



PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

FOR THE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING OF AUGUST 24, 2009
AGENDA ITEM E1

PROJECT: EI Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan
APPLICANT: City of Menlo Park

BACKGROUND

Menlo Park is developing a long-term plan for the EI Camino Real and Downtown areas. The completed visioning process (Phase I) has led into the preparation of a Specific Plan and associated Environmental Impact Report (Phase II). Environmental and fiscal reviews are being integrated into this process, so that potential benefits (such as tax revenue) and impacts (such as traffic) of different scenarios will be considered as the community develops the long-term plan. The completed Specific Plan will contain elements such as detailed land use regulations, design guidelines, infrastructure plans, and implementation measures. Broad public outreach and participation continues to be a key element of the project.

The project is being guided by the planning and architecture consulting firm Perkins+Will (“the consultant”), with the close assistance of City staff. The project is currently in the “Development of Framework, Concept Plans, Programs and Guidelines” stage, having completed the project initiation, existing conditions analysis, and vision refinement tasks. A key milestone for the earlier work was the first Community Workshop, which took place on April 16, 2009. At this workshop, the community looked beyond the Vision Plan goals to understand existing opportunities and constraints and the inherent trade-offs (e.g., traffic/parking and pedestrian space) when considering a vibrant downtown appropriate for Menlo Park. Approximately 100 community members attended the first workshop.

The current stage involves developing, reviewing, and refining concept plans and strategic approaches for the Specific Plan project area. The community began to address these topics at the second Community Workshop, which took place on June 18, 2009 and which involved the review of alternative plan elements (for example: land use mixes, vehicular/pedestrian/bicycle circulation details, and parking options), shown in advanced graphical formats such as 3D models and photomontages. Approximately 150 community members attended the second workshop.

The third and final community workshop will be held on Thursday, September 17, 2009. At this workshop, refined concepts and a preferred alternative, based on input from the previous meetings, will be presented and discussed. The results of this workshop will set the foundation for the draft version of the Specific Plan, with recommendations for land use, building character, and public improvements. Concurrently, the team will also conduct a thorough fiscal impact analysis and Draft Environmental Impact Report, which will be presented for full public review and comment in spring/summer 2010.

ANALYSIS

This meeting of the Planning Commission is one of three scheduled working sessions on the project that precede the Commission's formal review of the Draft and Final Specific Plan and Environmental Impact Report (EIR). The working sessions are intended to be regular 'check-ins' that allow the Commission to review the status of the project and to provide process feedback. The Commission's sessions are complemented by similar meetings of the City Council, the most recent of which will take place on Tuesday, August 25.

This meeting will involve a presentation by the consultant consisting of the following topics:

1. Review of Schedule
2. Community Meeting #2 (June 18, 2009): Key Directions
3. Oversight and Outreach Committee Meeting (July 30, 2009): Summary of Comments
4. Next Steps to Preferred Alternative: Refinement and Evaluation of Process Steps
5. Approach to Community Workshop #3 (September 17, 2009)

Hard copies of the presentation will be available at the meeting for the Planning Commission and the public, and an electronic version will be posted on the project web page after the meeting.

Staff recommends that the meeting follow the outlined procedure:

1. Consultant Presentation
2. Planning Commission Detail/Clarification-Type Questions of the Consultant and Staff
3. Public Comment
4. Planning Commission General Feedback

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The Vision Plan (Phase I) was a planning study and as such was not a project requiring environmental review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). The Specific Plan (Phase II) includes the preparation of an Environmental Impact Report (EIR).

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PUBLIC NOTICE & APPEAL PERIOD

Public notification was achieved by publishing a notice in the local newspaper and by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting. In addition, the City has prepared a project page for the proposal, which is available at the following address: <http://www.menlopark.org/specificplan>. This page provides up-to-date information about the project, allowing interested parties to stay informed of its progress. The page allows users to sign up for automatic email bulletins, notifying them when content is updated or meetings are scheduled.

ATTACHMENTS

None

EXHIBITS TO BE PROVIDED AT MEETING

Consultant Presentation

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