

# PERKINS + WILL

## Memo

To: City of Menlo Park

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From: Mark Hoffheimer

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Date: May 8, 2009

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Subject: Community Workshop #1 - Summary

### **COMMUNITY WORKSHOP #1 - SUMMARY OF COMMENTS**

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#### **I. PURPOSE AND PROCESS**

The purpose of the first Community Workshop aimed to help the community reconfirm the Phase I vision and goals, understand the existing conditions/constraints, and engage the primary issues and tradeoff related with future improvement of Downtown Menlo Park and creation of the Specific Plan.

The workshop process involved an overview presentation of the consultant analysis followed by an interactive session with community participants to understand and comment on four topics related to the study area. The four topics - 1) Connectivity, 2) Vibrancy, 3) Public Space, and 4) Character - were each setup as "stations" that both explained the relevance of the topic and asked a series of pertinent questions. Attendees of the workshop were sorted into four groups and asked to rotate around the room and visit the four topic stations, which were facilitated by two members of the consultant team, to gain an overall understanding of the interrelationship of topics. After each topic was discussed, each person recorded their response to the posted questions on a note and placed it on the station board. The workshop concluded with a wrap-up presentation of the findings and opportunity for workshop participants to voice individual comments and concerns. This process was organized to best direct the Concept Alternatives in the subsequent phase of work.

## II. RECURRING THEMES

- Improve pedestrian realm, bicycle network and overall accessibility/connectivity (especially east-west connections) in the downtown.
- Interest to create more vibrancy in the downtown through a mix of uses, extending hours of stores and restaurants, supporting public open space with adjacent active uses, and creating/enhancing public space that would be suited for people of all ages.
- Buildings up to three (3) stories on Santa Cruz Avenue predominantly acceptable with appropriate design, massing modulation, and step-backs.
- Buildings up to four (4), perhaps five (5), stories along El Camino Real predominantly acceptable with appropriate design, massing modulation, and step-backs.
- Desire for existing, vacant stores/buildings to be occupied or renovated where feasible.
- Call for alternate transportation systems to better link downtown to neighborhood centers.
- Desire to renovate portions of Santa Cruz Avenue to create more usable public space.
- Interest in the closure of Santa Cruz Avenue for temporary events (i.e. Farmer's Market.)
- Do not reduce quantity of parking; reorganize it into parking structures.
- Interest in feasibility/cost analysis of putting regional traffic on El Camino below-grade.

### III. WORKSHOP STATION COMMENTS

#### STATION #1 - CONNECTIVITY

**1. Would you be willing to increase vehicular delay on El Camino Real to improve conditions for pedestrians?**

YES (31) vs. NO (31) ---- "In the middle" (4)

#### YES

- Willing to delay during non-commute hours.
- Improve bike and pedestrian connectivity.
- Interest in below-grade regional circulation.
- As long as traffic does not disperse through neighborhoods

#### NO

- El Camino will never be a great walking street - improve pedestrian flow on other streets
- Improve east-west connectivity by vertical separation (above/below grade)

#### Additional Comments

- Need for parking on El Camino

**2. What would get you to use alternative means to get downtown?**

- Improved bike conditions (improved lanes, bike parking, grade separation, railway route)
- Improved public transportation (downtown shuttle service, more frequent bus service)
- Improved pedestrian conditions (add sidewalks - particularly west of downtown)
- More mixed-use
- Less traffic

#### STATION #2 - VIBRANCY

**1. When you go out, where do you spend your evenings and why? What would motivate you spend more time in downtown Menlo Park, particularly at night?**

- Palo Alto (high-end restaurants, wine bars, "more interesting retail"), Redwood City (Century Theaters Complex), Mountain View, San Carlos, Santana Row - San Jose
- Extending evening store hours
- A destination cultural event (theater, movie, arts, music, festivals)
- Mix of uses (entertainment, retail, restaurants, residential, office)
- Residential downtown (above street-level uses/parking structure)
- Places for people of all ages (teens, seniors, families, children)
- Better retail storefronts

- Safer environment
- Dog-oriented public spaces

***What would you do to make El Camino Real more vibrant?***

- Higher density
- More residential
- Less store vacancies (renovate old theater)
- Improve pedestrian realm and public space
- Below-grade through traffic on El Camino
- Special uses or anchor retail (bowling alley, marquee store, 'fox' theater, gym)

STATION #3 - PUBLIC SPACE

***1. What activities would you like the public spaces in downtown to accommodate?***

- Variety - a variety of spaces (size, type and program) that appeal to people of all ages.
- Art - places to sell/exhibit art that are both temporary and permanent.
- Farmer's Market - temporary close down of Santa Cruz for weekly market in the street.
- Dogs - places that are designed for dogs, including dog storefront "tie-ups."
- Outdoor Dining - incorporate places for outdoor dining
- Flexibility - allow streets to be flexible for variety of use (events, dining, games, etc.)
- Synergy - support public spaces with active uses that are open day and night.
- Parking - maintain adequate supply of parking within proximity to shops.

***2. Would you give up some parking spaces to gain public space and wider sidewalks in downtown?***

Total votes: YES (46) vs. NO (8) ---- "In the middle" (5)

YES

- Reduced/removed street-parking paired with the structured parking to create opportunity for an enhanced pedestrian experience and creation of open space.
- Increase maximum height limits for residential above parking (structures).
- Maintain adequate amount of parking.

NO

- Reconfigure existing sidewalk space to create more room for pedestrian circulation and open space. (i.e. remove planters, concrete walls, newspaper racks, etc.)
- Do not remove parking along El Camino Real (currently inadequate)

**3. Are you willing to allow for additional development in order to gain public space?**

Total votes: YES (50) vs. NO (7) ---- "In the middle" (2)

YES

- Up to three to four (3-4) Stories
- Encourage development through density bonuses
- Open space requirements for larger developments
- Allow for development to be favorable to small, local businesses - non-corporate.

NO

- Present condition is acceptable
- Not if it is greater than two (2) stories on Santa Cruz Ave.

Additional Comments

- Depends on the impact of the development (visual, traffic)
- Concern about amount and adjacency/proximity of parking
- Improved bike ways and circulation of high importance
- Interest in creating parking structures in existing parking plazas
- Interest to incorporate public open space on top of parking structure
- Interest in reconfiguring Santa Cruz Ave. (Pedestrianize, Remove Median, etc.)
- Concern about safety and accessibility

## STATION #4 - CHARACTER

### 1. What buildings appeal to you on the board? Why?

- Top 6 - [Bldg# (votes)] above: #18 (24), #20 (16), #15 (11)  
below: #24 (11), #16 (10), #27 (10)



- "Old charm", "Village", "Full of character", "Tall buildings that don't look tall", "Friendly"
- "The village character is more about street vibrancy than building massing."
- "Most El Camino Real developments are tacky, barely acceptable. We can do better. Need to push developers to higher aesthetics and creative standards."
- Height variation, scale, color, materials, balconies, step-backs, setbacks, awnings, signage, diversity

### 2. Given what you know about village character, is it appropriate to have buildings taller than two stories in downtown? How much taller?

Total votes: YES (34) vs. NO (7) ---- "In the middle" (22)

#### YES

- Predominantly accepting of 3 stories
- Accepting of four (4) stories if appropriately designed (massing, step-backs, setbacks, materials) and not over bearing.
- Some accepting of five (5) stories (with same conditions applied to four stories)
- Need for good streetscape and ground floor design - "pedestrian friendly"

#### NO

- two (2) stories maximum
- Concern about shading the street

#### Additional Comments

- "No village - call it community!"
- Depends on relationship to context/surroundings
- Residential on upper floors
- Accepting of more than two (2) stories with step-back condition (above two stories)

### ***3. Is it appropriate to have taller buildings on El Camino Real relative to downtown? How much taller?***

YES (36) vs. NO (3) ---- "In the middle" (29)

#### YES

- Predominantly accepting of four (4) stories
- Acceptance of five (5), maximum six (6), stories if appropriately designed (massing, step-backs, setbacks, materials) and not over bearing.
- Height should be biased towards the eastside of El Camino Real
- Need for good landscape design

#### NO

- Existing buildings are blighted - "don't need new buildings over two stories"
- More than two (2) stories is not appropriate for Menlo Park
- "Tall equals ugly - too big for a small town."

#### Additional Comments

- Buildings should front the street - setbacks detract from pedestrian experience
- "Village character is inappropriate for El Camino."
- Need for senior housing
- Uses should be predominantly residential
- Convert existing car lots to medical facilities
- Buildings should undulate in height and massing
- Most fit with overall goals of the City plans

**IV. APPENDIX: WORKSHOP BOARDS + COMMENTS** (under separate cover)

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**2. WORKSHOP COMMENTS:**

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- 2. Vibrancy Page 15
- 3. Public Space Page 27
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**3. WORKSHOP BOARDS:**

- 1. Connectivity
- 2. Vibrancy
- 3. Public Space
- 4. Character