F. AESTHETICS

This section evaluates the effects of the proposed project on aesthetic resources, including views and shade/shadow patterns in the vicinity of the project site. This analysis also considers the proposed project's consistency with applicable visual resources-related policies. Photographs, visual simulations, and diagrams are included to illustrate the site's visual character and the effects of the proposed project on aesthetic resources and shade/shadow patterns.

1. Setting

The following section describes the visual quality of the project site and views of the project site from surrounding areas.

a. Visual Quality of the Project Site. The project site is generally flat and made up of seven contiguous parcels, which include a large vacant paved parking lot along the El Camino Real frontage; a residential triplex building at 603 College Avenue; and a single-family residence at 612 Partridge Avenue. The one-story triplex was built in 1948 and is characterized by traditional, wood-frame architecture. The one-story, single-family residence has Craftsman architectural features, including a gently sloping roof, exposed eaves, and horizontal massing. The parking lot is surrounded by chain link fencing and is inaccessible to the public. Alto Lane is used as a private driveway for 603 College Avenue and has an electronic metal gate restricting public access into the right of way. Fencing surrounds both residential properties within the site. Key land use characteristics influencing the visual character of the site include the vacant El Camino Real frontage area and residential uses along the western boundary of the site. From El Camino Real, the project site appears as a gap in the streetscape, and signals a lack of activity. Please refer to Section IV.A, Land Use and Planning Policy, for a description of the physical characteristics of the project site. Key visual landmarks along College Avenue include two large redwood trees, one of which is located on the project site.

b. Visual Quality of the Project Site Surroundings. The orientation of the project site does not exactly match the cardinal directions. For the purpose of the following description (and consistent with the background discussion in the rest of the EIR), College Avenue is considered to be north of the site; El Camino Real is east of the project site; Partridge Avenue is south of the site; and predominantly single-family and multi-family residential homes are west of the site.

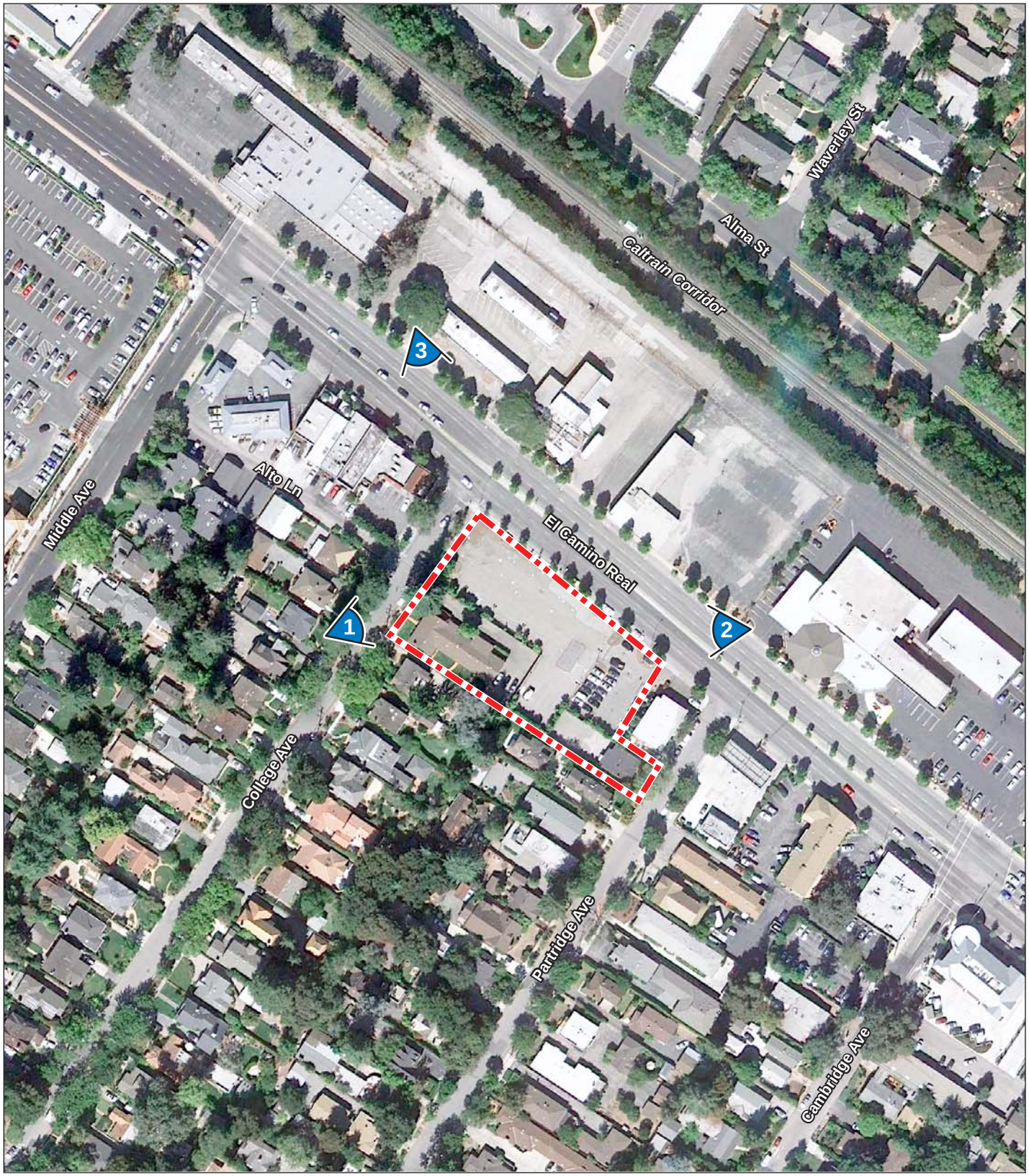
- *North*. The site is bordered by College Avenue to the north. Beyond College Avenue is a small shopping center with mainly one-story buildings that directly front El Camino Real. The visual quality of the shopping center is characterized by low-slung buildings with adjacent street-front parking and a parking lot located at the back of the buildings. Along College Avenue, single-family dwellings are one to two stories in height and are characterized by a diversity of architectural styles and ages. The street is lined with mature trees, which create a comfortable pedestrian environment.
- *East*. The site is bordered by El Camino Real to the east. The visual quality of El Camino Real is characterized by the roadway's large width (a total of six lanes) and adjacent commercial uses. These commercial uses are generally low in profile and are located adjacent to large surface parking lots. Trees, which have been planted along the east and west sides of El Camino Real, and in the median, contribute to the visual character of the area, but the sheer width of El Camino Real and the low profile of adjacent buildings creates an environment that is focused on vehicle movement and that may be visually discomforting.

- *South*. Areas to the south of the project site are characterized by low-profile commercial uses, including an auto body repair shop and restaurants. Surface parking also contributes to the look and feel of the visual environment. The residential neighborhood along Partridge Avenue is characterized by predominately two-story, single-family residences, with a diversity of architectural styles and ages. Partridge Avenue is lined with mature trees, which create a comfortable pedestrian environment (similar to College Avenue to the north of the site).
- *West*. The site is bordered to the west by a residential neighborhood, which is characterized by one- to two-story single-family dwellings along tree-lined streets.

c. Views from the Project Site. Views from the project site are constrained by surrounding development and trees. Views to the west are somewhat limited by surrounding fencing and trees. Views to the north and south are limited by the existing commercial development, and views to the east are partially blocked by tall trees along the Caltrain right-of-way. The Santa Cruz Mountains are generally not visible from the project site due to intervening development and vegetation. No views within or around the project site are designated as scenic views by local, State or federal agencies.

d. Views of the Project Site. Views of the project site area available from the streets that border the site: El Camino Real, College Avenue, and Partridge Avenue. Figure IV.F-1 shows the location of views of the project site for which visual simulations of the proposed project were prepared. Figures IV.F-2a through IV.F-2c show existing views from these viewpoints (in addition to the effects of the proposed project on these views). Key views of the project site are discussed below.

- *Views From College Avenue.* Views of the project site along College Avenue are partially obstructed by existing trees along sidewalks, including the redwood tree on the project site (see Figure IV-F-2a). From a pedestrian level, the residential triplex building at 603 College Avenue is visible but the vacant lot which fronts El Camino Real is barely visible. Directly adjacent to the triplex building, a two-story single-family house is visible.
- *Views From El Camino Real (northbound).* Views of the project site heading north along El Camino Real (see Figure IV.F-2b) are characterized by a vacant lot surrounded by chain link fencing, small street trees, and pedestrian-level and street-level lighting fixtures. The site appears to have little activity along its El Camino Real frontage. Views of two large redwood trees are also visible in the northwestern portion of the project site.
- *Views From El Camino Real (southbound).* Views of the project site heading south along El Camino Real (see Figure IV.F-2c) are similar to those seen in the northbound direction. The site is characterized by a vacant lot surrounded by chain link fencing, small street trees, and pedestrian-level and street-level lighting fixtures. The site appears to be underutilized because there is no vehicle activity, unlike some of the commercial uses in the vicinity of the site. The southernmost portion of the site is also visible, but is generally devoid of activity.



LSA

FIGURE IV.F-1

N

0 115 230
FEET

Project Site

2 Viewpoint Locations

389 El Camino Real Project EIR
Visual Simulations
Viewpoint Locations

SOURCE: GOOGLE EARTH, 10/2009; LSA ASSOCIATES, INC., 2011.

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Existing view of the Project Site

Visual Simulation of the Proposed Project

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-2a

389 El Camino Real Project EIR
Visual Simulations, Viewpoint 1 - College Avenue

SOURCE: DAHLING GROUP, 2011.

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Existing view of the Project Site

Visual Simulation of the Proposed Project

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-2b

389 El Camino Real Project EIR

Visual Simulations, Viewpoint 2 - El Camino Real (Northbound)

SOURCE: DAHLING GROUP, 2011.

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Existing view of the Project Site

Visual Simulation of the Proposed Project

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-2c

389 El Camino Real Project EIR

Visual Simulations, Viewpoint 3 - El Camino Real (Southbound)

SOURCE: DAHLING GROUP, 2011.

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- *Views From Partridge Avenue.* Views of the project site along Partridge Avenue are similar to those from College Avenue. Views of the site are partially obstructed by existing trees and vegetation along the sidewalk, and by the auto body repair shop. From a pedestrian level, the single-family residence at 612 Partridge Avenue and the side of the auto body repair shop are visible.

e. Existing Shade/Shadow Patterns. Figures IV.F-3a through IV.F-3f show existing shadow patterns within the project site, in addition to simulations of the shadow patterns that would be expected after build-out of the proposed project. Shadow pattern simulations were prepared for the following dates: June 21 (the summer solstice, when the sun is at its highest point in the sky); December 21 (the winter solstice, when the sun is at its lowest point in the sky); and March 21 and September 21 (the spring and fall equinoxes, respectively, when day and night are of approximately equal length). The shadow diagrams show net new shadow generated by the project.

Simulations were prepared for three times during each day: 9:00 a.m.; 12:00 p.m. (noon); and 3:00 p.m. Shadows cast by existing structures within the project site are limited because existing buildings are one story in height. In addition, the eastern portion of the project site consists of a vacant lot, and generates minimal shadow. Shadows are most widespread within the project site on December 21, the shortest day of the year. However, even on December 21, shadows generated by structures within the project site are generally confined to the project site itself. The shadow generated on December 21 at 9:00 a.m. extends onto College Avenue and the sidewalk on the northern side of the street; however, shadows generated by buildings on the site do not cover existing off-site buildings.

f. Applicable Policies. The Land Use section of the General Plan includes the following aesthetics-related policies that are applicable to the proposed project:

Goal I-A: **To maintain and improve the character and stability of Menlo Park's existing residential neighborhoods while providing for the development of a variety of housing types. The preservation of** open **space shall be encouraged.**

Policy I-A-1: New construction in existing neighborhoods shall be designed to emphasize the preservation and improvement of the stability and character of the individual neighborhood.

Policy I-A-2: New residential developments shall be designed to be compatible with Menlo Park's residential character.

Policy I-A-3: Quality design and usable open space shall be encouraged in the design of all new residential developments.

Policy I-G-10: Extensive landscaping should be included in public and private development, including greater landscaping in large parking areas. Where appropriate, the City shall encourage placement of a portion of the required parking in landscape reserve until such time as the parking is needed. Plant material selection and landscape and irrigation design shall adhere to the City's Water Efficient Landscaping Ordinance.

2. Impacts and Mitigation Measures

This section analyzes impacts related to aesthetics that could result from implementation of the proposed project. The subsection begins with the criteria of significance, which establish the thresholds for determining whether an impact is significant. The latter part of this section presents the impacts associated with the proposed project. Mitigation measures are recommended, as appropriate.

a. Criteria of Significance. Implementation of the proposed project would have a significant effect on aesthetics if it would:

- Have a substantial adverse effect on a scenic vista.
- Substantially damage scenic resources, including, but not limited to, trees, rock outcroppings, and historic buildings within a State scenic highway.
- Substantially degrade the existing visual character or quality of the site and its surroundings.
- Create a new source of substantial light or glare which would adversely affect day or nighttime views in the area.

These criteria are derived from the *CEQA Guidelines* environmental checklist. The City does not have any official scenic views or viewsheds.

b. Less-Than-Significant Impacts. The following section describes the less-than-significant impacts to aesthetics that would result from implementation of the proposed project. As described in Chapter III, Project Description, implementation of the proposed project would result in the demolition of two existing residential buildings on the site, abandonment of the public street easement for Alto Lane, and construction of a 26-unit residential project and associated facilities. Building roof lines would be no higher than 35 feet above grade (although building parapets and chimneys would extend slightly above the building roof line).

(1) Scenic Vistas. The project site is generally flat and contains limited views of surrounding areas due to existing buildings and trees. The Santa Cruz Mountains are not visible from the project site. (In addition, views of the Santa Cruz Mountains are not identified as scenic vistas or views in the General Plan, or by regulatory agencies with jurisdiction over the project site.) Therefore, the proposed project would not affect a scenic vista.

(2) Scenic Resources. The project site is not located within the viewshed of a designated State Scenic Highway. There are three officially-designated scenic highways within San Mateo County: State Route (SR) 35, SR 1, and Interstate 280 (I-280). SR 35 and SR 1 are located approximately 10 and 26 miles from the project site, respectively. I-280 is located approximately 4 miles from the project site. Due to its distance from the designated scenic highways, the proposed project would not substantially damage scenic resources within the viewshed of a State Scenic Highway.

The project site contains one heritage tree (a 90-foot-tall coast redwood), which would be preserved as part of the project. No rock outcroppings or historic structures are located within the project site. Therefore, the proposed project would not adversely affect scenic resources within the project site. In addition, the proposed project would not compromise scenic views, including views to the Santa Cruz Mountains, because such views are limited or nonexistent in the vicinity of the site.

(3) Visual Character. The project site is characterized by a vacant asphalt parking lot along the El Camino Real frontage. A chain link fence separates the vacant lot on the site from the sidewalk, and the two existing residential buildings. The eastern side of Alto Lane and the southern boundary of the 603 College Avenue property have brick and wood fencing. Fencing and hedges separate the rear of the 612 Partridge Avenue property from the vacant parking lot. Commercial and retail uses are located along El Camino Real to the north and south of the project site, which generate moderate levels of pedestrian activity in the vicinity of the site.

March 21, 9:00 a.m. PDT

September 21, 9:00 a.m. PDT

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-3a

Legend

Project Buildings

Existing Shadow

New Project Shadow

N

0 50 100

FEET

389 El Camino Real Project EIR

Shadow Diagrams:

March 21 and September 21, 9:00 a.m.

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL VISION, AUGUST 2011.

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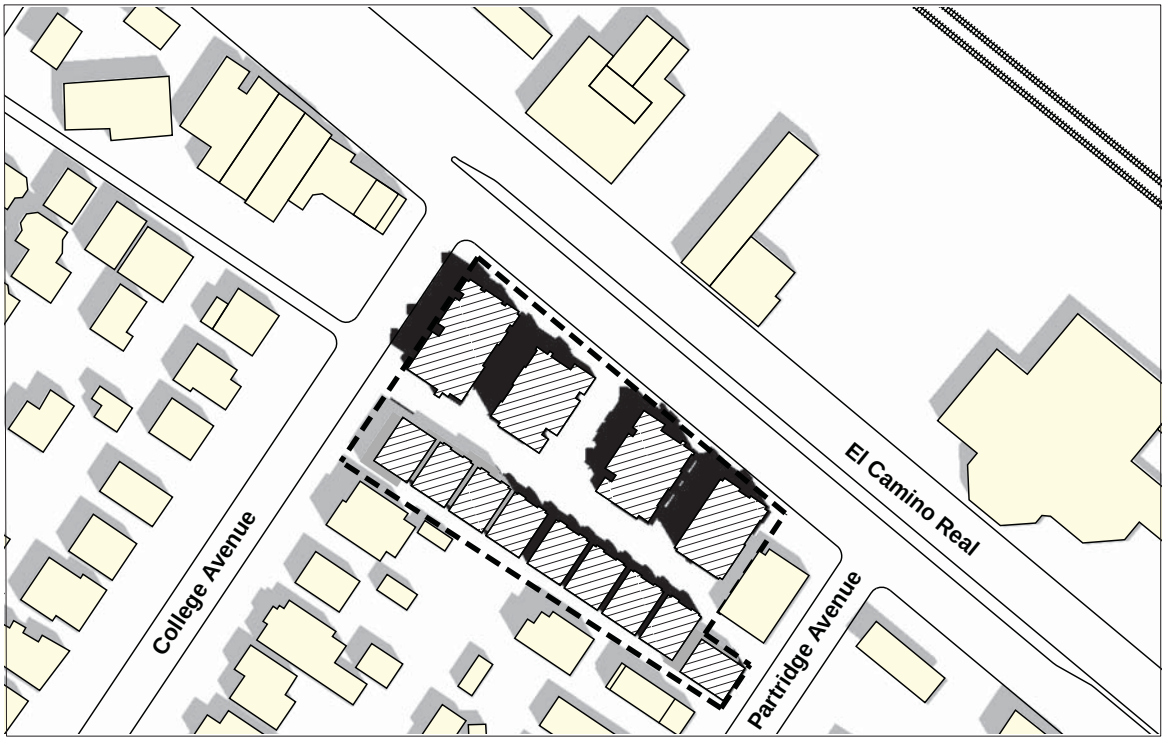
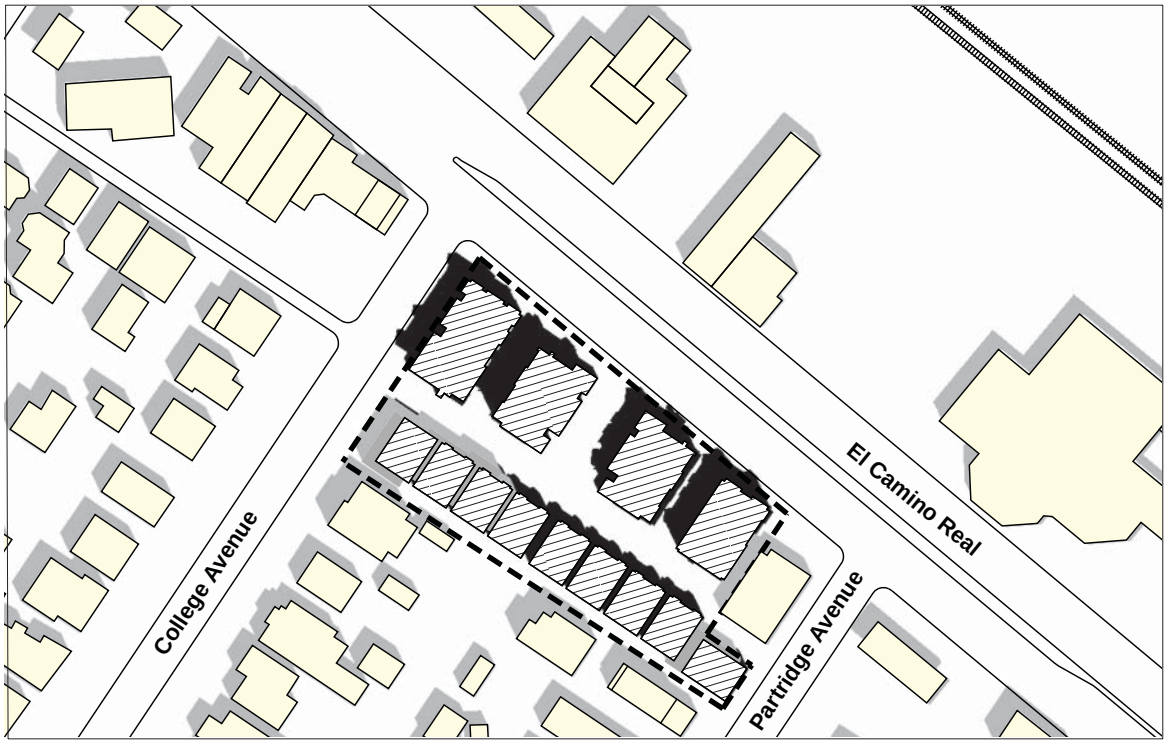


March 21, 12:00 noon PDT



September 21, 12:00 noon PDT

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-3b

Legend

Project Buildings

Existing Shadow

New Project Shadow

N

0 50 100

FEET

389 El Camino Real Project EIR

Shadow Diagrams:

March 21 and September 21, 12:00 noon

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL VISION, AUGUST 2011.

I:\CMK1001 389 El Camino Real\figures\Fig_IVF3b.ai (1/10/12)

March 21, 3:00 p.m. PDT

September 21, 3:00 p.m. PDT

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-3c

Legend

Project Buildings

Existing Shadow

New Project Shadow

N

0 50 100

FEET

389 El Camino Real Project EIR

Shadow Diagrams:

March 21 and September 21, 3:00 pm

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL VISION, AUGUST 2011.

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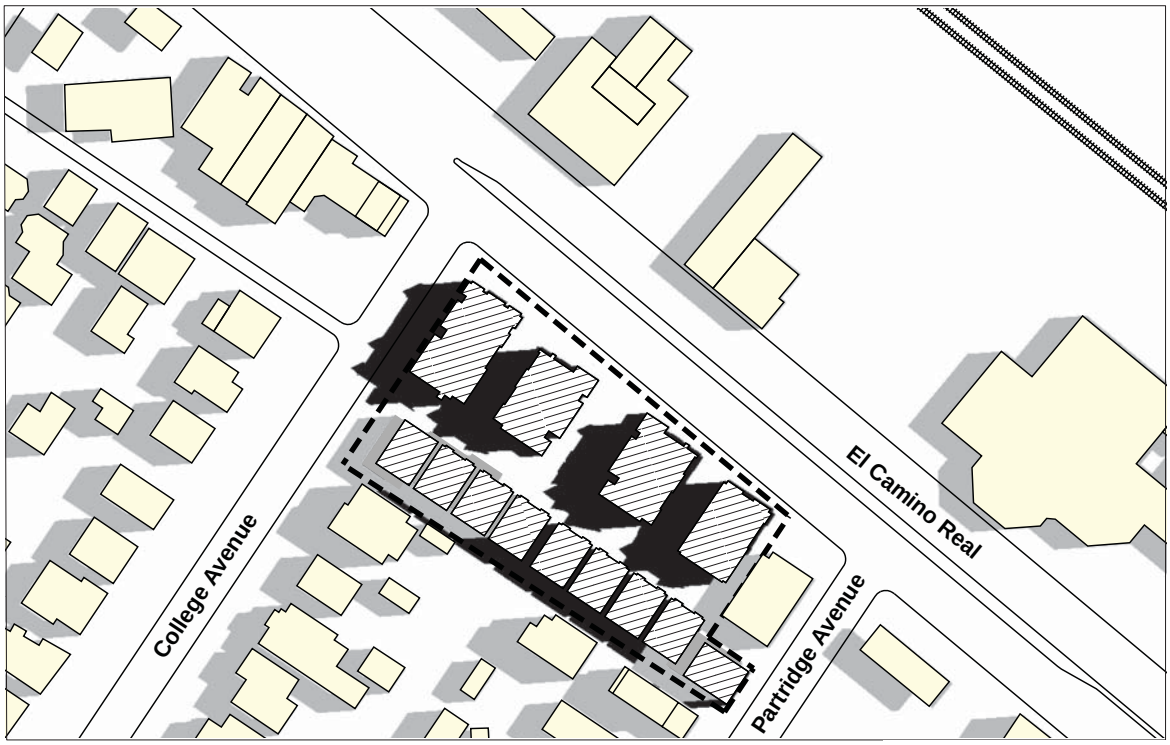

June 21, 9:00 a.m. PDT

December 21, 9:00 a.m. PST

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-3d

Legend

Project Buildings

Existing Shadow

New Project Shadow

N

0 50 100

FEET

389 El Camino Real Project EIR

Shadow Diagrams:

June 21 and December 21, 9:00 am

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL VISION, AUGUST 2011.

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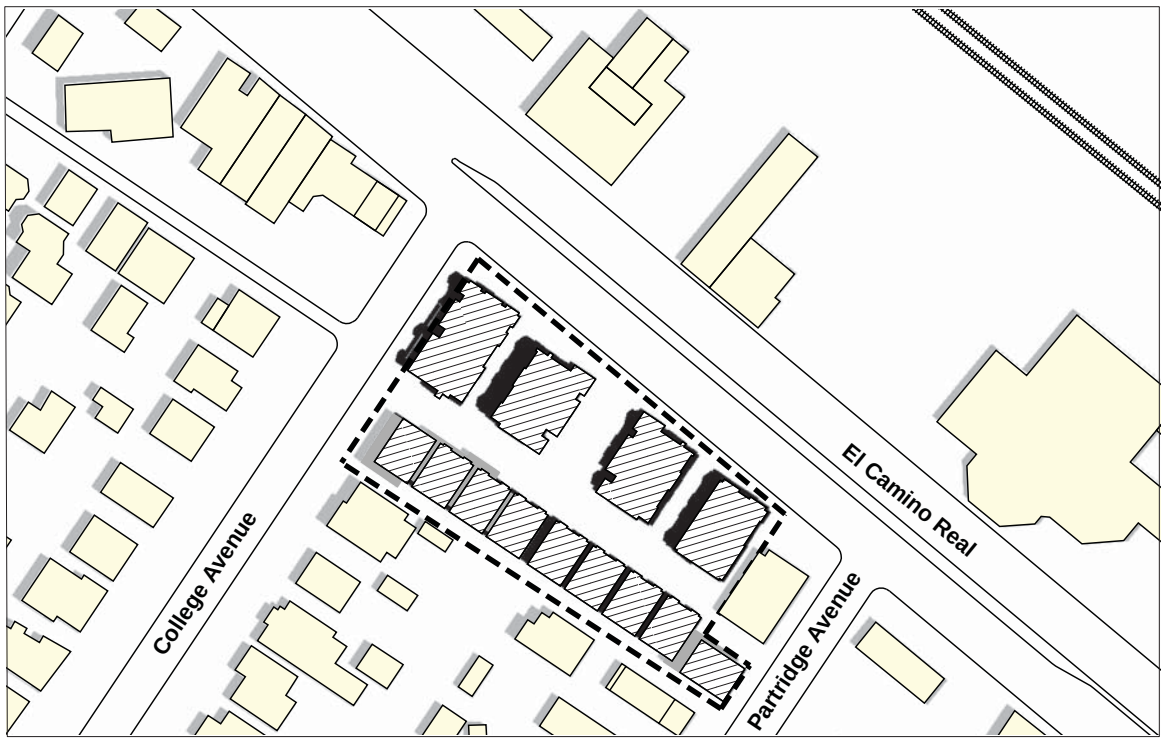

June 21, 12:00 noon PDT

December 21, 12:00 noon PST

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-3e

Legend

Project Buildings

Existing Shadow

New Project Shadow

N

0 50 100

FEET

389 El Camino Real Project EIR

Shadow Diagrams:

June 21 and December 21, 12 noon

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL VISION, AUGUST 2011.

I:\CMK1001 389 El Camino Real\figures\Fig_IVF3e.ai (1/10/12)

June 21, 3:00 p.m. PDT

December 21, 3:00 p.m. PST

LSA

FIGURE IV.F-3f

Legend

Project Buildings

Existing Shadow

New Project Shadow

N

0 50 100

FEET

389 El Camino Real Project EIR

Shadow Diagrams:

June 21 and December 21, 3:00 pm

SOURCE: ENVIRONMENTAL VISION, AUGUST 2011.

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Implementation of the proposed project would result in the demolition of the two existing residential buildings, abandonment of the public street easement for Alto Lane, and the construction of a 26-unit residential project and associated facilities. The proposed residential buildings would add visual interest to El Camino Real (compared to existing conditions) and would enhance the street-level pedestrian experience and the visual diversity of the street scene.

Because proposed residential uses are similar in type to those located immediately west of the site (although they would be developed at a higher density), the proposed project would not result in a substantial adverse change in the visual character of the project site. Although the proposed project would introduce higher-intensity residential uses adjacent to lower intensity residential uses and commercial uses, the two- to three-story building elements would help fill-in the streetscape void created by the vacant parking lot along the El Camino Real frontage, and would add texture and activity to that portion of the street. Figures IV.F-2a and IV.F-2c show “before” and “after” (project implementation) pictures of the project site.

As shown in the visual simulation in Figure IV.F-2a, a proposed two-story single-family residence (located in the residential triplex building site at 603 College Avenue) and three-story townhouse building (located on the existing vacant lot) would be partially visible at the viewpoint along College Avenue. As shown in the visual simulations in Figures IV.F-2b and IV.F-2c, views of the project site facing north and south along El Camino Real would be characterized by the three-story townhouse buildings and landscaping features, in addition to the existing street trees and lighting fixtures.

As described in Chapter III, Project Description, the architecture of the proposed project is characterized by traditional-looking materials such as decorative asphalt shingle roofing, fiber-cement finishing with wood and brick/stone accents, and a sloping roofline. Architectural features of the townhouses and single-family homes would include vinyl windows, fiber-cement columns and siding, decorative steel and wood railings, French doors, brick rowlocks, wood gates, metal louvered utility doors, and steel sectional doors with glass lights. The proposed architectural style is similar to that of some of the one- to two-story residential buildings in the residential neighborhood extending along College and Partridge Avenues. Therefore, the architecture and design of the project would not result in a significant adverse change in the visual character of the area.

The visual changes to the project site that would result from the proposed project would not be considered adverse, as the proposed buildings are of a size and scale that would generally improve the pedestrian experience along El Camino Real, which is a relatively wide and imposing roadway. Although the proposed project would be more dense than the neighborhood immediately to the west, this density would not compromise the look and feel of the existing residential neighborhood.

The proposed project would redevelop a vacant lot and residential site with higher-density residential uses. The addition of residential population to the site would increase daytime and nighttime activity within and around the area and could enhance the visual appeal of this stretch of El Camino Real. Redevelopment of the project site with residential uses would create a more appealing urban environment and would create linkages between the El Camino Real corridor, downtown, and outlying neighborhoods. Therefore, the proposed project would not adversely affect the visual quality of the project site and its surroundings.

(4) Visual Resource Policies. The proposed project would be generally consistent with the visual resources-related policies in the City’s General Plan Land Use Element that apply to the

project. Consistent with Policies I-A-1 and I-A-2, the proposed project would enhance the integrity of the El Camino Real corridor, because it would redevelop a surface parking lot along the roadway frontage and develop residential uses that are compatible with the City's residential character. The project would also be consistent with Policies I-A-3 and I-G-10 because useable private and shared open space would be incorporated into the design of the project. In addition, the project's landscape design would comply with the City's Water Efficient Landscaping Ordinance.

(5) Shade and Shadow. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the construction of two- and three-story buildings where one-story buildings and a vacant surface parking lot currently exist. As depicted in Figures IV.F-3a through IV.F-3f, these buildings would cast new shadows within and around the project site, including on a very small portion of the adjacent residential properties to the west of the site. New shadows would also be cast on small portions of residential and commercial properties across College Avenue to the north of the site, and across El Camino Real, to the east of the site. The most extensive shadow coverage outside the project site that would result from implementation of the proposed project would occur during morning hours throughout the year, and in the winter in late afternoon.

In mornings during the spring and fall, new shadows from the proposed project could extend approximately 75 to 100 feet onto the sidewalks in front of residential and commercial properties on College Avenue. In mornings around the winter solstice, when the sun is lowest in the sky, new shadows from the proposed project could extend approximately 125 feet onto the parking lot of the commercial property on College Avenue. In the late afternoon of the winter solstice, new shadows from the proposed project could extend approximately 125 feet onto and across El Camino Real, but not into any of the commercial buildings located on the east side of El Camino Real. None of the new shadows would cover adjacent residential and commercial buildings. Although the project would incrementally reduce morning sunshine in these areas, this impact would not be considered significant because the use of solar receptors or public spaces would not be substantially diminished.

The proposed project would cast shadows on the project's common open spaces near the current intersection of Alto Lane and College Avenue and adjacent to El Camino Real during the morning hours. The proposed project would also cast shadows on the El Camino Real open space area during late afternoon around the winter solstice. However, with the exception of the El Camino Real open space area during the winter solstice, both common open space areas would remain relatively shade-free during noon and afternoon hours for much of the year, especially during the summer when usage rates are expected to be higher. Shadow in the open space areas would be most extensive during the morning hours. However, the open space areas would be used the least at this time. Therefore, shadows cast by the proposed structures would not substantially interfere with the use of the open space areas.

c. Significant Impacts. Implementation of the proposed project would result in the following significant impact:

<u>Impact AES-1</u>: The proposed project could increase the amount of light and glare in Menlo Park (S)

Exterior lighting would be installed throughout the project site, including along interior pedestrian circulation routes. Although proposed lighting is expected to be generally consistent with and similar to existing lighting in the El Camino Real corridor, this lighting could increase levels of nighttime

light and glare in the area, particularly at the residential area to the west of the project site. Implementation of the following mitigation measure would reduce this impact to a less-than-significant level:

> Mitigation Measure AES-1: The project applicant shall prepare a lighting plan and photometric study and submit them the City for review and approval prior to issuance of a building permit. City staff shall review the plan to ensure that any outdoor lighting for the project is oriented downwards and is designed to minimize lighting or glare off-site. (LTS)

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