



PLANNING COMMISSION STAFF REPORT

FOR THE PLANNING COMMISSION
MEETING OF FEBRUARY 28, 2011
AGENDA ITEM D1

LOCATION: 389 El Camino Real (321-389 El Camino Real, 603-607 College Avenue and 612 Partridge Avenue)

APPLICANT AND OWNER: 389 El Camino Real, LLC

EXISTING USES: Single-Family Residence, Triplex, Vacant Land (formerly Anderson Truck Lot)

PROPOSED USE: 26 Residential Units

APPLICATIONS: EIR Scoping Session for a Use Permit, Architectural Control, Tentative Map, BMR Agreement, and Environmental Review

ZONING: R-3 (Apartment) and C-4 ECR (General Commercial, Applicable to El Camino Real)

PROPOSAL

The applicant is proposing to demolish the two existing buildings on the site, abandon the public street easement for Alto Lane, and develop a 26-unit residential project and related site improvements on property located in the R-3 (Apartment) and C-4 ECR (General Commercial, Applicable to El Camino Real) zoning districts. The proposed project would require approval of the following:

1. Use Permit for construction of three or more units in the R-3 zoning district, and to construct residential units and increase the floor area ratio (FAR) from 55 percent to 75 percent in the C-4(ECR) zoning district;
2. Architectural Control for design review of the proposed residential buildings;
3. Tentative Map to merge seven lots into two lots, abandon the public street easement for Alto Lane, and create 26 residential condominium units;
4. Below Market Rate Housing Agreement to provide three on-site BMR units priced at levels affordable to low-income households, in accordance with the City's Below Market Rate (BMR) Program and Government Code Section 65915, the State Density Bonus Law; and
5. Environmental Review to analyze the proposed project for potential environmental impacts. An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) will be prepared.

In addition, to address related fiscal issues, staff is planning to contract with a consultant to prepare a Fiscal Impact Analysis (FIA) for this project to be paid for by the project applicant. The proposal will require review and recommendations by the Planning Commission for the Use Permit, Architectural Control, Tentative Map, and EIR. In addition, the proposal will require Housing Commission review and recommendation for a BMR Agreement to provide three on-site BMR units priced at levels affordable to low-income households. The City Council will be the final decision-making body on these applications. This meeting will serve as a scoping session for the EIR, and no staff analysis of or recommendation on the requested applications is being provided at this time.

BACKGROUND

In September 2009, the applicant submitted plans for a 26-unit residential project under the State Density Bonus Law, Government Code Section 65915 and relevant amendments. A Planning Commission study session was held on this project on June 28, 2010. Following public comment, the Planning Commission provided comments on the proposed project. Several Commissioners commented that they believed the project was too dense, that the proposed units should be smaller, and that the massing was problematic. Several Commissioners also stated that the number of development standard waivers (in conjunction with the State Density Bonus Law) that was being requested was inappropriate. In addition, Commissioners commented that a larger setback from El Camino Real was needed for wider sidewalks and along College Avenue and Partridge Avenue to create a transition zone between El Camino Real and the single-family residences in the Allied Arts neighborhood. While several Commissioners believed that more parking spaces may be needed, one Commissioner thought that the project is dominated by parking and spaces should be consolidated to make it more efficient. A few Commissioners requested additional information on various topics, including the State Density Bonus Law, the potential impacts to schools, a comparison between the proposal and the draft El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan standards, and the price point of the BMR housing units. It was suggested that shadow studies be provided and story poles be erected. One

Commissioner stated that the units and finishes are attractive. No action was taken on the item. Since the meeting, the applicant has been working on revisions to the project.

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Site Location

The subject site consists of seven legal parcels currently addressed 321-389 El Camino Real, 603-607 College Avenue, and 612 Partridge Avenue, but is commonly referred to as 389 El Camino Real. The site spans the block between College and Partridge Avenues, with the exception of a parcel at the corner of El Camino Real and Partridge Avenue where Planet Auto, an auto body shop, is located. The majority of the subject site is zoned C-4 (ECR) with the property located at 603-607 College Avenue zoned R-3 (Apartment). The properties located across El Camino Real and to the left side of the subject site (when viewing from El Camino Real) are in the C-4(ECR) zoning district. The properties across College Avenue are zoned C-4 (ECR), R3A (Garden Apartment Residential), and R-1-U (Single-Family Urban). Single-family houses in the R-1-U and R-3 zoning districts in the Allied Arts neighborhood are to the rear of the site. A mix of uses and several large vacant parcels characterize the El Camino Real corridor. The parcels along the El Camino Real corridor, including the subject parcels, are currently the subject of the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan process.

Existing Site

The uses at the project site include a large vacant parking lot formerly used for auto sales at 321-389 El Camino Real, a residential triplex building at 603-607 College Avenue, and a single-family residence at 612 Partridge Avenue. The existing residences are rental units that are mostly occupied. Access to the single-family residential unit is from Partridge Avenue while the driveway to the triplex is from Alto Lane, a public street easement. Access to the vacant lot is near the auto body shop, off El Camino Real.

Proposed Use

The proposal involves the demolition of the four existing residential units and the construction of 26 residential units, consisting of nine detached single-family units and 17 attached townhouse units. The townhouses would be configured in a series of four rows, each with four attached units with the exception of one row with five units. The detached single-family residences would be constructed along the rear portion of the site. Presently, the residential units are proposed to be two to three stories in height, contain three to five bedrooms, and comprise between approximately 1,400 and 2,200 square feet of living space. All units would be for-sale, and three of the 26 units would be priced at affordable levels for low-income households, in accordance with the City's BMR Housing Program and the provisions of Government Code Section 65915, the State Density Bonus Law. As mentioned earlier, the applicant is currently working on making modifications to the project based on previous comments on the project.

Revisions to the project may result in changes to the site layout, unit massing, and/or design, but the number of units would not exceed 27 (the maximum number of units permitted under the State Density Bonus Law) and the FAR would not exceed the currently proposed 89 percent.

Vehicle access to the project site would occur via El Camino Real, except for one unit on College Avenue and one unit on Partridge Avenue. The internal site circulation system is designed in an “E” shape, with a longer driveway extending parallel to El Camino Real and three shorter driveways extending perpendicularly from the main spine towards El Camino Real. Currently, the central of the three shorter driveways would provide right-in, right-out access to the site from El Camino Real for regular, non-emergency vehicles. Therefore, cars exiting the site and heading north on El Camino Real would need to make a U-turn at Cambridge Avenue. The other two shorter driveways would provide emergency vehicle access with gates to preclude regular vehicle egress/ingress. It should be noted, however, that modifications to the project under consideration by the applicant could include creating two vehicular access points along El Camino Real instead of one. Pedestrian access would occur via sidewalks along El Camino Real, College Avenue, and along accessible routes that would be constructed within the project site. Presently, a total of 52 private parking garage spaces (two for each residential unit), and ten at-grade visitor parking spaces are proposed, of which two would be compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). While the proposed parking configuration could be slightly modified, a minimum of 59 parking spaces would be provided.

The applicant also proposes to merge the existing seven legal lots into two lots, and retain the existing zoning designations of C-4 (ECR) and R-3 (Apartment). As part of the proposal, Alto Lane within this block is proposed to be abandoned and become part of the development site.

EIR SCOPING

The proposed project requires environmental review, and a focused EIR is proposed to be prepared for the project. Preparation of the EIR has been advertised in the Notice of Preparation (NOP) for this project (Attachment B). The EIR will analyze whether the proposed project would have significant environmental effects in the areas of Land Use and Planning Policy and Transportation, Circulation, and Parking. It should be noted that the transportation analysis in the EIR will analyze development of 27 residential units, which is the maximum number of units permitted under the State Density Bonus Law. While design changes may be proposed that could affect the site layout, unit massing, and/or design, the number of units would not increase beyond 27. In addition, the type of units would remain the same and the site would continue to be accessed from El Camino Real, therefore the EIR analysis being prepared would sufficiently cover the project and any potential modifications.

Additional subject areas may be analyzed based on responses to this NOP and/or findings of the analysis; however, the proposed project is not anticipated to result in

significant environmental effects in the areas of Aesthetics, Agriculture and Forestry Resources, Air Quality, Biological Resources, Cultural Resources, Geology and Soils, Greenhouse Gas Emissions, Hazards and Hazardous Materials, Hydrology and Water Quality, Mineral Resources, Noise, Population and Housing, Public Services and Utilities, and Recreation. Although these topics will not be evaluated in separate topical sections of the EIR, they will be evaluated briefly in the CEQA-Required Assessment Conclusions chapter of the EIR. A short discussion that explains why the project is expected to result in a less-than-significant impact for each of the above topical area will be provided.

The EIR is also required to evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives to the project that would achieve most of the basic objectives of the project but would avoid or reduce the project's significant environmental effects. The City is currently considering analysis of the following alternatives, and is seeking input on these alternatives and other alternatives that should be evaluated as part of the EIR:

- CEQA-Required No Project Alternative (under which the project site would generally remain in its existing condition)
- Baseline Zoning Alternative (under which development would occur that is in general conformance with the site's existing zoning regulations, including three residential units on the portion of the site zoned R-3 and approximately 23,000 square feet of commercial space on the portion of the site zoned C-4(ECR))
- Reduced Residential Alternative(s) (under which the number of residential units would be revised to avoid any potentially significant traffic impacts or other significant impacts; more than one Reduced Residential Alternative may be evaluated, depending on the impacts identified in the EIR)
- Mixed Use Alternative (under which a mixture of residential and commercial uses would be developed on the site, including 22 multi-family residential units and approximately 13,400 square feet of commercial space; this alternative would require the portion of the site zoned R-3 to be rezoned to C-4(ECR))

The February 28, 2011 Planning Commission meeting will serve as a scoping session for the focused EIR. The Scoping Session is part of the EIR process, during which the City solicits input from the Planning Commission, other agencies, and the public on specific topics that they feel should be addressed in the environmental analysis. Comments received during the scoping session and during the NOP comment period on the project will be addressed in the Draft EIR.

Correspondence

Staff has received two items of correspondence that are included as Attachment C. Peter Colby of 726 Partridge Avenue states he is concerned about restricted access to a dense site, vehicular circulation within the site, and future residents' inability to park in their driveways. He believes this will result in frustrations and a low quality of life. Mr. Colby also provided similar comments in May that were included in the June 28, 2010 study session staff report. Scott Woodbury of 631 College Avenue believes the

proposed density of 26 units and height of three stories would negatively impact the standard of living for people who live on College Avenue, and that the project would worsen the traffic situation on El Camino Real.

Future Meetings and Opportunities for Public Input

The meeting of February 28th is focused on the content of the EIR, not the details of the project. Throughout the process, there will be opportunities for public input on both the project and the Draft EIR. The following public meetings have been scheduled or are planned:

- EIR scoping session – February 28, 2011 (Planning Commission);
- Applicant, staff, and neighborhood taskforce meeting to introduce the applicant's proposed revisions to the project plans;
- Planning Commission and City Council information items on Government Code Section 65915, the State Density Bonus Law;
- Housing Commission meeting to make recommendations on the proposed BMR Agreement;
- Planning Commission public hearing to receive comments on the Draft EIR and a study session on the requested development applications;
- Planning Commission public hearing to make recommendations on the Final EIR, incorporating responses to comments on the Draft EIR, and the requested development applications; and
- City Council Public Hearing on the Final EIR and the requested development applications.

The City has prepared a project page for the proposal, which is available at the following address: http://www.menlopark.org/projects/comdev_389ecr.htm. 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.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

A focused EIR will be prepared for this project. The Notice of Preparation (NOP) for the EIR was released on February 16, 2011, with comments requested by Friday, March 18, 2011. The NOP is available online on the project webpage and at the Community Development Department during business hours. Following the release of the Draft EIR, a meeting will be held to provide comments on the document. Comments will then be addressed as part of the Final EIR, which would be reviewed at a subsequent meeting. The City requests that written comments on the NOP be sent to the following address: Megan Fisher, Associate Planner, City of Menlo Park Community Development Department, Planning Division, 701 Laurel Street Menlo Park, CA, 94025. Comments may also be submitted by email to: mefisher@menlopark.org

RECOMMENDED MEETING REVIEW PROCEDURE

1. Introduction by Staff Explaining the Role of the Scoping Session
2. Commission Questions of Staff on EIR Scope
3. Public Comment on EIR Scope
4. Commission Comments on EIR Scope

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PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notification consisted of publishing a notice in the local newspaper and notification by mail of owners and occupants in the area bounded by El Camino Real, Harvard Avenue, University Drive, and Middle Avenue, and residents on Morey Drive and Kenwood Drive. In addition, the 389 El Camino Real project page is available at the following web address: http://www.menlopark.org/projects/comdev_389ecr.htm.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Location Map
- B. Notice of Preparation, dated February 14, 2011
- C. Correspondence
 - Peter Colby, 726 Partridge Avenue, dated February 15, 2011
 - Scott Woodbury, 631 College Avenue, dated February 22, 2011

Note: Attached are reduced versions of maps and diagrams submitted by the applicants. The accuracy of the information in these drawings is the responsibility of the applicants, and verification of the accuracy by City Staff is not always possible. The original full-scale maps, drawings and exhibits are available for public viewing at the Community Development Department.

EXHIBITS TO BE PROVIDED AT MEETING

None

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