

9/13/09

TO: Thomas Rogers, Associate Planner
Menlo Park Community Development Dept.

Please copy: City Council
Planning Commission

FM: Clem Molony, 35-year resident of the Willows neighborhood

SUB: **EIR Feedback re. the Menlo Gateway Project**

I have been following this project's movement through the city planning process for about two years, attending numerous Planning Commission and 'Gateway'-subcommittee meetings. I have reviewed relevant parts of this Draft EIR, which I find as thoroughly prepared as the other dozen EIR's which I have reviewed as part of my career as an Environment & Safety Manager over the past 25 years. I hope these comments are helpful to the Planning Commission, City Council and city staff.

Overview

General Plan Amendment: I believe it is a good idea for Menlo Park to modernize the land use designations in the General Plan when there is justification. In this case and in this commercial neighborhood, creating the requested designation makes a lot of sense.

Zoning Ordinance Amendment: The new M-3 zoning district (with specific parking requirements) which will result is also good for Menlo Park's future, not only economically but also in numerous other ways explained below.

Architectural Control: The high Floor Area Ratio requested for this hotel-office mixed-use project is appropriate because the resulting commercial activities are immediately accessible to two state highways, and they are relatively far away from residential neighborhoods. The city already has a zoning district (Central Commercial) which allows a high FAR if use-related parking is provided. This proposed district is clearly a similar case where the high FAR is fully justified. The tall hotel next to Highway 101 will be in keeping with other Peninsula cities' current and planned hotels next to the freeway.

City budget: The revenue flow to the city from this project (and other environmentally-positive economic development) is needed to keep our city services sustainable over the long-term. The 8/19/09 Almanac newspaper noted that "several council members have said they view economic development as the city's main tool in stabilizing its finances." The modern economy has been re-set; the use of city reserves is not the answer to our budget challenges. The project's creation of approximately \$8M in public-benefit money will help sustain our city services and neighborhood improvements. I am pleased that the city hired an independent firm to quantify the fiscal impacts of the project, rather than depend on the developer's consultants.

Other comments: Before looking at specific impacts, a few comments noted at various meetings: The Belle Haven community's leaders appear to be strongly supportive of the proposal. The city's development agreement will no doubt include that the hotel component will occur prior to office construction. The creation of 1900 jobs to build this, and the addition of modernized office space in Menlo Park for 2300 high-tech jobs, is a real plus for our Peninsula economy. There will be a local-workers first source agreement between the project and JobTrain, the highly successful worker-training non-profit who boost the careers (and lives) of our less-advantaged neighbors.

Evaluation of Impacts

Land Use

As stated above, it makes common sense to modernize our city's land use designations and zoning when the city has an appropriate opportunity. In this case a local-family company, which is run by a long-term Menlo Park resident who loves this city, and which company has in-depth understanding of the Peninsula's future commercial-buildings market is making a zoning-change proposal which will position Menlo Park for future economic stability. These modern, sensible changes are good for our city, regardless of what the nay-sayers will argue.

Population and Housing

Local housing values is one of the most vexing problems which comes with the success of the Bay Area economy. The city's Below Market Rate Housing Program is one excellent tool to help address affordable housing issues for teachers, emergency-responders, service-workers, those in health care, etc. This project's payment of in-lieu fees into that program (reported to be \$8.5M) will be a big plus for our city's housing efforts.

Public Services

The project's development agreement will tie together the requested entitlements for the project with needed public benefits. Direct city service costs will be borne by the project. Permanent revenue flows will accrue to the city services budget from increased property tax, ongoing sales tax, and the hotel's transit occupancy tax.

The Bohannon organization is negotiating with the local fire district to cover the cost of a needed ladder truck and the cost of project related services. Local schools will gain a windfall in annual property taxes without having to take on many extra students. The Belle Haven neighborhood and community, because of its nexus to the project, appears to be an appropriate place to invest a fair share of resulting community benefits.

Traffic and Circulation

This set of impacts is the most difficult challenge of the project. Therefore I reviewed this section in depth, and provide both general and specific comments.

I am quite familiar with traffic patterns on the east side of town because I live adjacent, and my kids growing up had numerous friends who lived east of Hwy 101. The 21 study intersections which were identified all make sense for review, and it was valuable to compare the Level of Service status (LOS data) at all locations before ('Near Term') and after the project is built.

Table 3.11-6 compares before and after. It is interesting to note that when you combine the AM and PM data on LOS after the project is built, and before doing any mitigations, the total of intersections LOS situations is

LOS: A	5	\	
B	19	\	46 acceptable intersection situations
C	9	/	
D	13	/	
E	6	\	11 unacceptable intersection situations
F	5	/	

Traffic and Circulation, cont.

The "Increase-in-delay" data provide additional insight. In the AM, only one intersection has a delay of greater than ten seconds (Independence at Constitution), and the average delay at the 21 intersections appears to be 3-4 seconds. In the PM, only two intersections show a significant increase in delay (Constitution at Chrysler, and Chrysler at Bayfront). As I understand it, the project will fully mitigate all three of these problem intersections with roadwork upgrades and signalization.

Other mitigations (~\$2M in investment for city roads, transit, etc.) which will be required of the project will address the remaining problem intersections (various intersections at Bayfront Expressway, and Marsh at Middlefield). Of note is one conclusion of the data-analysis that, given the project's location by Highway 101 and Bayfront Expressway, only about 10% of the traffic from the project is estimated to enter the city. It appears that there will be negligible changes to our city's existing traffic patterns.

It's important to note that an additional review of the project's traffic impacts will be done by the San Mateo County Congestion Management Program (hooray for Measure A) with resulting suggestions for mitigation. Finally, I was also encouraged to see that the DEIR states that the proposed design will provide adequate parking for the project.

Utilities

The other significant impact of the project is utilities, especially water supply. The fact that the Bohannon organization is so dedicated to green building principles is heartening for our city. They will design for LEED certification throughout the project. This will provide significant reduction in the use of our planet's natural resources. The resulting project here in Silicon Valley will be a model for similar projects worldwide. I was encouraged that the DEIR stated that there is sufficient water supply in the city for this project.

Thank you for all the work that city staff (and your consultants) have done so far to evaluate this important project. Even though there may be excess office capacity on the Peninsula currently, the replacement of obsolete buildings at the current site with modern highly-valuable buildings (to meet returning demand in the future) make sense.

I encourage approval of this project as proposed.