

**El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan
Summary of Public Comment
July 28, 2011 Planning Commission Meeting**

This summary is intended to inform the Planning Commission's review of the Draft Specific Plan.

Summary of Public Comment

Alex Kugushev

- Resident for 45 year and over the years has seen the city improve
- Questioned the value of the Plan and stated that nothing is broken that needs to be fixed
- Questioned who would benefit from the Plan

Richard Draeger

- Has owned business in Menlo Park for 55 years
- Commented that Downtown Alliance efforts to engage with the City have been fruitless in that none of the recommendations but the retention of the Downtown medians has been incorporated into the Plan or EIR
- Questioned the responsibility of proposing a mixed use building in Parking Plaza 4 that would result in a loss of one-third of the spaces, noting that the plaza is at capacity
- Questioned the level of engagement of merchants in proposals to remove 50% of spaces along Santa Cruz Avenue and in the south parking plazas
- Stated belief that parking structures at 50 feet tall are inconsistent with village character
- Questioned how parking structures would be paid for and whether impact would be on business owners or tax payers
- Commented that there is nothing broken that needs to be fixed and that the Plan will cause rampant bankruptcies.

Mark Flegel

- Noted that Downtown Alliance is made up of 120 property and business owners whose livelihood is directly and vitally connected to the economic success of the downtown and who have joined together to voice their hopes and concerns related to downtown; Downtown Alliance is pro Menlo Park; many members worked on improvement plans 20 years ago
- Noted that Downtown Alliance supports maintaining and enhancing the small town charm and character; Noted that intent of Specific Plan is also to preserve the small town charm and character
- Noted that the Downtown Alliance wants to retain Menlo Park's unique character and not be a cookie-cutter of Redwood City or Palo Alto; Questioned whether Plan really wants to maintain Menlo Park's charm or be a replica of Redwood City or Palo Alto

- Noted Downtown Alliance support for the preservation of all customer convenience surface parking since the parking is important to the success of the businesses; walking long distances to garages serves to discourage shoppers and yet Plan would sell or lease parts of parking plazas to build offices on the claim that the plazas are underutilized
- Noted that Downtown Alliance supports upgrading and beautifying the existing parking plazas; City budgeted money for the upgrades 20 years ago but only three plazas have been completed
- Commented that Specific Plan allows for almost 400,000 square feet of new buildings with 4,600 new car trips to downtown every day and a loss of 550 or more parking spaces but that Plan does not address the impacts on the economic vitality of businesses; cited Los Altos construction and resultant 30-90% loss in business revenues due to the construction
- Stated belief of Downtown Alliance that the proposed parking structures will be inconsistent with the small town charm and character, will alter the skyline and block sun to adjacent buildings
- Noted Downtown Alliance support for a two-level garage on parking plaza 2 and another structure near the train depot and noted that these locations would be less disruptive to downtown businesses
- Questioned who would pay for the parking structures; noted that cost concerns are driving away new businesses who are afraid of the uncertainty
- Noted Downtown Alliance support for continuation of landscape maintenance and enhancement along Santa Cruz Avenue
- Stated belief of Downtown Alliance that City has ignored suggestions for improvements; questioned who the City is supporting
- Suggested focusing first on El Camino Real and then the downtown at a later time; suggested continuing to work together to produce a vital downtown.

Jim Brenzel

- Practicing accountant with office on Oak Grove Avenue
- Commented on existing back-up of traffic heading to El Camino Real every afternoon; noted that proposed Santa Cruz plaza will constrict traffic and divert it to Oak Grove and Menlo Avenues causing greater back-ups; noted added constraint of parking removals on Oak Grove Avenue due to proposed bike lanes and difficulty of using the post office with no on-street parking and backed-up traffic
- Noted Fire District opposition to sidewalk extensions 20 years ago and is concerned that Fire District may have concerns with Plan proposals
- Commented on overwhelming opposition to the Plan and factors that speak to Menlo Park's desirability as a community
- Commented that if the City is not broken, do not fix it, and to remember to first do no harm; noted that the Plan has enormous costs but little community benefit and asked why the City doesn't just leave the community alone and whether it has any shame.

Henry Riggs

- Noted that he was speaking as an individual
- Noted that over the years of the Specific Plan process, he had heard many people comment on the need to make changes to downtown; noted that workshops and other engagement opportunities were open to all who wanted to participate and thanked the many volunteers throughout the process
- Commented that the Plan includes many positive elements such as the walkways linking the parking plazas and serving to upgrade the back entries of businesses, the added economic viability that comes with changes in densities, intensities and heights, the inclusion of a residential option on upper floors, inclusion of elements attractive to seniors and families to park once and walk, shaded parking spaces, options for parking spaces without time limits, and a second layer of spaces in structured parking
- Stated belief that concerns raised regarding parking structures can be resolved by the Plan; cited example of well designed structure in Palo Alto and suggested that heights of parking structures be limited to the heights of adjacent buildings; noted that the residential uses proposed as an option on parking plaza 3 was not appropriate and would be better on El Camino Real
- Suggested that any structured parking should have 50 % support of adjacent property owners and should be incrementally developed starting with the relocation of permit parkers to assess the value of the structures; recommended that the perpendicular parking of plaza 5 not be repeated
- Suggested the current parking in-lieu fees as a source of funding for the parking structures
- Suggested that any widening of sidewalks should be sponsored by a specific user or at least have a programmable use since it would result in the loss of diagonal parking that is easier to use and more efficient; noted an exception for the area of the Santa Cruz plaza
- Suggested that newspaper boxes and similar structures as well as small clusters of bike racks could be placed on islands at the end of the parking rows
- Suggested that the Plan needs to include more to enhance east-west connectivity such as an undercrossing of El Camino Real at Santa Cruz Avenue
- Stated that the Plan needs to make it attractive for owners to invest.

John Boyle

- Thanked the Commission and other volunteers for their service; noted the importance of land use issues for local government
- Encouraged the Commission to not let this opportunity slip away for fear of it being a contentious issue or upsetting some people; noted that without the Plan the blight on El Camino Real would spread to the downtown and other parts of the city
- Noted that the Plan is not about turning Menlo Park into a major urban center but rather it's about bringing the City's zoning into the 21st century to respond to changes in real estate prices, construction techniques and prices, and transportation patterns

- Commented that it takes continual investment to stay fresh and meet the community's values of small town charm and vibrancy; investment opportunities must be economically viable; provided examples of how pedestrian character is aided by widened sidewalks and vibrancy by additional residential development
- Commented that many people he had spoken with wanted to see an upgrade to downtown; commented on the outreach conducted by the Council Subcommittee members and staff with business merchants and learning of the pressures some merchants felt to sign petitions of opposition

Dexter Chow

- Owner of Cheeky Monkey
- Commented that it is important to move forward with the Plan and to continue to revitalize downtown or the downtown would see an increase in vacancies
- Noted that the Plan is still a draft and that some changes may be appropriate

JoAnne Barley

- Resident for over 30 years
- Noted her support of the Downtown Alliance
- Stated that she had attended many of the workshops but didn't feel that the views of the people at her tables were represented in the Plan
- Noted the Alliance's support of proposals for El Camino Real and limited parking structures
- Noted opposition to the covered market place, building on the parking plazas
- Asked that the Commission listen to all points of view

Lawrence Zaro

- Represents property owner on Santa Cruz Avenue; has been trying to rent a storefront for 3 years and realtor has indicated that at least one person did not rent because of the Plan
- Took strong exception to an earlier comment about the Downtown Alliance pressuring people to join; noted that he is a member and has never witnessed that kind of pressure; noted that it is a voluntary organization
- Plan includes substantial changes and he questioned how the success of the Plan will be guaranteed
- Noted disagreement with the concept that more people are needed to increase vitality
- Commented that Menlo Park currently has advantages over other cities with convenient and free parking and that the city may lose that advantage with the plan and face stiffer competition that will hurt people as a result.

Richard Singer

- Resident in unincorporated Menlo Park; shops in Menlo Park because of the convenient parking

- Commented on concern that the plan will add a substantial amount of new development and bring more people in while also changing the parking; Noted that he did not want Menlo Park to be another Sunnyvale or Redwood City
- Commented on concern about the impact of the market place on the Farmer's Market
- Noted that some modernization would be wonderful but that the plan is too ambitious; noted that development can go on El Camino Real
- Stated that the Plan should be on a ballot

Ciya Martorana

- Resident for 30 years and is the managing partner at Carpaccio's
- Commented on the difficulty of customer parking at lunch time and the negative impact on the business
- Commented on the need for convenient parking and that not all people are bikers
- Noted that she broke her hip in parking plaza 2 but the potholes have still not been repaired

Mark Flegel

- Wished to respond to previous speaker's comments regarding pressure on business owners by the Downtown Alliance and noted that the comments were inappropriate
- Commented that the Alliance supports a Plan that reflects the true dreams of the community

Roxie Rorapaugh

- Commented that people support the Plan because they believe it will protect the environment and improve air quality but she believes the Plan will do little to help the environment and will increase the carbon footprint and degrade air quality
- Commented that although the Plan includes requirements for LEED certification, the applicability of LEED is limited to larger projects
- Commented that Sierra Club supports the Plan based on the inclusion of TDM programs and increased housing in the downtown but that there are no guarantees that either of these would actually take place
- Commented that the worst part of the Plan are the parking structures because they are expensive and not needed; cited previous parking studies that showed no existing shortage of parking
- Commented that the construction of garages will impact businesses, put people out of work and will be harmful to the environment
- Suggested improvements to the parking plazas including solar panels and green paving materials

John Hickson

- Unincorporated Menlo Park resident and past president of the Live Oak Lions Club

- Stated that the Lions Club is a volunteer organization that contributes \$35,000/year to charity; noted that Farmer's Market also donates 800-900 pounds of food for the needy
- Stated that the Farmer's Market is worth protecting and that the focus is on top quality produce; noted that convenient parking and easy access for the vendors and customers is essential for the continued success of the Farmer's Market
- Stated concern that the proposed paseo, market place and loss of 68 spaces in parking plazas 6 and 7 will not complement the market and will force changes in the market layout that will be a disadvantage for the vendors and customers
- Stated that he is not convinced that the Plan will bring in more customers and is concerned that the Farmer's Market will lose customers as a result of the Plan
- Noted that when the Farmer's Market started 20 years ago, they agreed to restrict the market to fresh produce and not hot foods so as to encourage people to patronize existing restaurants; noted that approach worked to bring in more restaurants and people
- Requested that hot foods not be allowed in the market place on Sundays and stated that he did not see a need for additional food outlets
- Stated that he is happy with the Farmer's Market as it is and believes the Plan will only create problems for the Market; noted that any loss in the Farmer's Market will also affect charity donations; commented on petition opposing Plan signed by 2,500 Farmer's Market patrons
- Requested that any changes be made on a temporary basis so that the impacts can be assessed before being made permanent

Frank Carney

- 40 year resident
- Commented that key question is whether the goal is to improve and enhance downtown or to significantly change with more development resulting in more people and traffic
- Noted that the community's top priority is to maintain the small town character as consistently stated by residents; noted that of the 12 vision goals, some are contradictory and not everything can be done, but preserving the village character is at the top of the list
- Stated that the community preference should guide decisions
- Noted that although he agreed that downtown could be improved and enhanced, he did not want to see it destroyed by bigger development

Margaret Carney

- President of Live Oak Lions Club; supports and runs the Farmer's Market
- Commented that Farmer's Market is about to celebrate 20 years; Farmer's Market was started by five women who wanted to bring energy, vibrancy and a hometown feeling to downtown on Sunday mornings; Farmer's Market provides fresh produce and contributes to local charities; favorite market of patrons, farmers and musicians; Farmer's Market was originally opposed by a local business who saw it as competition and it took two years to get approval

- Commented that the Lions Club is fearful of negative impacts from the Plan, including loss of close and convenient parking and space for the Farmer's Market due to the paseo development
- Noted that the consultants referenced the Ferry Building in San Francisco but that Menlo Park is not a similar tourist draw; most Menlo Park residents want to shop quickly and return home and do not want to hang out in downtown
- Stated that the concept of vibrancy is overblown and unrealistic and asked that the Commission not support the Plan; asked that the concerns of the Lions Club and supporters of the Farmer's Market not be discounted and for the Commission to not endanger the Farmer's Market
- Commented that the goal should be to protect and enhance the small town character

Jitze Couperus

- Property owner on Santa Cruz Avenue and an engineer
- Commented that short-term elements of the Plan will result in a loss of 175 parking spaces, generally equivalent to one or two plazas
- Commented that parking is the life blood of merchants and the short-term development will strangle business since the Plan would not build parking structures until financing is found
- Stated that the Downtown Alliance recommends two slightly smaller garages; good engineering dictates that garages should be built before any parking is removed

Pat White

- Born and raised in Menlo Park; has opposed government projects many times including the rerouting of Santa Cruz Avenue and the widening of Sand Hill Road
- Stated belief that the Plan is the worst project he has seen in Menlo Park and will destroy downtown by removing parking, narrowing roads, and adding density without new access roads
- Commented that bikes are good for exercise but not for commerce
- Commented that Plan presumably allows for permitted uses but Menlo Park is known for anti-business attitudes
- Commented that the Plan will destroy Menlo Park by creating gridlock, destroying small business, forcing property owners to sell, and decreasing property values

Nancy Couperus

- Property owner on Santa Cruz Avenue
- Read letter from Lindsay Mickles, a property owner on University Drive who has owned property and occasionally resided in Menlo Park for 30 years
- Letter stated that the unique flavor of Menlo Park, due in large part to its openness, produces rich experiences lost to many other communities due to development; stated that developers have now turned attention to Menlo Park and the city has fallen prey to the desire for more development and revenue

- Letter commented on potential features of parking structures, including fees for parking, creation of spaces attractive to criminals, shading of adjacent buildings and public spaces; cited examples of Stanford Shopping Center with free parking and dangers of parking structures in Santa Rosa where recent murder occurred and Petaluma
- Letter commented that story poles are not being erected because then people could see the size, scale and height of the structures and would not re-elect the City officials
- Speaker commented that judging by the applause and number of buttons taken by people, three-quarters of the audience have serious concerns with the Plan

Cat Carlton

- Representative of Sharon Heights Homeowners Association
- Commented that downtown could use beautification to ensure that it thrives and produces revenue, but that the loss of convenient parking is a concern; commented that she is not inclined to use a parking structure for quick shopping trips
- Commented that the Plan includes some good elements but that it is important to listen to the Downtown Alliance and shoppers
- Expressed support for a previous suggestion related to the intelligent expansion of sidewalks, expanding where it makes sense and keeping on-street parking where it makes the most sense

Megan Fluke

- Representative of Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter and specifically of the Sustainable Land Use Committee
- Stated that the Plan is a great opportunity to meet environmental goals, including reductions in greenhouse gases and air pollution, increased bike, pedestrian and transit accessibility, preservation of open space by reducing sprawl, and the creation of complete and well connected neighborhoods where people can meet their needs without cars
- Noted that the Sierra Club has submitted comment letters and offered specific recommendations including retaining the option for 60-foot tall buildings that can be attractively and creatively designed to use a variation of massing and height and incorporate a variety of uses, inclusion of stronger language related to east-west connectivity, inclusion of stronger language for affordable housing for seniors, young adults, and lower-income persons
- Expressed support for protecting the Farmer's Market and local businesses; suggested inclusion of a policy to restrict larger regional chains

Gary Eggers

- Property and business owner
- Commented that Menlo Park needs renewal but it needs to be done carefully
- Suggested temporarily closing Chestnut Street to be able to fully assess impacts on traffic and get feedback from the public before making any decisions to permanently change things

Halle Hewitt

- Commented that she supports change if done intelligently but is concerned for the loss of Menlo Park's charm
- Stated concern for the safety of parking structures and the difficulty of using structures for the disabled, seniors, and other shoppers
- Stated that she was not notified of all of the workshops and meetings
- Questioned whether the Plan would go to a vote, whether this is the best time to be spending money given the current economy, and whether new boutiques and restaurants would be attractive and add to the vibrancy
- Expressed a concern for increased traffic, especially from the Stanford projects and the impacts of High Speed Rail
- Noted that similar projects in other cities have not been successful
- Commented on her work with the Farmer's Market at the block parties and the concern for the less prominent location provided to the Farmer's Market
- Expressed support for the El Camino Real portion of the Plan
- Stated that two-to three stories of height is acceptable

Adina Levin

- Resident living near downtown; member of Green Ribbon Citizen's Committee; member of Environmental Quality Commission but speaking for self
- Commented that the Plan needs to serve the City going into the 21st century; cited statistics on driving and commute patterns that indicate the patterns are changing to have less reliance on driving and more use of alternative modes of travel
- Commented that Plan should include reasonable planning goals to provide improved access and routes for pedestrians, bikers, transit users and other alternative modes of transportation

Patti Fry

- 20-year resident and former member of Planning Commission
- Noted that she had submitted a comparison table of existing and proposed zoning regulations for the Commission's review
- Commented that some of the existing parking plazas are challenging even though the downtown is not completely built out under the current rules
- Commented that under the Plan, parking requirements would be lowered and the approval process for projects would not require projects to document adequate parking; commented that the ability to control the effects of development would be limited to design issues under architectural control approval
- Commented that the increased development potential allowed by the Plan and especially the office square footage that would increase more quickly than retail or residential would result in increased traffic
- Commented that the proposal for wider sidewalks and one parking structure were good elements of the Plan

- Commented that it is important to take into account the comments of the downtown property and business owners since they are the most knowledgeable on their operations
- Commented that new development on the parking plazas, including the market place do not make sense; market place idea came from the consultants and people thought it was an interesting idea in the station area, but not in downtown
- Suggested that the paseo be a temporary installation because all of the cross streets in downtown are used to maintain a balanced circulation pattern and avoid gridlock

Peter Colby

- 30-year resident
- Commented that people don't have a clear view of how downtown works; commented that people in select groups tend to use the money of others like taxes; noted the reliance of big trucks to stock stores that can be walked to and the need for people with specialized skills to drive the trucks through downtowns
- Commented that developers bought up land when El Camino Real was vibrant with the car dealerships and have since lost their gamble because the traffic won't allow for additional development; commented El Camino Real currently works well and is walkable

Carl Trealivell

- Resident for 9 years; shops and dines in downtown several times per week
- Asked that the Commission heed the public testimony
- Stated support for maintaining the small town charm and character; noted that other Plan metrics are not necessarily supportive of keeping the small town character
- Commented that there does not seem to be a need for more parking and that the cost of building parking structures is considerable given current budget constraints; commented that elements such as the removal of parking on Oak Grove Avenue for bike lanes appears to create the need for parking structures rather than letting the need for parking drive the decision
- Suggested that changes be at a low level and taken in small bites to lower the risks of the Plan; supported changes for temporary approaches to improvements such as the paseo

Tiger Bachler

- Owner of Alyce Grace boutique; working suburban mom of five children
- Commented that as a business owner, the Plan gives her hope that downtown can be revitalized to bring needed revenue to small businesses
- Commented that she was asked to sign the Downtown Alliance petition but respectfully declined wanting an opportunity to educate herself on the Plan; stated belief that Plan is a guideline for what could happen, not a plan for everything that will be done

- Commented that the downtown needs pockets of areas to experience community and cited Menlo Center and Town and County are examples that are vibrant and centers for experiencing community
- Commented that parking is difficult downtown for her and her customers, specifically with regard to time limits; noted that providing for longer parking options would be beneficial

Deborah Miller

- Resident
- Commented that she is opposed to the Plan in its current form; stated belief that Plan will drastically change and detract from the features that make downtown charming in exchange for cookie-cutter, high density development
- Expressed concern that existing local businesses that are widely used by the community would be displaced by higher rents
- Stated opposition to increases in density and building heights and the loss of parking plazas in exchange for parking structures
- Stated belief that stripping Santa Cruz Avenue of its neighborhood character and making it a destination is a mistake and places undue burden on the local community and will not serve the local community; cited examples of local community use and stated that many community activities and the small town feeling would be lost if the Plan were implemented

John Chiappe

- Stated belief that the Specific Plan is the result of a consultant needing a job
- Commented that Menlo Park currently has the best parking, a great retail mix and first class Farmer's Market but that a consultant thinks things can be better
- Noted difficulties in renting vacant properties due to concerns of construction disruptions
- Questioned who would pay for the Plan elements
- Stated belief that there should be a city vote on the Plan

Gail Sredanovic

- Life-long environmentalist and member of Sierra Club Loma Prieta Chapter; commented that the Sierra Club membership was not consulted on the Club's position; Noted membership on team that worked on Alameda Streetscape project to improve bike and pedestrian access
- Commented that denser housing belongs on El Camino Real and not in downtown, that the proposed market place would hurt the existing markets and Farmer's Market, and that the removal of convenient parking would hurt the businesses since customers will go elsewhere with convenient parking
- Commented that the Plan will encourage the replacement of retail services with offices and restaurants
- Cited examples in Redwood City and Sunnyvale of failed projects
- Noted that a potential solution to housing is secondary housing units

Peter Hart

- Long-term resident
- Commented on points of agreements, including universal support for maintaining the residential character, maintaining the current parking, freshening of the downtown and maintaining a vibrant Farmer's Market
- Questioned how, with the points of agreement, anyone could believe that adding 400,000 square feet of new development while also reducing the circulation potential would do anything but prevent the top goals from being accomplished

Edward Syrett

- Willows neighborhood resident since 1968
- Commented that he shops in downtown even though it is not the closest shopping to his residence; stated that he avoids shopping in Palo Alto because of the parking difficulties; noted that the Palo Alto garages are too far from his destinations and often are fully occupied
- Expressed support for the current vibrancy of downtown, ease of parking, and closeness of parking to the shops
- Commented that parking should not be eliminated before adding new parking
- Commented that it would be sad to give up shopping in Menlo Park for Palo Alto