



CITY COUNCIL STUDY SESSION MINUTES

STUDY SESSION
Tuesday, February 7, 2006
7:00 p.m.
City of Menlo Park
The Menlo Park City Council Chambers
701 Laurel Street
Menlo Park, CA 94025

A. ROLL CALL - Jellins, Fergusson, Cohen, Duboc, Winkler

Staff present - City Manager Boesch, City Attorney McClure and City Clerk Vonderlinden.
Other members of City staff were present.

Mayor Jellins asked those present to recite the pledge of allegiance.

C. STUDY SESSION (*this item was addressed first*)

1. El Camino Real: Past, Present and Future; including presentations on real estate development projects, planning initiatives in process and potential City Council direction to staff. (*There is no staff report associated with this item*)

David Johnson, Business Development Manager, introduced the topic and provided context for the developments on El Camino Real. Walter Martone, Transportation Manager for the City and County Association of Government (C/CAG), shared details about the Grand Boulevard Initiative.

Mayor Jellins suggested taking public comment before going any further.

B. PUBLIC COMMENT

Michelle Harbottle referred to fees incurred during her project (a use permit) and she is seeking clarification from Council on what fees she has to pay.

Steven Van Pelt shared concerns with parking along El Camino Real and with railroad freight cars that get parked on Caltrain tracks as well on Chilco Avenue.

Cal Jones said that when he served in the City Council he was given the opportunity to serve as Mayor. He hopes Council will come up with a policy that is fair and reasonable.

C. STUDY SESSION (continued)

Walter Martone, Transportation Manager for C/CAG, explained that the vision is to have the 14 jurisdictions that have frontage to El Camino Real synchronize their efforts. Mr. Martone outlined various actions C/CAG is initiating to help the process. He commended Menlo Park for being ahead of the process and for its comprehensive approach. Council asked if Menlo Park has applied for the grant and Mr. Boesch said that a possible next step. Mr. Boesch said that a letter was received inviting a Council Member to be part of the steering committee. Ms. Duboc believes we should be coordinating our efforts with Palo Alto. Council asked various questions of Mr. Martone about the process and agencies involved.

Mayor Pro Tem Fergusson is interested in the Grand Boulevard process and Mr. Martone offered to facilitate a meeting to address that topic. Council Member Cohen is aware of the transportation problem and he believes this is a problem for a lot of people and he would like us to work closely with Santa Clara County.

Arlinda Heineck, Community Development Director, provided an historical overview of planning efforts along El Camino Real, followed by a characterization of current zoning and General Plan regulations for El Camino Real and lastly an update on current project activity. She highlighted three studies: 1) the 1970's El Camino Real Southern Pacific Railroad Corridor 2) The Center City Design plan that was undertaken from 1996 to 1998 with the purpose of articulating a future mission for the center of the city, and 3) the Land Use and Circulation Study of 1999-2000. Ms. Heineck shared information about current projects and timelines for each one.

Mayor Jellins invited anticipated applicants to address Council and share details about their projects. They were: 1) William Crowell, with Stanford Park Hotel Partnerships 2) John Baer, representing the former Anderson Chevrolet Truck lot; and, 3) Jeff Warmoth (Sand Hill Property Company) with the former Cadillac property. Each developer shared their vision for their site. Various Council Members asked questions of the developers. Mayor Pro Tem Fergusson asked about the levels of service of Caltrain and she would like to see that body involved in the process.

Public Comment

John Fox asked Council to include "Safe Routes to School" in some of the projects. He supports features that consider cyclists and a breeze way to El Camino Real.

Steve Elliott, with the Stanford Management Company, said that Stanford intends to create a comprehensive plan for its site.

Elizabeth Lasensky opined that she would like to know what can be done to assist the renovation of the Park Theater since one of the properties is close by.

Lennie Roberts, with the Community for Green Foothills, shared her enthusiasm about El Camino Real and she hopes design issues are considered as well as the job/housing imbalance on the Peninsula.

Alex Douglas said that there has been an ongoing parking problem on El Camino Real. He believes that employees who work downtown don't have adequate parking.

City Manager Boesch explained that the purpose tonight is to present information and to hear Council's reactions to conceptual proposals. Council Member Duboc supports the Grand Boulevard Initiative but she worries if it takes too long Menlo Park may lose momentum. Council Member Cohen believes that the overpass idea is a good one because many city buildings are only accessible via car. He supports a parking structure closer to El Camino Real. Council Member Winkler supports the C/CAG grant as well as the Grand Boulevard scheme and she would like this to come back to Council via the priority setting. However, she would like to see the overpass idea tied to the Caltrain grade separation project.

Mayor Pro Tem Fergusson said that she likes taking a regional approach and supports pursuing the C/CAG grant to explore the corridor plan. She believes we have gridlock on El Camino and we are talking about adding more traffic and this needs to be considered. She believes the proposals before Council need to be looked at against the backdrop of the General Plan. Mayor Pro Tem Fergusson would like to know what the public benefit is for each project if it goes over allowed densities. She believes the ability to grant additional square footage should be considered carefully, and she believes the comments made by Lennie Roberts should be addressed. She also concurs with comments made by Mr. Fox about the overpass. She challenges the developers to give incentives to use bikes and walk instead of riding cars. Ms. Fergusson would like to see at every main entrance to Menlo Park signs welcoming people to Menlo Park. As people exit Menlo Park she would like to see "thank you for visiting Menlo Park" signs. She believes this would set us apart and she would like to see this as a potential project for next year.

Mayor Jellins believes there is a cycle of development, and while the City may provide some incentive to see things occur, there isn't much Council can do. He believes Council will not approve projects that will have major detrimental environmental impacts in our community. He would like to hear from the public and welcomes involvement by property owners. He would also welcome an El Camino that is defined by the C/CAG efforts, he invites further involvement of CalTrain to enable a vibrant traffic plan. He believes Council will need to address increasing density needs. Council Member Duboc said that maybe it is time to explore five-story development. Council discussed higher density and some Council Members said that it would be a trade off and it depends on what it can get us. Mr. Cohen agreed with the Mayor and Ms. Duboc. However, he said the Council can't do it alone but is encouraged by a Council that wants to make this city pedestrian friendly. Mr. Cohen asked the audience to speak amongst themselves and discuss higher density, bicycle overpass, parking structure and come up with a plan the Council can't resist.

Council Member Winkler said that she agrees with applying for the grant because a lot of the planning issues will be addressed. She added that density and transportation feed off each other and she would be looking for shuttles that would move people around our city. She supports a functional, distinguishing feature in Menlo Park and she would like Council to consider something that will be added to Menlo Park and make it special. She is not afraid of the density as long as there is a plan to handle some of the problems that come with it. Mayor Pro Tem Fergusson said that it is important to view the interactions with the developers as a negotiation with density and public benefit as points for discussion. Ms. Fergusson said that the Park Theater was an architectural gem and she asked developers to meet with the owner to reopen it. Ms. Fergusson believes that the El Camino, Alma, Caltrain corridor is the sensible area to accommodate higher densities. Mayor Jellins believes this is a break from the past. Ms. Duboc said it is important to take care of the aging population and she would consider higher density senior housing.

City Manager Boesch was asked to present a summary: Mr. Boesch said he is encouraged by the discussion and believes there is an emerging coherence to what is being discussed. Next steps may include projects that will come back to the City Council as part of its annual priority setting session, in terms of follow on actions that will require a commitment of economic or staff resources; secondly, staff will follow-up with property owners present tonight and absent. He mentioned that there are other planning design studies that need to be integrated. Mr. Boesch added that the next step is to have a plan of action based on tonight's discussion and bring it back to Council in a variety of forms in the upcoming weeks and months ahead. Mayor Jellins asked for a list of major relevant policies or issues that need to be considered by Council that can or should be resolved or addressed and for Council to discuss. Mr. Jellins would hope that this happens again in the coming year. Mr. Jellins said that Councils change over the years and this Council is setting something in motion but this is just a point in time to get it started. Ms. Duboc specified that an attractive parking structure might be considered by the Stanford Park Hotel and on the 1300 El Camino Real she would like the Derry project to be involved.

Mr. Jellins said that minutes from the Council of Cities meeting had been received. He added that next week there will be a Closed Session on Bayfront Park and if there is anything to report then it will come to the public. Mayor Pro Tem Fergusson reminded the public that there are three upcoming Budget Workshops and she encouraged residents to attend.

D. ADJOURNMENT – the Study Session adjourned at 9:58 pm.

Respectfully submitted

Silvia M. Vonderlinden, CMC

Approved at the Council Meeting of March 21, 2006.