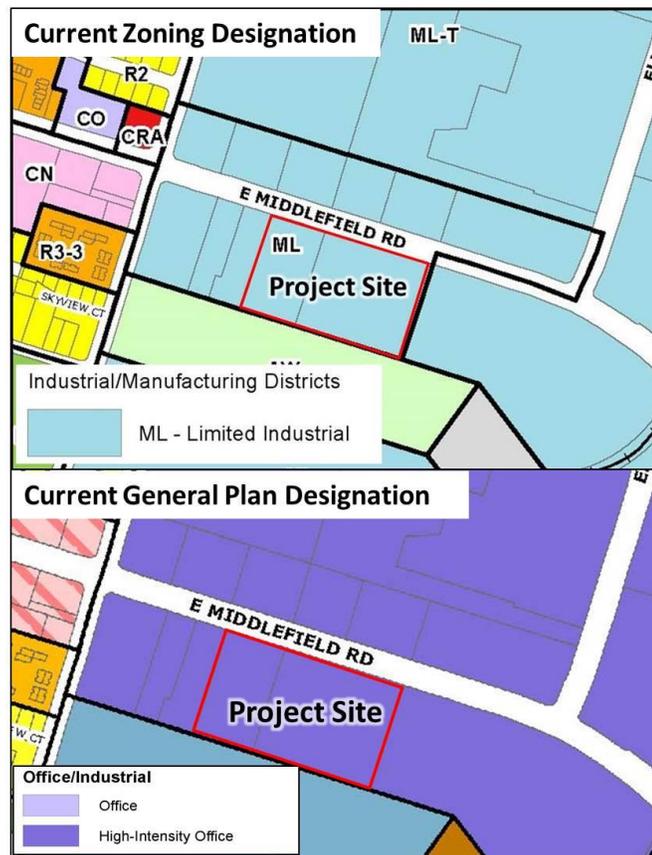
The project site is located in the southwesterly portion of the EWPP area in the Mixed-Use Character Area. The western one-third of the site is designated as Medium Intensity (maximum 75' in height), with the remaining two-thirds of the

site designated as High Intensity (maximum 95' in height). A map of the Character Sub-Areas is available in the Public Draft EWPP on Page 52.

The EWPP will guide the transition of the East Whisman Change Area to a vibrant mixed-use district with a new residential neighborhood, open spaces, and mobility options. As noted, the Draft Plan will serve as the primary tool for implementation of the City's General Plan vision for East Whisman. 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.

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 than additional environmental review may be required. Staff will continue to work with the applicant to determine the appropriate environmental review.

**Figure 2: Zoning and General Plan Map**



## **General Plan and Zoning Designations**

The site has a current General Plan Land Use Designation of High-Intensity Office. As part of the EWPP process, it is proposed the project site's General Plan Land Use Designation will be amended to East Whisman Mixed-Use.

The project site is currently zoned ML, Limited Industrial, and is proposed to be rezoned to align with the East Whisman Precise Plan zoning designation.

## **ANALYSIS**

While elements of the proposed project design are consistent with the Draft EWPP, there are key circulation, open space, and design features that are inconsistent with the Draft Precise Plan. While the discussion of the Draft EWPP development standards is outside the scope of this project's Study Session, the EPC can provide input on whether exceptions to the Draft 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 design direction for the project.

## **Project Description**

The project includes demolition of the commercial/industrial buildings on site and construction of up to 464 dwelling units, consisting of a mix of 270 rental apartments and 194 ownership condominiums and a new 0.4-acre public park. The new residential units are proposed between five structures, which range in height from four stories (for the stacked 12-plex flats on the westerly side of the site) to seven stories (for the two condominium/apartment buildings constructed over three levels of podium parking in the middle and easterly portion of the site). The parking is proposed at a ratio of 1.26 spaces per unit with 48 guest parking spaces (including eight shared spaces for the public park). See Exhibit 4 for the Project Plans and Figure 3 for a Site Plan.

Future growth in East Whisman will provide tangible benefits to adjacent residential communities, including new park locations identified in the EWPP. It is envisioned that the 0.4-acre area proposed to be dedicated as a future public park could be combined with a similar dedication on the adjoining property, creating the possibility of a larger public park to serve the area (see Figure 3). The proposed park is described in the Draft EWPP as a “mini-park” (0.3 to 1 acre in size). The design of the park will be subject to a separate public review process with the City’s Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC).

**Figure 3: Site Plan**



Project site access is proposed from two entrances on Middlefield Road connected by a U-shaped service street with access to the podium parking garages for the apartment and condominium buildings and a set of alleys to individual garages at the stacked flat buildings. Further vehicle, pedestrian, and bicycle circulation is described in the Circulation Section of this report.

The site has 91 existing on-site trees, including 23 Heritage trees. All 91 trees are proposed for removal. A conceptual landscape plan shows new trees to be planted on Sheet L1.0 of Exhibit 4.

The project also includes a Tentative Map to subdivide the site into the rental and ownership units, a common lot, and a public park.

The architectural design for all three components of the project is modern in appearance.

**Figure 4: View from East Middlefield Road**



### **Discussion Topics**

Since the initial Gatekeeper application in 2018, the project has increased in size from 250 units to 464 units. The change occurred as the Draft EWPP has further developed. Although staff has worked closely with the applicant to achieve an EWPP-compliant project, the project includes design elements that are not consistent with the proposed requirements of the Draft EWPP. Because this project review is concurrent with the development of the EWPP and could be one of the first projects developed under the EWPP, staff's intent is for the project to set the example for future residential development in the area in terms of building design, amenities, connectivity, and site layout. Key areas of noncompliance or inconsistency with the EWPP are discussed in detail in the following sections.

#### *Circulation*

#### **The Service Street**

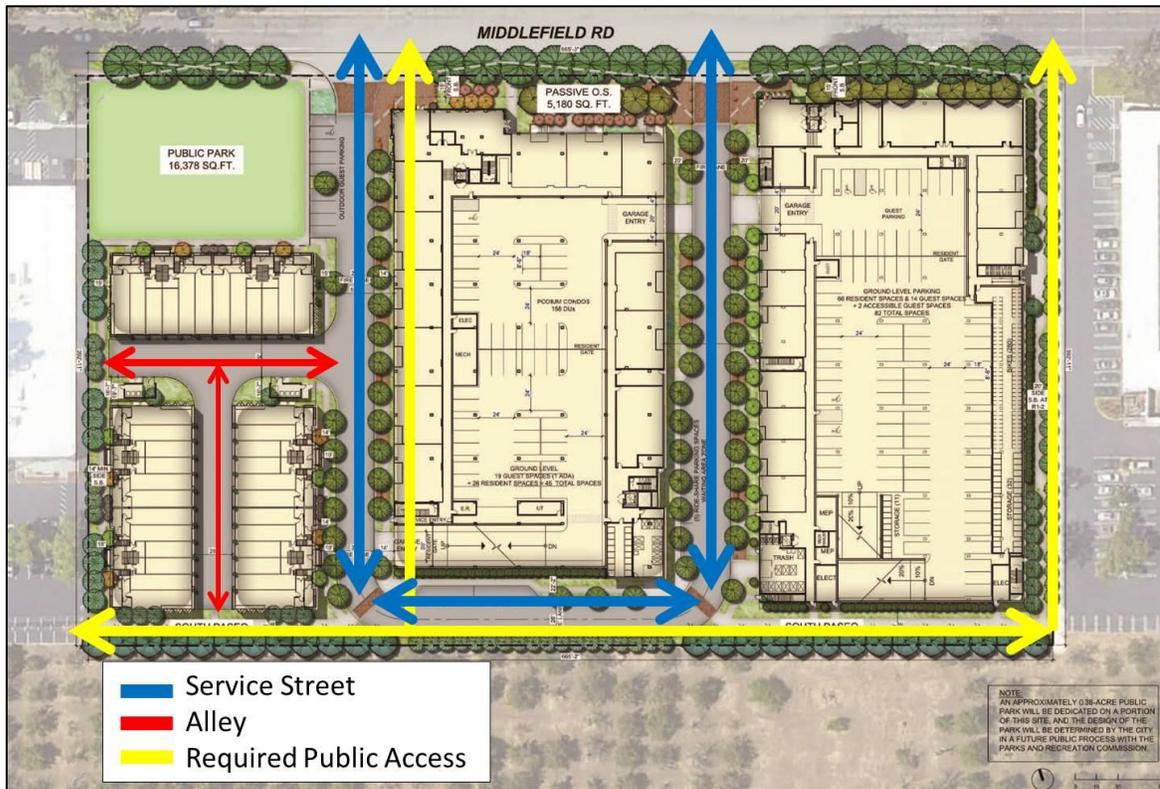
As proposed, the project includes a U-shaped primary service street circulation plan to serve the taller apartment/condominium buildings and public park, with alleys serving the three stacked flat buildings (36 units above-ground level private

garages). The service street provides two-way vehicle traffic, sidewalks, and emergency vehicle access to all buildings on-site consistent with the intent of the EWPP; the alleys do not have pedestrian access. No dedicated bicycle lanes are provided on-site, but the service street will have slower traffic speeds and lower volumes and will be comfortable for most bicyclists.

The Draft EWPP requires public pedestrian and bicycle access across development sites to support multi-modal access and smaller block sizes. While the Precise Plan recommends locations for these multi-modal paths based on logical wayfinding and compliance with the block standards, the specific locations or configurations of these connections are not defined in the Plan but are intended to be reviewed as development projects are proposed. The Draft Plan identifies three paths through the project site that are required to provide public pedestrian access, while bicycle access/improvements are encouraged but not required in these locations. Proposed site circulation and required public access are shown in Figure 5.

It should be noted the required north-south pedestrian connection on the left side of the project site (shown in yellow in Figure 5) is intended to provide direct connection to a midblock crossing at Middlefield Road to the northern portion of the Precise Plan area. The current project design places a building in this location, resulting in an offset of the public path to the anticipated location of the midblock crossing. As part of the project review, staff will work with the applicant to determine if any site or building modifications are necessary to ensure a safe pedestrian connection and crossing.

Figure 5: Site Circulation and Public Access



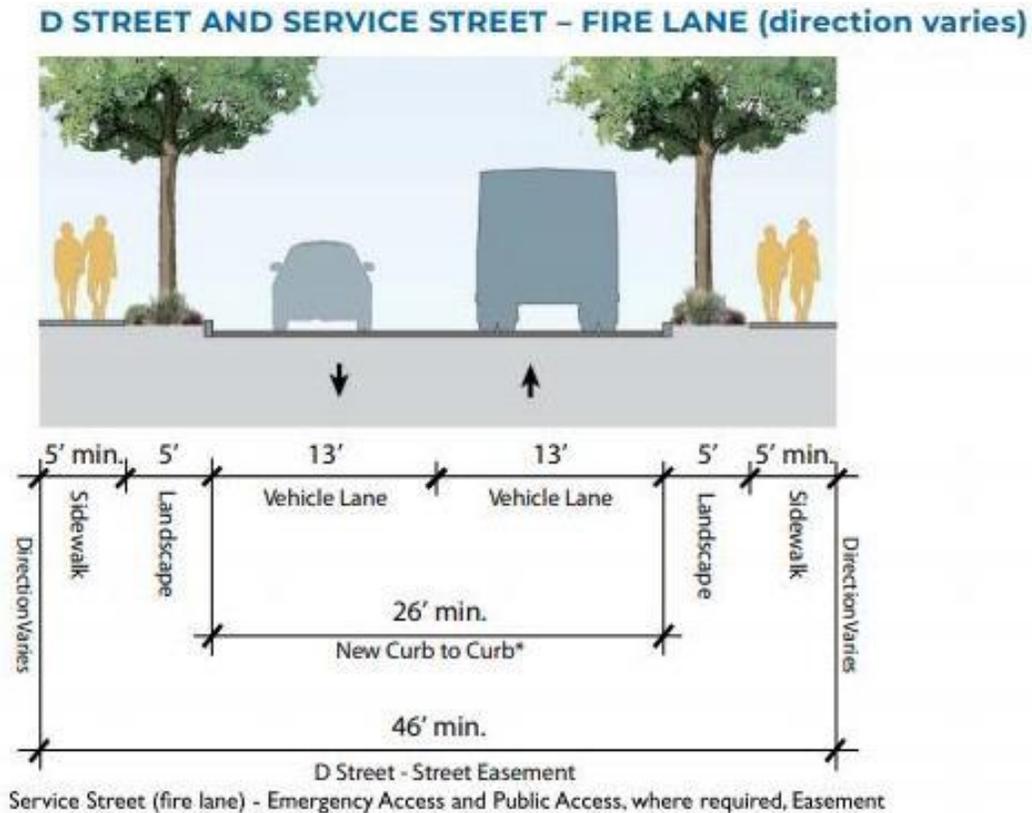
In addition to identifying public access locations, the EWPP prescribes the character and design of these paths based on privacy, landscaping, tree canopy, visibility/wayfinding from public streets, pedestrian comfort, and relief from long building facades. The following are examples of existing service street cross-section widths in Mountain View and nearby cities (for comparison reference):

- San Antonio Shopping Center in Mountain View (Merlone Geier Phase 2) has a service street located between the hotel and parking garage: 59'
- Olson Way in Downtown Sunnyvale: 50'
- North Park Apartments in North San Jose (e.g., Miranda Drive, Palmilla Drive): 85'
- Santa Clara Square in Santa Clara (currently under construction): 70'

As shown on the Site Plan in Exhibit 4, the east side of the U-shaped service street has a 66' cross-section (between the tallest buildings), while the west side (adjacent to the park) has a 55' cross-section. The EWPP calls for a 66' cross-section for

service streets, including a 26'-wide vehicle roadway, 10' pedestrian zone (including sidewalks and street trees) on both sides of the road, and 10' building setbacks from the back of the sidewalk, as shown in Figure 6 (from Page 141 of the Draft EWPP).

**Figure 6: Service Street Design Criteria and Section, Draft EWPP**



There are two inconsistent aspects of the proposed service street circulation for the proposed project site with the Draft EWPP:

1. *The western portion of the U-shaped service street is 11' to 15' narrower than the EWPP street standards. This results in an overall narrower service street with less sunlight and landscaping due to reduced separation between buildings, which may increase the visual appearance of the seven-story building, affecting both the pedestrian experience and views of the project from the surrounding area.*
2. *The southern portion of the U-shaped service street is approximately 13' narrower than the EWPP street standard and does not provide continuous pedestrian access on both sides of the roadway. As shown along the rear property line, the south*

paseo sidewalk is not continuous for pedestrians requiring them to either walk in the vehicle roadway or cross the street twice. Further discussion is provided below.

### **Pedestrian Paseos**

The southerly and easterly edges of the subject property are designated as greenway or paseo/multi-use path locations in the Draft EWPP. The minimum width of a paseo or multi-use path, including buffer landscaping, is 30', with residential buildings required to provide an additional 5' setback from the 30' paseo. The EWPP states these connections "... shall provide the minimum area necessary for a functional connection, including, if necessary, a landscape buffer between the hardscape and property line," allowing flexibility on a project-by-project basis to determine the minimum dimensions of setbacks, buffers, and paths.

As proposed, the project has an incomplete pedestrian circulation network at the rear of the site that brings pedestrians to the interior of the site along either end of the "south paseo" and then requires pedestrians to either cross the service street twice to connect between the paseo segments or walk in the street. The EWPP calls for a pedestrian and bicycle circulation system that encourages active transportation and states all streets within the plan area are "complete streets" to accommodate bicycles and pedestrians with bicycle lanes, wide sidewalks, and enhanced crossings. Staff believes the site design needs to be revised to create a paseo along the southern site boundary that is in conformance with the EWPP and provides direct, convenient, safe, and pleasant walking and biking routes.

**Table 1: Summary of Requested Circulation Exceptions**

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Required</b>
<b>Service Street Setbacks and Dimensions</b>	0' to 5' on both sides, 50' to 55' total width	10' on both sides, 66' total width
<b>Paseo Dimensions</b>	20' to 25'	35' ( <i>flexibility allowed</i> )
<b>South Paseo Direct Connectivity Across Site</b>	Crosswalks and indirect routes for pedestrians	Consistent and continuous improvements for walking and biking

***EPC Question No. 1: Does the EPC support the proposed circulation plan exceptions, some lesser extent of the exceptions, or no exceptions?***

*Private and Common Usable Open Area*

The proposed project includes common usable open areas in multiple locations, including a passive open space along Middlefield Road, a courtyard located above the second level in the condominium building, two courtyards located above the second level of the apartment building, and six rooftop decks. These areas range in size from 664 square feet to 14,332 square feet and include a variety of amenities such as pools, barbecues, and other gathering spaces. Except for the small passive open space along Middlefield Road, each common amenity area is intended for use by occupants of that building only; the amenities are not proposed to be shared among all project residents.

The Draft Precise Plan requires a minimum of 150 square feet per unit of common usable open area and provides flexibility for inclusion of up to 50 square feet per unit of private open area within the total open area requirement (e.g., if 50 square feet per unit of private open area are provided, then at least 100 square feet per unit of common usable open area would be required, resulting in a combined total of 150 square feet per unit). Under the EWPP, common usable open areas must have a minimum dimension of 25' and cannot include public parks or paths provided as EWPP's required public circulation.

The project plans identifies 52,836 square feet of common usable open area (or 114 square feet per unit) in addition to 34,624 square feet of private decks, balconies, and patios. In combined total, the plan identifies 87,460 square feet of open area (or 188 square feet per unit). However, the project identifies several open areas that do not comply with the EWPP's required open area dimensions and use limitations. Specifically, the south paseo is identified as a common usable open area, though it is provided pursuant to the public multi-modal requirements. Plus, one rooftop deck is counted as common usable open area, though it does not meet the 25' dimensional requirement. Removing these noncompliant open areas would result in the project having common usable open area below the minimum Precise Plan standard.

**Table 2: Summary of Requested Common Usable Open Area Exceptions**

<b>Standard</b>	<b>Required</b>	<b>Proposed</b>	<b>Staff Analysis</b>
<b>Private Open Area</b>	0 to 50 sq. ft./unit	74 sq. ft./unit	74 sq. ft./unit
<b>Common Usable Open Area (Min.)</b>	100 to 150 sq. ft./unit	114 sq. ft./unit	<b>88 sq. ft./unit</b> <i>(excl. noncompliant areas per EWPP)</i>
<b>Total Open Area (Min.)</b>	150 sq. ft./unit	188 sq. ft./unit	162 sq. ft./unit

The EWPP also describes creating complete neighborhoods, including communal amenities. Staff believes one way to achieve this objective on-site may be through revisions to the site layout to make open areas a more prominent element/central theme of the project, and accessible to all residents of the development. This may also assist in addressing building massing as discussed in the next topic.

***EPC Question No. 2: Does the EPC support the proposed open space exceptions, some lesser extent of the exceptions, or no exceptions?***

*Building Design and Massing*

The project consists of two large street-facing blocks each with a seven-story building and three smaller interior blocks with four-story stacked flat buildings. The larger buildings are approximately the same height with similar massing and design. The stacked flats are shorter in height, employ different roof forms, but share similar design elements and materials as the larger buildings. Although all of the buildings have a regular rhythm of balcony recesses, there are limited upper-floor stepbacks (i.e., vertical articulation) and expanses of fairly flat facades.

**Figure 7: View of the Buildings from East Middlefield Road**



The project has not yet been reviewed by the City's Development Review Committee (DRC). With the release of the Draft Precise Plan, a DRC meeting will now be scheduled and staff will work with the applicant to address EWPP direction and design input from the EPC. Discussed below are some key design topics from the EWPP for EPC to consider and provide input on, including corner building treatments, building variation/articulation, and massing.

### **Corner Building Treatment**

The intersection between the future public park and the taller condominium building in the center of the project site is identified as a "Key Corner" in the EWPP. Per the EWPP, all 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.

Although the project does not currently propose to use any height exceptions, the Precise Plan allows key corners to have additional 10' of height for architectural features that create a sense of place or 10' to 15' of additional height for providing a public park on-site. If the project applicant modifies the plans to include any features requiring these height exceptions in the future, the project would need to demonstrate compliance with height limitations under the Moffett Field Comprehensive Land Use Plan. Figure 8 provides examples from the Draft EWPP of corner building treatments.

**Figure 8: Examples of Corner Treatments**

The project plans include a design concept addressing the key corner objectives with an extruded stepped “frame” at the building corner with rooftop decks oriented toward the street and future public park. Staff anticipates continuing to work with the applicant and DRC to refine this corner concept to meet EWPP objectives and ensure a distinctive design is provided.

### **Building Variation**

Two key design guidelines in the EWPP include differentiating buildings and varying massing. Building heights should vary across individual project sites to create visual interest and break up the scale of development. Massing changes or breaks can also be used to transition between two or more buildings. As noted earlier, there are a lot of similarities in the design and materials of the proposed buildings and, while there are projections and recesses across many of the building facades, upper floor massing continues to be prominent with no substantial vertical articulation or upper floor recess. Staff believes these design guidelines regarding building variation and articulation need to be addressed as the project review continues.

### **Building Massing**

The EWPP also states that buildings should be designed with a defined base; middle or body; and top, cornice, or parapet cap to help reduce the appearance of building massing. As noted above, the two taller buildings are substantially the same height and do not have substantial vertical articulation (i.e., upper floor recesses). In addition, while balcony recesses have good depth, many other architectural recesses and projections appear shallow given the scale of the buildings. The result is that both taller buildings, as well as the smaller stacked flat buildings, have elevations that appear fairly flat.

Both of the taller buildings have two levels of above-ground parking, partially wrapped by residential units on some elevations. The above-ground parking impacts the building massing as minimum dimensions are needed to provide adequate parking and circulation. Additionally, there are minimum dimensions needed to maintain useable residential units per building and fire codes. As a result, some elevations are not wrapped with residential units to activate the streetscape both interior to the site and fronting Middlefield Road. With the current design, there are also constraints on narrowing the buildings and, as a result, there is less flexibility to bring common open areas closer to ground level or make other massing adjustments while complying with minimum setback requirements.

Staff recommends the applicant continue to work on ways to improve building articulation, such as recessing upper floors, breaking up larger wall areas into smaller bays, refining dimensions of projections and recesses, connecting underground parking levels and/or depressing more of the garage to subterranean. Some of these options may be harder to achieve and require substantial redesign, while others could be more easily addressed with staff and the DRC. Input from the EPC on design preferences will help target this work.

*EPC Question No. 3: Does the EPC support the proposed building architecture (corner treatment, variation, and massing) or staff-recommended areas of design refinement?*

*EPC Question No. 4: 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 early on in the development review process to guide the applicant in refining the project design. Staff requests EPC feedback on the following questions and any other project-related comments:

1. Does the EPC support the proposed circulation plan exceptions, some lesser extent of the exceptions, or no exceptions?
2. Does the EPC support the proposed open space design exceptions, some lesser extent of the exceptions, or no exceptions on this topic area at all?
3. Does the EPC support the proposed building architecture (corner treatment, building variation, massing), or staff-recommended areas of design refinement?
4. 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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- Exhibits:
1. [January 16, 2018 City Council Staff Report- Item 7.1](#)
  2. [April 17, 2018 City Council Staff Report- Item 7.1](#)
  3. [October 16, 2018 City Council Staff Report- Item 7.1](#)
  4. Project Plans