



menlofocus

A newsletter for the community from the City of Menlo Park

Winter 2009

A word from the City Manager

Welcome to our winter issue of menlofocus, the City of Menlo Park's community newsletter. menlofocus is designed to keep you informed about City services, upcoming events, activities, and policy decisions.



This issue includes information about the results of our first community survey in over 10 years as well as a story about the Menlo Park City Council's goal setting efforts for the upcoming year. We've also included articles addressing topics residents indicated are important through a series of interviews and data we collect from our web site.

This is the time of year when city staff begin preparing the budget for the next fiscal year, which begins in July. It's a very complex process so we need to get started early. Just as you are carefully watching your family budget during this time of economic uncertainty, we are also carefully watching your city's budget. The good news is Menlo Park made many efficiency improvements and other significant budget savings changes including staff reductions when the dot.com "bubble" burst several years ago, and we have accumulated a significant reserve allowing us to take a longer-term approach. Please see the story on page 2 for more information about this subject which we know many community residents are concerned about.

As always, we're interested in your ideas for future stories. Please contact our editor, community engagement manager Cherise Brandell, at cebrandell@menlopark.org or call 650.330.6618. We're also looking for your feedback on how we can improve to better meet your needs—please contact Cherise if you have suggestions.

Warm regards,

Glen Rojas
Menlo Park City Manager

Council Sets Priorities for the future

During December and January City Council members, the City Manager, and City Department Heads spent many hours working on defining long term goals for the community that will be the focus of staff work and City budgets in the coming year. Over three different work sessions Council members described the most important values for guiding their work, developed a preliminary set of 18 goals to work from and then refined those goals to a set of top priorities for added attention in the future.

Council's values, describing "how" they will approach governing, include:

- Fiscally responsible
- Inclusive
- Open and transparent
- Responsible and accountable
- Future-focused
- Regionally-oriented
- Entrepreneurial
- Fun

Council's long term goals include a focus on four primary areas:

- A vibrant and resilient local economy supporting a sustainable City budget.
- Updated comprehensive planning documents supporting high community quality of life into the future.
- Low negative impacts and maximum benefit from High Speed Rail.
- Environmental stewardship to lower the community's carbon footprint and prepare the community for the consequences of climate change.

In the coming months, Council will be working with the

City's seven resident-led Commissions and staff to develop a budget for the next fiscal year, which begins July 1, 2009. The goals and values developed in the last two months will provide guidance for everyone involved in the budget ensuring that the City's resources are focused on the community's most important needs.

According to City Manager Glen Rojas, "Setting goals will help us focus our resources on what is most important to the community. Goals also help us align our work so that Council, Commissions and staff are all working together in a common direction to meet the needs of Menlo Park residents."

For more information about the Council goal setting process, contact Assistant City Manager Starla Jermone-Robinson at 650.330.6617.



Council members (above) generate possible community goals at a recent workshop.

Survey says: Menlo Park is a great place to live!

Starting in late October, 1200 randomly selected Menlo Park households received a 35-question mail – back community survey designed to help City Council and staff understand how residents feel about quality of life in Menlo Park, the quality of City services and other data designed to help the City make better decisions. Results were analyzed by the research arm of the International

City/County Management Association (ICMA), the National Research Center, which conducts over 200 similar surveys across the country each year, permitting Menlo Park to compare with other communities of similar size.

Overall, the survey results include many highlights, but especially exciting are the results showing how high residents rate the quality of life in Menlo Park. Over 95% of respondents rated overall quality of life in Menlo Park as

"excellent" or "good." Almost all respondents said they plan on staying in Menlo Park for the next five years (99%) and 89% rated their neighborhood as a "good" or "excellent" place to live. All these ratings are higher than the national average in other communities using a similar survey. Menlo Park responses to the "overall quality of life" question ranked 13th of 129 similarly sized communities.

Perceptions of community safety were also highly rated. 82% of respondents said their neighborhood was "very safe" while 86% said they felt the downtown area was very safe. Menlo Park ranked 4th of 194 communities on the downtown safety rating and 19th of 237 communities on neighborhood safety.

Respondents were also asked to rate City services. City employees ranked above the national average in all areas

What do you like most about living in Menlo Park?

- Community – real sense of warmth for neighbors!
- Community of families that are friendly and welcoming!
- I have never felt safer!
- We enjoy knowing a lot of people around town!
- It's just a great place to live!

(continued on page 4)

Community Planning for Downtown and El Camino moves forward



Menlo Park is developing a long-term plan for the El Camino Real and Downtown areas. At the core of the project is broad public outreach and participation. This process will continue to engage a wide range of community members, including those who may not currently be involved in local government.

At a meeting this summer, the City Council accepted the draft, *El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan*, which established twelve broad and inspirational goals. Council also approved the staff recommendation for moving forward with a Specific Plan, which will answer detailed questions, such as:

- What are the impacts? For example, what would be the traffic impacts of new development?
- What are the benefits? For example, how would tax revenue be affected by different land uses?
- Are the broad vision plan goals financially feasible?
- What are the appropriate trade-offs between “upzoning” and public benefits?
- How should the City work with external entities such as Caltrans and Caltrain to implement the vision plan given the approval of the High Speed Rail project?
- What will new buildings generally look like?

The answers to these and other questions will provide the background needed to make actual regulatory and policy changes needed to implement the 12 vision plan goals.

Most recently, in December, the City Council selected Perkins+Will consultants to provide support for the Specific Plan process. Council also approved the continuing reliance on an Oversight and Outreach Committee, composed of residents and other stakeholders to help oversee the community input process and provide other review and support.

The next phase of the process has five steps or tasks:

- Task 1 consists of preliminary tasks such as finalizing the project schedule, reviewing background materials, and planning for communication activities.
- Task 2 includes a detailed analysis of the opportunities

and constraints of the project area. The task includes stakeholder interviews, the first Community Workshop, and one working session each with the Planning Commission and City Council.

- Task 3 involves the establishment of a Strategic Planning Framework for the project area, which will be used to develop preliminary concept plans that will be reviewed at a second Community Workshop. The concept plans will then be refined and reviewed at a third Community Workshop, after which a preferred concept plan will be prepared.
- Task 4 consists of preparing the draft regulatory and environmental review documents. This task is technical in nature and represents the longest individual task. After the release of the draft documents, Planning Commission and City Council meetings will be held during a 45-day review period.
- Task 5 consists of the preparation of the final regulatory and environmental review documents, including any necessary General Plan and Zoning Ordinance Amendments.

The project is projected to formally commence in January and conclude in October 2010. For more information or to get involved, contact Thomas Rogers at throgers@menlopark.org or 650.330.6722.

Menlo Park staff moving forward on 80 priority projects

Each year as a part of the City’s budget process, City staff, resident-led Commissions and the City Council develop a list of priority projects for the coming year. Many projects require more than one year to complete and with over 80 projects underway at any one time, it can be challenging to keep track of them all.

In order to help everyone stay informed on the status of all this work, Public Works Director Kent Steffens developed a comprehensive schedule of all the projects which will be regularly updated. According to Mr. Steffens, “preparing a schedule for each priority project gives us an important way to assess progress on projects that help us reach our goals. It also helps us assess our ability to take on new projects.”

The report shows that the largest volume of projects is being handled by the Public Works Department – 45 of 57 currently active projects. These projects include things like development of a new Police substation in Belle Haven, downtown parking plaza renovations, the development of plans for the new Burgess Gymnasium, various street resurfacing projects, sports and playing fields studies, sidewalk projects and safe routes to school projects.

The Community Development Department is managing eight projects including: development of an implementation plan based on the results of the Senior Housing needs assessment, development of a phased program to implement Green Building checklists for development projects, updating the City’s Housing Element and taking the next steps in developing a plan for the Downtown and El Camino Real.

The complete report is available on line at www.menlopark.org under Items of Interest.

Menlo Park ensuring healthy finances



Although events in the economy are now battering the financial health of many communities, the City of Menlo Park began pursuing budget sustainability long ago. The City responded to a long term forecast of reduced revenues and increasing expenditures in the 2006-07 budget, when operating efficiencies based on community priorities were defined in a community input process. In 2007, Menlo Park residents also assured stable revenues with the passage of a Utility Users’ Tax, furthering progress toward a sustainable budget.

The City Council’s approved Investment Policy allows investments in U.S. Treasury notes, U.S. Instrumentality, and other conservative holdings that also help to stabilize the city’s finances. Much of the City’s portfolio, (over 40%) is held by the Local Agency Investment Fund (LAIF) a state-wide investment pool that provides liquidity for over 2,500 state and local agencies and follows an investment policy similar to that of the City. This strategy has kept the City’s investments stable in a turbulent market.

An additional step ensuring healthy finances was the recent User Fee Study which included analysis of the full costs of providing services for which the City charges fees. The study identified the annual cost of services and the potential annual revenue for fee activities should the full cost be charged. The study showed that the City currently recovers about 61% of it’s total costs for these services. According to City Finance Director Carol Augustine, cities don’t necessarily want to recover the full costs of all services for which fees are charged. “Subsidies are often provided for services such as public safety, libraries, and recreation programs for youth and other amenities a community considers important to quality of life.” The study will be followed by a User Fee Cost Recovery Policy that Council will discuss on February 10, as well as a General Fund Reserve Policy that will help the City more effectively maximize the current \$26 million reserve fund for the community’s long term benefit.

“The City is in reasonably good financial condition with high reserves. Although challenges lay ahead, we can take a long term approach to addressing any needed changes,” said City Manager Glen Rojas. “We will continue regular monitoring of our investments and expenditures given the current unpredictability of the economy and keeping in mind the delicate balance between community needs and our ability to remain financially strong into the future.”

For more information about the City’s financial health, contact Carol Augustine at 650.330.6643.

Menlo Park FAQ's ...some frequently asked questions you might like to know...

Q: Why is the City cutting down some of our great old trees?

A: Most of the City's street trees, those located between your



property line and the street, were planted decades ago either by the City or during the original development of the City's neighborhoods. Unfortunately, some of those trees are no longer healthy and are causing safety and other concerns as they age. Many trees are nearing the end of their life at the same time—80% of the City's trees are classified as "mature."

In order to keep our community full of the beautiful trees we all love, the City has begun a Reforestation Project to maintain a variety of healthy trees of differing ages, sizes and species. This means that street trees in decline or near the end of their life are being gradually replaced with young healthy trees.

During the summer and fall of 2008, certified arborists surveyed and identified declining street trees throughout the City. They prioritized trees that have structural problems or are damaging surrounding structures. The City is currently contacting property owners who have street trees recommended for replacement to see if they are interested in participating. Participation is encouraged, but it is not mandatory.

Please contact the Department of Public Works at 650.330.6740 or visit our website at www.menlopark.org/reforestationmenriquez@menlopark.org if you have any questions about the condition and life span of your tree or the reforestation project.

Will we need mandatory water rationing?

Californians are experiencing the first statewide drought since 1991. The possibility of water rationing could become a reality this year due to lower than average rainfall, concerns about the Sierra snowpack and last year's extremely dry conditions.

As a reminder, the City's No-Waste Ordinance (Chapter 7.38 of the Municipal Code), enacted during the last drought in the early 1990's, is still in effect. The ordinance requires all residents and businesses within Menlo Park to:

- Repair broken or defective plumbing, sprinkler or irrigation systems permitting the leakage of water.
- Ensure that water use does not result in flooding or runoff in gutters, driveways or streets.
- All hoses must have a positive shut-off valve.
- Restaurants shall serve water only upon request.
- Water used for cooling must be recycled.

All Menlo Park residents and businesses are urged to voluntarily reduce their water use by 10% and to abide by the City's No-Waste Ordinance. Many simple, inexpensive and unobtrusive water-conserving options are available to help meet the 10% reduction goal. Items that are available at no cost include low flow showerheads and faucet aerators, hose nozzles, and leak detection tablets. Educational materials and rebate programs for low flow fixtures are also available from most water providers. Menlo Park Water District customers may call the City at (650) 330-6740 to request free water-conserving items and to obtain additional information.

To determine your home or business water supplier, visit our website at www.menlopark.org/departments/pwk/mpmwd.html.

Thank you for reducing your water use!



Five star Rosewood Sand Hill Hotel and Spa brings 250 new jobs

New revenue for the city will soon arrive in the form of the 123-room five-star Rosewood Sand Hill Hotel, a lavish resort and spa being built on Stanford University hillside property on Sand Hill Road next to a state Highway 280 on-ramp. Construction of the city's largest hotel is to be finished Feb. 7, with the opening scheduled for April 1, according to David Johnson, Business Development Manager for the City of Menlo Park.

The Rosewood Resorts hospitality chain operates about two dozen hotels around the world, including the Carlyle in New York. It will feature remote controls that patrons can use to access not just their television but also lighting, thermostats and virtually everything else in the room. It is speculated that the hotel will have the largest spa from San Jose to Napa Valley, as well as a restaurant and rooms exceeding 2,300 square feet. In all, 13 two-story "cottages" compose the hotel, plus a 2,800-square-foot ballroom, three boardrooms and an outdoor meeting space.

The 16-acre hotel is being built alongside five acres of office and other development. According to projections by Menlo Park Finance Director Carol Augustine, the Rosewood will provide \$1.6 million in annual revenue to the city by 2011. Each occupied room at the Rosewood generates 10 percent of the room cost in the form of a "transient occupancy tax" or TOT. Last year the City earned \$1.5 million from all current hotels, or 4 percent of city revenues. "These kinds of revenues don't come along very often," Johnson said. "It's an indication of the quality of Menlo Park that a five star hotel is locating here."

The hotel will also generate some 250 new jobs, per Rosewood Sand Hill Managing Director Mike Casey. City and hotel officials will host a job fair on February 9th so that locals can apply for various hospitality jobs. This hiring event will be widely publicized. As a result of its location in the City of Menlo Park, there is great hope that qualified residents will become candidates for the many and varied positions to be offered. According to Johnson, "the hotel should also serve the nearby venture capital businesses located along Sand Hill Road and will further enhance the City's brand for this economic activity. As the worldwide "epicenter of venture capital," we fully expect venture capitalists taking advantage of the hotel's 13,000 square feet of meeting space.

A place for teens at the Menlo Park Library

The Library is reaching out to teens by offering specialized programming, new materials and a place "for teens only".

The Library has been the co-host, along with Kepler's Books, to several author events especially for teens, bringing award-winning authors to the library including Tamora Pierce, Nancy Farmer, Libba Bray, Shannon Hale, and Francisco Jimenez. The Library also provided teens with writing workshops presented by Kerry Madden and Lynn Hazen and a media awareness organization, About-Face, taught teens about self-esteem and body image. A college planning workshop series to help teens and parents plan for the future was also held.

One of the Library's most popular events includes Teen Night: After Hours, where once per month the Library provides a place for teens to enjoy a safe, fun Friday night. Teens enjoy watching movies, listening to music, playing games on the Internet and the Wii, and, yes, even reading books. "What a great and much needed safe gathering place", says parent, Vivian Leal Mendez. Twenty five teens attended the first gathering and 50 teens attended the second.

In addition to programs at the library, there are plenty of new teen books, movies, audio books and music. Resources include free online tutoring in all core subject areas, in both English and Spanish, and an extensive database featuring the Biography Resource Center, Student Resource Center Gold and Expanded Academic. These resources can be found at www.menloparklibrary.org.

Soon the Library will begin a small remodeling project resulting in a special teen area and a renovation of the children's area creating a special place to house all teen materials, provide laptops and comfortable seating.

For more information contact Michelle Barrese, Head of Youth Services at the Menlo Park Library at barrese@plinfo.org or 650.330.2531.



Is 2009 your year to volunteer?



Share the gift of reading... Become a volunteer tutor in Menlo Park's Project Read.

Did you know 30 million adults in the United States can barely read and write? An additional 63 million have significant gaps in basic literacy skills. Since 1985, Project Read-Menlo Park has been the program adults in our community turn to for free literacy tutoring. Over 2000 adults have received instruction in reading and writing to help them achieve personal goals and function more effectively at home, at work, and in the community..

The core of our program is one-to-one tutoring where adult learners are paired with volunteer tutors. We provide

free training to volunteer tutors during a three-part, eleven-hour training. Those unable to attend the in-person training (or do not want to wait for the next scheduled session) may use our video training and be placed with a learner quickly.

"All of us want the best for our students and look for ways to ensure their success" said Jean Eastman, tutor for 8 years. Tutoring takes place at the Menlo Park Library as well as the Belle Haven Library, Menlo Park Senior Center, Burgess Recreation Center, or at a location mutually agreeable to tutor and learner.

For more information, contact Roberta Roth, literacy outreach specialist at 650.330.2525 or rlroth@menlopark.org.

Business Development Plan Approved

The Menlo Park City Council recently approved a comprehensive Business Development Plan to provide a better understanding of the activities needed to meet the City's economic development goals. The plan shares existing goals, objectives, and strategies for each of the City's eight economic activity centers and outlines the major strategies underway in each. The plan also provides background information for improving services where needed to promote economic activity.

A recent community survey shows that one of Menlo Park residents' biggest concerns about the future is "the economy and economic development." So the plan also provides a list of economic vitality measures for Menlo Park's local economy and a regular reporting schedule to the City Council and the community that can be used to track how well the plan is working at meeting this community need. According to City Manager Glen Rojas, having a comprehensive business development strategy is especially important in uncertain economic times. "We want to focus on growing our revenue base to enhance our ability to deliver quality services to the community well into the future. A key strategy for a strong long term city budget includes 'growing the pie,' not just shrinking expenses."

The Business Development Plan is available on the City's website at www.menlopark.org under Items of Interest, or you can call the Business Development Center at 650.330.6615.

Your input is needed on City plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions

In order to help reduce greenhouse gas emissions originating in Menlo Park, the City has developed a Climate Action Plan and is looking for your input on the ideas. The plan was created based on an Emissions Inventory which found that the two highest generators of greenhouse gas emissions in our area are vehicles and commercial buildings, due to their high energy use.

The cost of creating the plan was covered by a grant from the Bay Area Air Quality Management District and the City/County Association of Governments and received input from the City's Environmental Quality, Transportation, and Planning Commissions, as well as the Chamber of Commerce, and the Green Ribbon Citizens Committee (GRCC). According to Menlo Park Environmental Programs Coordinator Dianne Dryer, "we've developed a set of actions that can be taken within our city operations as well as actions that can be taken by residents and businesses in the community at large and we're looking for community input on those ideas." The plan also includes strategies for emission reductions with estimated costs, options for reduction targets, and a summary of State proposed strategies and policies.

The City is hoping to complete the input process by March 1st, when it is expected that changes will be made to the plan for formal adoption by the Council in April. It is possible Council could include specific strategies to reduce emissions as it considers the City budget for FY2009-10.

The plan is available on the City website (www.menlopark.org), at the Library reference desk, and by calling Dianne Dryer at 650.330.6764.

Survey

(continued from page 1)

rated, including knowledge, responsiveness and courtesy. Individually, the quality of our drinking water was the highest rated service – ranking 4th of over 200 comparable cities. Other highly ranked services included the police department, the library, parks and recreation facilities and programs, and parks. Lowest rated services that staff will be looking at closely for areas to make improvements include street cleaning, and storm drainage.

Respondents could also include "open ended" responses to a question about the biggest issue facing the community in the future. The major themes identified by residents in these free form responses included concerns about the economy and economic development, concerns about development along El Camino Real, concerns about traffic and trains (transportation issues), concerns about City finances – such as the budget, taxes and maintaining city revenues, and the affordability of housing.

Over 300 residents responded to an online version of the same survey, and although these results are not "statistically valid" they closely mirror the random sample results along most questions.

According to City Manager Glen Rojas, the survey will help Council and staff measure service quality and make targeted improvements where needed. "There's an old saying that what gets measured gets done and the survey will help us focus our resources on improving areas residents are most concerned about." Mr. Rojas added, "We're very excited about the positive results overall. Clearly the people of Menlo Park love their community and we want to do all we can to maintain that very high quality of life."

A presentation of the results by the survey research organization will be made on February 24 at 6pm in the Council Chambers. For complete results of the community survey, both random sample and web-version, go to the City's Web site at www.menlopark.org and click on the community survey link under Items of Interest. For more information about the survey, contact Cherise Brandell, community engagement manager, at 650.330.6618.

City of Menlo Park Frequently Called Numbers

- Police Non-Emergency 330-6300
- City General Number 330-6600
- Library 330-2500
- Recreation 330-2200
- Business Development 330-6615
- Business Licenses 330-6642
- Building (Permits / Inspections) 330-6704
- Maintenance 330-6780
- Maintenance nights /weekends 330-6300

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