



**CITY COUNCIL AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCY
MINUTES**

Tuesday, June 10, 2008

7:00 p.m.

**701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025
Menlo Park City Council Chambers**

ROLL CALL – Cohen, Robinson, Boyle, Cline, Fergusson

Staff present: City Manager Rojas, Assistant City Manager Steffens, City Attorney McClure and City Clerk Kelly. Other staff was present in the audience.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

A. PUBLIC COMMENT

Stuart Soffer said that by considering approving a deficit budget for FY 2008-09, the Council is making a risky assumption that the City's past financial performance will hold.

B. STUDY SESSION

1. **Consideration of the revised draft El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan and discussion of potential next steps for the visioning process. ([Staff Report #08-076](#))**

Thomas Rogers, Associate Planner, provided background and history on the El Camino Real Downtown visioning process and informed the Council that the City's consultant, Design, Community and Environment (DCE), will present the draft El Camino Real Downtown Vision Plan. He stated that the goal of the study session is for the Council to ask questions and provide feedback to the consultant that will be incorporated into a revised draft Plan.

David Early, founding principal of DCE, reminded the Council that what is before them is a vision plan for the El Camino Real Downtown area, not a specific plan. He pointed out that this is the first phase in a two phase process and that Phase II would include an implementation plan. He said the implementation steps would include a community involvement strategy and might include a specific plan and zoning ordinance amendments; streetscape plans; design guidelines; traffic studies; and analysis of financial feasibility. He said it might also include a retail recruitment strategy; formation of business or parking improvement districts; public/private partnerships; and identification of grant opportunities to fund projects. He indicated that the implementation phase would also require full environmental and technical analysis.

Mr. Early reviewed the process to date, which included meetings of the Oversight and Outreach Committee, mobile and walking tours, stakeholder interviews, community surveys and workshops, a speaker series, and a Planning Commission workshop. He stated that the draft Plan includes a vision statement, 12 goals, which are broad ideas for the future of the vision plan area, and objectives under each goal, which are more specific direction for achieving each goal.

Tom Ford, principal of DCE, identified the 12 goals and discussed some of the objectives under each of the goals. The goals include:

- Maintain a village character unique to Menlo Park
- Provide greater east-west, town-wide connectivity
- Improve circulation and streetscape conditions on El Camino Real
- Ensure that El Camino Real Development is sensitive to adjacent neighborhoods
- Revitalize underutilized parcels and buildings
- Activate the train station area
- Protect and enhance pedestrian amenities on Santa Cruz Avenue
- Expand shopping, dining and neighborhood services to ensure a vibrant downtown
- Provide residential opportunities in the vision plan area
- Provide park and plaza spaces
- Provide an integrated, safe and well-designed pedestrian and bicycle network
- Develop parking strategies and facilities that meet the commercial and residential needs of the community

In response to questions raised by members of the Council, Mr. Early said that while the timeline for Phase 1 was fairly ambitious, he did not believe that adding more time would have resulted in more resolution or different results. He stated that Phase II could take anywhere from one to two years to complete. Mr. Early informed the Council that consensus was defined as a mid-point that most people would support or a broad representation of a large number of participants in the process. Mr. Ford stated that Phase II should include additional community input, especially with property owners and other key stakeholders. Mr. Early explained that if properties are up-zoned, the property owners derive increased value to their properties and that cities will sometimes require the property owner to contribute to public benefits as a condition for the change in zoning. A public benefit could include providing parking, streetscape improvements, better design, or other amenities.

Members of the public commented as follows:

Clem Maloney thanked the Council and staff for their decision to reach out with the visioning process. He mentioned that one presenter in the speaker series emphasized: 1) land use planning has a major impact on global warming and that transit oriented housing is a key way that city leaders can set forth a future that will not increase global warming and 2) society needs to invest in smart growth. He expressed his belief that the 12 goals and the objectives will help the City make quality decisions. He indicated that he plans to stay involved in the process.

Lou Deziel, Planning Commission, said that there was a wide range of public opinion, and some people did not feel their points were included. As a result, the Commission asked that the consultant revise the plan to include the array of options that the community had raised during the process.

Howard Crittenden, owner of Park Theater, asked that any reference to the Park Theater being maintained as a cultural amenity be removed from the plan, since this will only be accomplished if it makes financial sense. He also said that he does not believe that this statement represents the consensus of public input into this process.

Elizabeth Lasensky expressed her desire to move into Phase II and stated that the City has an opportunity to develop the downtown and its corridors for mixed use and mixed income use.

Fran Dehn said that the Chamber would like the City to move forward with Phase II and implementation of a plan that encourages compatible mixed used development with quality design and construction standards; supports a housing element to meet the needs of all segments of the community; development of floor area ratios and densities that support the City's evolving demographics; implementation of zoning and plans with design specific elements; acknowledgement of long rather than short term impacts of change; provides public spaces, services and cultural assets that enhance quality of life; recognize, preserves and supports community values and assets.

Margie Rosinski felt the City has done a good job of soliciting public opinion. However, she said that at a recent workshop the process was disorganized and she did not feel comfortable that the comments obtained from that workshop reflected the group.

Ben Eiref said that the process has been great, with lots of public participation. He cautioned that it important to keep moving forward so as not to lose momentum, and stated his desire to stay involved in the process.

Margaret Garland said that El Camino Real is a blighted area because of its many vacant buildings and that something needs to done. She suggested that if developers make money from developing this area, they should be required to give something back to the community. Ms. Garland expressed concern that zoning regulations will be changed to benefit developers and that residents might lose their properties through eminent domain. She asked the Council to consider green issues, both in the construction of buildings and in providing green zones between buildings.

Henry Riggs stated that the downtown is waiting for the Council to take action. He acknowledged that compromise is hard to reach on volatile issues, but believed that this process has achieved more in finding the community's center than some may want to admit. He praised staff and the consultants for their work on this process.

Richard Draeger, Draeger Supermarkets, said he would like to see this process move into Phase II. He pointed out that the downtown is unique in that it consists of mostly one-of-a-kind local businesses, whose owners and employees live and contribute to the community. He said Draeger supports complimentary mixed use development, higher density housing, and improved traffic circulation.

Charlie Bourne felt that the housing goals and objectives are divisive and should be removed from the plan. He questioned the interpretation of the data collected through the residential surveys.

Reg Rice informed the Council that the surveys ranked improving traffic flow on El Camino Real as the highest ranking transportation issue. He agreed with this assessment, but said it was not reiterated in the workshops and suggested another survey go out in Phase II.

Vincent Bressler informed the Council that one issue discussed at the Planning Commission was instituting a process and quantifying the value of a public benefit. He also stated his belief that the community would be supportive of bold ideas and it is

important to have bold ideas included in the plan. He suggested one bold idea would be the undergrounding of the intersection at Ravenswood and El Camino Real.

Sheila Rose commended the City for this process, but felt more outreach is necessary before moving into Phase II. She stated her opposition to any rezoning of any residential property and any three story buildings being built on the west side of El Camino Real.

Katie Ferrick thanked the Council for the vision process and expressed her support for moving forward with Phase II. She offered to continue to serve in any manner she can be of assistance.

The City Attorney informed the public that the City has no intent, as part of this process, to use eminent domain or to rezone residential properties.

Vice Mayor Robinson commented on each of the 12 goals. In summary: 1) he wasn't sure he supported the recommendation for grade separation at Oak Grove, but could support it at Ravenswood; 2) he agreed any increase in building heights needs to be sensitive to adjoining neighborhoods; 3) he supported removing specific comments about the Park Theater; 4) he suggested that one way traffic on Santa Cruz be considered; 4) he asked how underground parking would be paid for; 5) he liked the idea of a downtown shuttle bus; 6) he acknowledged that the housing issue is going to be a challenge and needs to get community consensus; and 7) he expressed support for a bike path lane extending to the downtown. The Vice Mayor pointed out that a lot of these issues can't be resolved until Phase II and felt that it is important to keep the momentum going on this process.

Councilmember Fergusson said there is a lot of good content in the plan, but that what she found missing are: 1) the concept of a "green alley", which means developing a regional retail focus on green technology and alternative fuel vehicles on El Camino Real; 2) mention of the trees and the efforts of Trees for Menlo Park; and 3) Allied Arts, which is important to the City's architecture and history. She stated her preference to consider grade separation at Ravenswood, but to leave Oak Grove as an option. She questioned assumptions stated in the plan that: 1) standardizing cross-sections would improve traffic flow; 2) the location of a hotel next to a major hotel rather than throughout the City; and 3) there is not much of a market for retail and restaurants on the north end of El Camino Real. She stated her desire to see more family type restaurants in the mix; to have an extraordinary landscaping plan, using conservation methods, for the downtown; to include gateway signage to entrances to the City; and to have more convenient train service, especially during rush hours. She also stated her desire to have the Fire District work with property owners to identify seismic vulnerable buildings.

Councilmember Cline stated that there is some confusion as to what should be accomplished in Phase I and what will be accomplished in Phase II. He stated his belief that the economics of specific proposals should be considered in Phase II. He agreed that there should be consideration of grade separation at Ravenswood with an option an Oak Grove. He also expressed the belief that passive plazas and parks could be accomplished without undergrounding and sidewalks on Santa Cruz need to be wider. He also stated that the City needs to crystallize the concept of connecting the east and west side of the downtown. Councilmember Cline stated that the community is split on the housing issue and that there appears to be a lot of support for the concept of a train station plaza.

Councilmember Boyle said that he thinks of the visioning process as a continuum and that the vision plan provides the framework to explore and determine if some of the elements are viable. He stated that he generally supports all 12 of the goals as a reasonable set of statements to progress the discussion. He said the visioning process used a series of tools including surveys, tours, workshops, speaker series, and community meetings and that they depended on staff and their consultant to pull together all of the different input and form a reasonable aggregation of the information obtained from the community. Councilmember Boyle said that the plan should stress that part of the vision is variety, and that it should be clear that when talking about up-zoning, this is not meant to be universal up-zoning, and not every building is being proposed to be three stories tall. He asked that the needs of bicyclists and pedestrians, which are not necessarily the same and are sometimes in conflict with each other, be better identified. He acknowledged that the parking goals and traffic flow issues will need to be further explored in Phase II and that Phase II should provide more specificity for all of the goals and objectives. He stated that the housing statement does a reasonable job of capturing the community's feelings in wanting more housing in the downtown.

Mayor Cohen stated his appreciation for comments made by members of the public and the Council. He expressed support for comments made, in particular, regarding the need to require public benefit compensation from developers; to include bold statements as part of the plan; to eliminate the vacant car lots on El Camino Real; recognize and resolve issues related to pedestrians and bicyclists; keep undergrounding as an option; and to reclaim the surface area of Santa Cruz currently used for parking.

In response to questions raised by members of the Council, Mr. Rogers stated that the next steps would be for the consultant to revise the draft plan based on Council's feedback and to return to the Council on July 15, 2008 with a revised draft Vision Plan for Council's consideration and acceptance. In addition Mr. Rogers stated that the consultant will prepare artistic perspective renderings and will present implementation strategies for Phase II. He stated that a newsletter will also be sent to the public describing the revised draft Vision Plan and inviting the public to provide input at the Council meeting of July 15, 2008.

By Council consensus, the Council directed staff and the consultant to revise the draft Vision Plan based on Council's feedback and return to Council on July 15, 2008 with the revised plan, including artistic perspective renderings and recommendations for implementation of Phase II. Council also directed staff to finalize Phase I by sending out a newsletter and inviting the public to the meeting of July 15, 2008.

C. ADJOURNMENT – Adjourned at 12:00 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry M. Kelly, City Clerk

Approved at the Council meeting of August 5, 2008