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CITY OF MENLO PARK
PLANNING

DEIR Comments – El Camino/Downtown Specific Plan

The DEIR understates potentially significant impacts on parking, traffic, and circulation.

The following are impacts, which I believe will occur with implementation of the El Camino/Downtown Specific Plan. While it's understood that some of the structures described in the Specific Plan may not in fact end up in the Final Plan, or may be moved to other locations, they are nevertheless in the plan now described on the City's website, and for that reason I have addressed each one as if they will be in the Final Specific Plan.

Plaza 1 (post office plaza):

The Specific Plan proposes a 5-level parking structure on this plaza, removing all but approximately 45 surface parking spaces. The proximity of this plaza to El Camino means that cars entering Oak Grove to access the parking garage will back up El Camino traffic at peak traffic times. (Maloney Lane, which currently provides access to Plaza 1 already produces this impact.) The parking structure (the largest one proposed) is to accommodate 650 cars. Access is going to be a problem because cars cannot enter the plaza from El Camino onto Santa Cruz Avenue when traveling north, since you cannot turn left onto Santa Cruz Avenue from El Camino in this direction. The other entrance to Plaza 1 off of Oak Grove is the surface parking area that must be retained as surface parking (according to historical records in which the previous owner sold this property to the City with the stipulation that "it be used solely and exclusively for parking purposes.") Chestnut Lane also contains a private parking area for the nearby businesses, making it a narrow two-way access to Plaza 1 and a parking structure. Construction over an 18-month to 2-year period will make parking problematic in this area and create additional traffic congestion in the downtown area generally. ***If a parking structure is built in Plaza 1, how will the very large delivery and garbage trucks (as well as fire trucks) be able to gain access to the back entrances of the stores that back on to this plaza?***

Plaza 2 (Oak Grove Plaza):

The removal of all surface parking on this plaza and replacement by a mixed-use building will create more demand for parking elsewhere. The proposed residential units and retail will create additional car trips and require underground parking to accommodate the new residents. Shared parking between residents and shoppers generally does not work out in practice unless there is a very generous number of new spaces created. An example immediately across the street at 724-726 Oak Grove Avenue illustrates the unworkability of this concept. The underground parking for this mixed-use development was intended to serve patients, clients and residents. When residents protested that they were unable to use their parking spots during the day, the building owner installed a gate 'for residents only', which meant that patients had to find parking elsewhere – in the public parking plazas and along neighborhood streets. The 9 above-ground parking spaces are wholly inadequate for the number of medical, dental, and financial offices in this building. The additional pressure on the existing parking resources that has resulted has been detrimental.

With the loss of all 95 surface parking places in Plaza 2, together with the attendant need for additional parking for the mixed use build-out – **how much on-site underground public parking will be required to adequately provide for the new development? Has this been considered?**

Plaza 3 (behind Flegel's):

The proposed "pocket park" appears to eliminate the entrance to Plaza 3 from Crane Street. The City originally acquired this property, which provides ingress and egress to Plaza 3 "for the purpose of establishing off street motor vehicle parking places, including property rights of way necessary or convenient for ingress thereto or egress therefrom." (Resolution No. 1812) This plaza is already heavily used by attendees of the nearby church and shoppers.

The elimination of an entrance from Crane Street will force all vehicles to enter the plaza from University Drive. A parking structure in this plaza, together with townhomes on top (which will add more parking demand and create more car trips) will increase traffic dramatically on University Drive. Large delivery and garbage trucks (as well as fire trucks) must be able to gain access to the backs of the retail stores. This will be made much more difficult with construction of a parking garage. Disruption to the immediate area due to construction over an 18-month to 2-year period will be inevitable and traffic congestion in the area will result. Parking on streets close to downtown, which has caused complaints from neighbors in the past, will be exacerbated.

Again, if town homes are built atop of the parking garage, this will create additional demand for parking spaces, which are already in short supply and the 370 spaces created will be inadequate to serve the needs of the shoppers, residents, and the church across the street, which plans for additional development on its property. My understanding is that the church does not plan to add more on-site parking for its future development, but would instead contribute toward the building of the parking structure. If this is the case, the 370 spaces in this plaza will be totally inadequate for the amount of new development. **Isn't this correct?**

Plaza 4 (next to Draeger's):

Loss of access from Evelyn Street into this very busy and cramped parking area will cause severe congestion and added parking demand with the proposed construction of a mixed-use building in this plaza. The increased demand will very likely impact street parking in the nearby neighborhoods surrounding downtown. There is constant turnover of parking spaces in this parking plaza, which is needed by shoppers. A mixed-use building in this plaza will create more parking demand, add to congestion, and create access and circulation problems. **Would the proposed mixed-use building provide on-site underground public parking?**

Plaza 5 (behind Posh Bagel):

The proposed mixed-use building in this plaza will remove a portion of the current parking immediately behind the buildings on Santa Cruz Avenue. Large delivery and garbage trucks need convenient access to the backs of these buildings. The proposed location of the mixed-use building in this plaza will remove this convenient

parking and add more demand for parking spaces. **Would the proposed mixed-use building provide on-site underground public parking?**

Plaza 6 (behind Wells Fargo):

A Marketplace in this plaza will increase parking demand and impact the parking in this plaza. With the proposed partial closure of Chestnut Street to create a paseo, vehicles will be unable to access Plaza 6 from Santa Cruz Avenue at Chestnut. Traffic circulation will be adversely impacted as a result. The Marketplace will impact the existing Sunday Farmers Market and the businesses on Santa Cruz Avenue and Menlo Avenue by reducing parking and limiting easy access to this plaza. **Would the Marketplace provide on-site underground public parking?**

Plaza 7 (next to Trader Joe's):

The proposed Marketplace in this plaza will severely impact one of the most crowded parking plazas in the downtown – the location of Trader Joe's. Besides increasing parking demand, it, in combination with the partial Chestnut Street closure, will reduce vehicle access from Chestnut Street. This will very likely cause traffic tie-ups and additional congestion. The amount of parking in this plaza, which is already heavily impacted, will be substantially worsened by the combined loss of parking due to the Marketplace and the additional demand placed on it by the new use. **Would this Marketplace provide on-site underground public parking?**

The net gain and loss of parking in the plazas and along Santa Cruz Avenue is summarized in two tables as follows. The first table reflects the option where the parking garage in Plaza 3 would be mixed use and provide some housing in addition to parking spaces. The second table reflects the option where this parking garage is devoted entirely to parking.

NET GAIN/LOSS OF DOWNTOWN PARKING SPACES
(Parking Garage in Plaza 3 with housing on top)

	Existing	Proposed	Net Gain (Loss)
Plaza 1	249	†695	446
Plaza 2	95	0	(95)
Plaza 3	212	†† 370	158
Plaza 4	105	74	(31)
Plaza 5	150	108	(42)
Plaza 6	136	104	(32)
Plaza 7	94	58	(36)
Plaza 8	145	138	(7)
On Street ¶	409	304	(105)
Total	1595	1851	256

NET GAIN/LOSS OF DOWNTOWN PARKING SPACES
(Parking Garage in Plaza 3 without housing on top)

	Existing	Proposed	Net Gain (Loss)
Plaza 1	249	†695	446
Plaza 2	95	0	(95)
Plaza 3	212	†† 650	438
Plaza 4	105	74	(31)
Plaza 5	150	108	(42)
Plaza 6	136	104	(32)
Plaza 7	94	58	(36)
Plaza 8	145	138	(7)
On Street ¶	409	304	(105)
Total	1595	2131	536

- † 650 spaces in Parking Garage and 45 surface parking
- †† All spaces in Parking Garage and no surface parking
- ¶ Parking spaces along downtown streets

The addition of 1537 more residents in the downtown area and 929 new jobs will adversely impact parking, circulation, access, and traffic by increasing the number of car trips. Infrastructure to support this additional growth is insufficient. Schools are already maxed out. The addition of more children will impact the existing school population and the desire to keep classroom size small. This could also lead to the redrawing of school boundary lines.

Elimination of 48 prime parking spaces along Santa Cruz Avenue in order to widen sidewalks will impact parking, traffic, and circulation. Elimination of an additional 11 parking spaces along Chestnut will compound the problem.

The removal of 55% of the easy convenient surface parking, according to the parking chart in the Specific Plan, will severely impact downtown parking – forcing more cars into less convenient parking garages and into surrounding neighborhoods.

Not included in the Specific Plan is a statement that any new construction in Downtown requires on-site parking. If this is not a requirement, parking in the downtown will be a nightmare. The current plan is at odds with the policy statement in the Land Use Element of the General Plan:

“New development shall not reduce the number of existing parking spaces in the Assessment District, on P-zoned parcels or private property where parking is provided in lieu of Assessment District participation.”

In addition to changing the zoning for the surface parking plazas to permit high-density infill development, the Specific Plan also recommends a zoning change to permit three-story buildings in the downtown. ***Again, if such a zoning change is made to allow three-story buildings, will these developments provide on-***

site public parking? If not, there will be a further degradation of parking in the downtown.

The net gain of 256/536 spaces is not worth the disruption and increased demand for infrastructure to support the build-out. If implemented as now described, there will be a change in the character of the downtown from a small town to city-like atmosphere.

Again, the Specific Plan is at odds with the current General Plan, which spells out in the Land Use Element the goal of the downtown to:

"Strengthen Downtown as a vital and competitive shopping area while encouraging the preservation and enhancement of Downtown's historic atmosphere and character."

The Plan as envisaged will substantially reduce (in some cases remove completely) the surface parking spaces in seven of the eight of the downtown parking plazas. Even if multi-story parking structures are erected to partially mitigate this loss, then at best, the net impact will lead to a tighter concentration of incoming and outgoing traffic with resulting congestion. The resulting stop-and-go traffic will exacerbate air pollution and add to the overall carbon footprint of downtown commerce.

On top of this, the increased density of inhabitants in the downtown (as a result mixed-use residential being placed there) will place an even greater load (both parking and traffic) on this area adding to the pollution and carbon footprint.

Thus there is a two-fold impact. First, relocating all of the current surface parking into one or two concentrated structures has its impact in traffic density, resulting congestion and increased air pollution. Secondly, locating housing (more downtown inhabitants) where the parking plazas once were, will add another layer of traffic with associated congestion, pollution, and carbon footprint on top of a system that has already been compromised.

The Menlo Park Downtown Alliance, a group of downtown business and property owners, proposed an Alternative Plan, the environmental impacts of which would be substantially less than any of the proposed Alternatives (other than the No Project Alternative). **Why was this Plan not included as one of the Alternatives?**

Does the City have the right to unilaterally take over the planning and approval of future use of surface parking plazas, which were paid for through assessments by the downtown property owners to benefit downtown businesses by providing easy, convenient parking access?

How does the City in its short-term plan (next 5 years), when it is unlikely that there will be any parking structures, plan to mitigate the loss of parking along Santa Cruz Avenue and Chestnut Streets (59 parking space to be removed) for Trader Joe's, Wells Fargo Bank, the Sunday Farmers Market, and other businesses in the area?

Nancy Couperus, Property owner and member of the Menlo Park Downtown Alliance
859-869 Santa Cruz Avenue, Menlo Park

(650) 941-4808