



Menlo Park City Council / Atherton Town Council Special Joint Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, September 25, 2002, 7:00 p.m.

**Menlo Park Council Chamber
801 Laurel Street, Menlo Park**

ROLL CALL - Mayor Schmidt called the special meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. Mayor Pro Tem Kinney, Councilmembers Collacchi, Borak and Jellins were present. Also present were Town of Atherton Mayor Alan Carlson, Vice Mayor Jim Janz, Councilmembers Bill Conwell, Dianne Fisher and Kathy McKeithen. City Manager Boesch, Atherton Town Manager Robinson, City Attorney McClure, Interim City Clerk Wahlsten, Atherton Town Clerk Barker and other department heads were also present.

A. PUBLIC COMMENT – There was no one present wishing to speak.

B. VALPARAISO CORRIDOR STUDY

Staff report introduced by City Manager Boesch. The Valparaiso Corridor Study was prepared by consultant DKS Associates, hired jointly by Menlo Park and Atherton. It was started a year ago to address traffic circulation issues raised by citizens and affecting both communities. Mark Spencer from DKS, together with Jamal Rahimi, Menlo Park's Transportation Manager; Dan Smith, Menlo Park's traffic consultant, and Cliff Temps, Atherton's Director of Public Works, were present to give the report and answer questions.

Dan Smith summarized the report. It focuses on Valparaiso Avenue which is the border between the two jurisdictions, and the intersecting streets. The primary areas of concern included the El Camino/Valparaiso intersection; Valparaiso/University intersection; sidewalks; Sacred Heart Schools' master plan; new driveway approved, but not yet constructed, on Valparaiso to serve the Montessori School; and the Valparaiso/Elena intersection.

Transportation Manager Rahimi reviewed the adaptive signal system being installed in cooperation with Cal Trans at 10 intersections on El Camino Real between Encinal Avenue and Stanford Shopping Center. This gives real time monitoring of traffic. It will be completed in March, 2003 and will have an approximately two months test before it is ready for fine tuning.

Mark Spencer cited the public meetings that have been held to gather input and presented the recommendations in the report addressing each area. They include trimming some landscaping by property owners; restricting left turn access from Valparaiso to and from the Blockbuster commercial center; monitoring the results of Sacred Heart/St. Joseph's new pick-up and drop-off circulation plan off Emilie; monitoring the results of the El Camino Real signal project; installation of traffic signal at Valparaiso and University; possible installation of another traffic signal along the corridor to increase the "platoon" effect; possible operation of a traffic signal during non-peak hours

as an “all-way flashing red” which is the same as a four-way stop; replacing the bots-dots with chatter bars or a raised median in the Victoria Drive/Blockbuster driveway area; and safe walking paths, particularly in the school areas.

Councilmember McKeithen requested a mechanism to insure citizens’ input is heard when the fine tuning of the adaptive signal system takes place. In response to her other queries, Transportation Manager Rahami stated a new traffic signal costs approximately \$150,000; and Mark Spencer stated he has not yet contacted the property owner regarding trimming the vegetation that would improve sight visibility.

Councilmember Jellins asked if any changes in speed could be expected with the proposed changed conditions; what would a signal at University and Valparaiso do for capacity; and why is there a six foot difference in the improved roadway width in the north and south lanes. Mark Spencer stated that it should take less time to get from one end of the corridor to the other, but speeds will not increase; and the signal would allow more through-put traffic. Dan Smith explained that the striped centerline of Valparaiso indicates the city limit lines of the two jurisdictions and that Menlo Park paved its side six feet wider than Atherton has. He noted that the available width should be used for the benefit of the whole street where appropriate, regardless of the city limit lines.

Councilmember Conwell stated that safety is the primary concern. He questioned a traffic signal that functioned part of the time as a four-way stop and asked if sidewalks would narrow the roadway. Mark Spencer stated we would be able to maintain twelve foot travel lanes even with sidewalks. Councilmember Conwell cited a practice in other areas where parents drop off the students at a location away from campus and a bus takes them to campus.

Councilmember Fisher expressed concern that if a traffic signal is installed on either Elena or Emilie it would draw more cars since it would give a protected turn location.

Councilmember Borak cited Menlo Park’s success in working with private schools in terms of traffic control in the neighborhoods and asked how the Valparaiso corridor would function if only one traffic signal at Valparaiso and University were installed. Mark Spencer stated a second signal further west would increase the platooning effect. In response to Councilmember query, Transportation Manager Ramini stated that traffic counts are increasing about one to two percent a year which is consistent throughout the city.

Vice Mayor Janx asked if the new traffic signal on Valparaiso and signals on El Camino would have LED lenses which gives the ability to have battery back-up for continued operation in case of a power outage. Transportation Manger Ramini stated that any new signals would have LED lenses, but total replacement is not part of the El Camino project.

Mayor Pro Tem Kinney asked about using different materials for pathways.

Mayor Carlson asked about the traffic impacts of a new performing arts center which would replace the present 250 seat facility on Sacred Heart’s campus. Mark Spencer stated it depends on where they access the campus. Mayor Carlson also asked if the existing pedestrian lights would be removed if new traffic signals are installed. Mark Spencer stated they would be removed.

Mayor Schmidt asked if there are technical distinctions between sidewalks and paths and if there is any way to model a signal at Valparaiso and Elena. Dan Smith stated that he would have to research any technical differences. Mark Spencer stated it would be difficult to do a computer model on just one signal and better results could be obtained by compiling expert opinions.

Joe Ciancaglini, head of Sacred Heart Schools, Atherton, pointed out some errors in the report as it concerns Sacred Heart. He stated they are in compliance with Atherton’s requirements and their

master plan has been approved. Their campus covers 64 acres and has 7 entrances and exits. The school has agreed to install a road from the Montessori School to Valparaiso but Atherton asked them to delay the project until this study was completed. Their new traffic circulation plan seems to have solved problems on Emilie but they will be conducting an independent traffic study to document traffic counts.

Manisha Agrawal, Atherton, requested bots-dots be replaced with something people can't drive over; restricted left turns out of Blockbuster; and more policing of the "keep clear" zone.

Charlie Schreck, Menlo Park, stated Sacred Heart's master plan should represent long-term plans and not be changed every year; and also suggested dedicated left and right turn lanes from Emilie to Valparaiso could help reduce the vehicle stacking.

Phil Abrahamson, Atherton, stated he attended City Council and Town Council meetings in 1996 on this same issue. He is in favor of replacing the bots-dots with chatter bars or a raised median and asked what the traffic estimates were when the Blockbuster was approved since the peak hours of this study do not match the peak hours of Blockbuster. Mark Spencer responded that the peak hours of this study were the school peak hours.

Charles Marsala, Atherton, suggested that traffic is added to Valparaiso because El Camino Real goes from six to four lanes at that point.

David McAdoo, Director of Operations for Menlo School, pointed out that page 5 of the staff report states that Menlo College could cost share in the traffic signal. That should be Menlo School.

Rich Wipfler, Menlo Park, lives on Valparaiso at its intersection with Emilie and requested that a traffic signal not be installed in his front yard. He asked if a queue of cars trying to access Menlo School would defeat the platoon action afforded by a new traffic signal.

Dan Hilberman, Menlo Park, asked that there be no exit from Sacred Heart at Arbor. He requested coordination on studies of Santa Cruz, Middle and Valparaiso and stated that "no action" should be an option.

M/S Collacchi/Schmidt, to authorize the staffs of the City of Menlo Park and the Town of Atherton to work together to prepare design plans and budget to: 1) modify signal timing at the intersection of El Camino Real and Valparaiso for purposes of reducing current congestion and queuing on Valparaiso; 2) restrict left turn access on Valparaiso to/from the private parking lot near the southwest corner of the intersection; 3) install a traffic signal at the intersection of Valparaiso and University Drive; 4) install chatter bars or raised medians in certain sections of Valparaiso with an analysis of the safety and visibility issues related to each. When it is brought back to Council broader notice will be given to include the owners of the Blockbuster area. Motion carried 10-0 with both City Councils approving unanimously.

It was noted that both Councils will be taking subsequent action on the items that are in their respective jurisdictions. City Manager Robinson noted that the Atherton City Council has included funding for their share of one traffic signal in their budget.

City Manager Boesch stated that this is tentatively scheduled to come back to Council for final action in November.

Councilmembers concurred that this is a historic evening and recommended another joint meeting as soon as there is more information regarding Sacred Heart's Master Plan in order to finalize the remainder of the issues on this corridor. Mayor Carlson thanked Mayor Schmidt for the invitation to meet jointly.

ADJOURNMENT – 10:05 P.M.

Marjorie K. Wahlsten, CMC, City Clerk
Approved by the City Council on October 8, 2002