



PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

May 4, 2009

7:00 p.m.

City Council Chambers

701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025

CALL TO ORDER – 7:02 p.m.

ROLL CALL – Bressler, Ferrick, Kadvany, Keith (7:05 p.m.), O'Malley (Vice chair), Pagee, Riggs (Chair)

INTRODUCTION OF STAFF – Deanna Chow, Senior Planner; Megan Fisher, Associate Planner; Justin Murphy; Development Services Manager

A. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There was none.

B. CONSENT

1. Approval of minutes from the March 23, 2009, Planning Commission meeting.

Commission Action: Consensus to approve the minutes as submitted.

Motion carried 4-0-2 with Commissioners Ferrick and Kadvany abstaining and Commissioner Keith absent.

C. PUBLIC HEARING

1. Architectural Control and Environmental Review/City of Menlo Park/600 Alma Street: Proposal to demolish the existing 17,400-square-foot gymnasium and gymnastics building and construct a new 22,500-square-foot gymnastics facility (plus a 1,400-square-foot locker room expansion) at the location of the existing gymnasium and gymnastics building, a new 25,700-square-foot gymnasium in an area between the existing Recreation Center and Alma Street, and associated site improvements located at the Civic Center Complex in the P-F (Public Facilities) zoning district. *This public hearing will be an opportunity to provide comments on the content of the Draft Environment Impact Report (DEIR) prepared for the project.*

Staff Comment: Planner Fisher said that the public hearing was to receive public and Commission comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) prepared for the Burgess gymnasium and gymnastics center project.

(Commissioner Keith arrived at this point in the meeting.)

Planner Fisher said the staff report highlighted the transportation section of the DEIR. She said two comment letters were received by staff since the publication of the staff report, and those had been distributed to the Commissioners at the dais. She said the first letter from Ms. Patty Fry commented on parking counts for the DEIR, impacts from construction traffic and parking, and impacts to the Alma Street and Ravenswood Avenue intersection from the proposed project. Planner Fisher said that responses to Ms. Fry's comments would be written as part of the Response to Comments document. Planner Fisher noted that as part of the traffic study there had been an analysis of the Alma Street and Ravenswood Avenue intersection for a.m. left turn and through movement restriction. She said these measures would be in place this summer or fall.

Planner Chow said the second letter was from Ms. Nancy Borgeson and was about the energy demand and energy usage of the proposed project. Planner Fisher said that Appendix B of the Initial Study, which became Appendix A of the DEIR, was a global climate change memo that discussed how the project would comply with the state's greenhouse gas emission reduction strategy. She said that the project architect would submit a LEED checklist with a future re-submittal, which would discuss energy demand and usage for project. She said Ms. Borgeson letter would be responded to in the Response to Comments document. She said that several members of the City's Public Works Department staff were present to answer questions. She said that Ms. Shannon Allen, LSA, the firm preparing the EIR, would make a short presentation.

Ms. Shannon Allen, LSA, said the purpose of the meeting was to receive both oral and written comments on the adequacy of the DEIR. She said that written comments would be received until the close of business on May 26, 2009. She said comments should be very specific as to the adequacy and the content of the DEIR. She noted that there would be other public meetings at which people might comment on the merits of the proposed project itself. She said the CEQA process for the project included preparation of an Initial Study and a Notice of Preparation that was released on November 20, 2008. She said the Commission held a scoping session on December 13, 2008 after which the DEIR was prepared and released on April 9, 2009 with a public review through May 26, 2009. She said upon the close of the public review period that the City and LSA would take all of the comments and respond in writing in a Response to Comments document. She said the Final EIR would include the DEIR and the Response to Comments document. She said that the Final EIR was expected to come before the Planning Commission at their June 29, 2009 meeting and then to the City Council for certification in late July 2009.

Ms. Allen said the project considered in the DEIR was the construction of a new 25,700-square-foot gymnasium in the vacant area between the existing Recreation Center and

Alma Street. She said this was the impetus for the DEIR and this building was planned and budgeted for construction. She said the next step would be the demolition of the 17,400 square foot existing gymnasium and gymnastics center, which would occur at a later date after the construction of the gymnasium, and after the City Council reviewed a conceptual design and the funding for the gymnastic center. She said this future project would include a 22,500 square foot gymnastics facility and 1,400 square foot expansion of the locker room associated with the pool. She said this part of the project was not funded but under CEQA it was required to look at the entire project as part of the environmental review. She said the DEIR was a focused environmental impact report on transportation, circulation, and parking as all other issue topics were addressed in the Initial Study. She said the near term and long range conditions of the project would cause an increase in a delay of 0.8 seconds or more at critical intersections. She said that a 0.8 seconds delay was a significant impact as established by the City of Menlo Park, and would affect the intersections of El Camino Real and Ravenswood Avenue, Middlefield Road and Ravenswood Avenue, Middlefield Road and Linfield Drive, and Middlefield and Willow Roads. She said the near term and long range conditions of the project would cause an increase in delay on roadway segments including Linfield Drive between Middlefield Road and Sherwood Way, Waverly Street between Willow Road and Alma Street, Ravenswood Avenue between Alma Street and El Camino Real, Ravenswood Avenue between Laurel and Alma Streets, and Middlefield Road between Ravenswood Avenue and Willow Road. She said that mitigation measures were proposed for the impacts on these intersections and roadway segments including implementation of a Transportation Demand Management Program, payment of traffic mitigation fees, and funding contributions for the future improvement of the intersection of El Camino Real and Ravenswood Avenue. She said that these mitigation measures however would not reduce impacts to less than significant levels. She said at several intersections the construction of through or turn lanes would reduce impacts; however, roadway widening was not feasible. She said the project would result in significant unavoidable traffic impacts.

Ms. Allen said the DEIR included an analysis of parking. She said the existing parking supply and demand at the Civic Center was surveyed and the future conditions of the parking demand of the project were analyzed. She said it was found that the existing parking supply would accommodate the parking demand both on weekdays and weekends and when school was either in session or out of session.

Ms. Allen said the DEIR also included a discussion of project alternatives and looked at a "no project" alternative as required under CEQA, evaluated the combined facilities alternative, which assumed that the existing gymnasium and gymnastics center would be demolished and replaced with a new 37,500 square foot combined gymnasium and gymnastics building, and a renovation alternative to renovate the existing 17,400 square foot gymnastics center and gymnasium for a gymnastics center and construction of a 22,800 square foot gymnasium on the gymnasium project site near the Recreation Center.

Ms. Allen said the next step after the close of the public review period would be the City and LSA's preparation of responses to comments received on the DEIR. She said the Planning Commission would then be asked to make a recommendation to the City Council to certify the Final EIR and at future meetings, the Commission would consider architectural control.

Recognized by the Chair, Planner Fisher said the staff report stated that the Resolution of Intent to Abandon a Section of Alma Way and Mielke Drive would be considered by the City Council, but in fact would occur at the Council's June 2 meeting.

Questions of Staff: Commissioner Pagee said item 7 on page 36 of the DEIR indicated a list of the approved planned developments in Menlo Park, and asked if that was available. Planner Fisher said the list was in the City's TIA and she had emailed that list to Commissioner Pagee earlier that day in response to Commissioner Pagee's email.

Commissioner Pagee said she googled intersections discussed in the DEIR and found discrepancies for the Alma Street and Ravenswood Avenue intersection and the Middlefield Road and Ringwood Avenue intersection between the actual configuration of that intersection and what was shown in the figure in the DEIR. Ms. Lisa Ekers, the City's Engineering Services Manager, said the figures such as figure 4-2 depicted traffic movement and not traffic lanes. She said also there was different symbology used for those intersections with a traffic signal. She said that the legend indicated lane geometry, but the lanes shown were not exclusive lanes, rather depictions of traffic movement.

Commissioner Bressler said that when the Commission considered a variance there were findings to make which helped clarify the decision process. He asked what the purpose of an EIR was and whether there were defined criteria to weigh benefits against impacts. Development Services Manager Murphy said there was CEQA, state law and guidelines for preparing the document and its purpose was to share information about a project with decision makers who would ultimately have to consider the merits and impacts of the project. He said with the Final EIR there were findings that would be made, and in this instance because there were significant unavoidable impacts that a Statement of Overriding Considerations would be needed and it was then that the decision makers would weigh the impacts against the impacts. Commissioner Bressler said this was a subjective process. Ms. Allen said that CEQA was required by law. She said the process of preparing the DEIR, receiving comments and responding to those for the Final EIR created a public information document. She said that the Statement of Overriding Considerations was a structured document and decision makers had to weigh the benefits of a project against the negative impacts.

Chair Riggs said El Camino Real was not addressed but there was a reference to a right hand turn off El Camino Real onto Ravenswood Avenue. Ms. Allen said DKS was the traffic consultant and she was not certain if there was such a reference.

Commissioner Pagee said residents had written letters questioning the choice of February as the study period for parking. Ms. Allen said that was discussion between DKS and the City. Mr. Nathan Scribner, Engineering Services, said they looked at July, a busy month and high use but no school, and chose February as a month when school would be in session. He said that it was not possible to study every scenario. He said in February they did a Wednesday sampling and a weekend sampling. Commissioner Pagee said there was no spring or fall survey. Mr. Scribner said that was correct. Commissioner Pagee said that she would have liked a more thorough survey as the basis for determining the parking needs.

Chair Riggs asked if it was reasonable to expect that a measurement could be done before the end of the school year. Ms. Ekers asked if the question was to do an additional survey before the end of this school year. Chair Riggs said that was correct. Ms. Ekers said that the DEIR had been prepared based on the survey that looked at July and February. She said the playing fields were open in February. She said planned closures were often when the fields would be most at use otherwise. She said staff in the response to comments would look over the schedules when the survey was done. Commissioner Kadvany asked if the survey was done with every car counted or a snapshot. Mr. Scribner said each lot was checked every half hour from early in the morning to late in the evening.

Public Comment: Mr. Greg Conlon, Menlo Park, said he was representing his daughter who lives on Burgess Drive. He said that it did not appear the proposed new gymnasium would have a significant visual impact on the neighborhood, but he suggested placement of a tree at the intersection of the skateboard facility and the new construction as that would screen the new building looking north from Burgess Lane.

Mr. Don Brawner, Menlo Park, said he was shocked with the traffic counts. He questioned how the City could look at the proposed project without knowing what would transpire with high speed rail. He said if that occurred there most likely would be no Alma Street. He said he appreciated the donors for the project but had concerns with it. He said the objectives of the project was to accommodate 1,400 gymnastic participants and meets, 26 youth basketball team and meets, 54 adult basketball teams and meets, and possibly 56 girls volley ball teams and meets. He said 56,000 square feet of gymnasium was a lot for the City and noted there were gyms on the other side of freeway as well as a couple in Atherton. He questioned the demolition of the Burgess gym and was concerned with dirt, noise and traffic impacts on the neighbors. He said the small problems of the existing gym could be resolved with a little work. He noted the near term levels of service charts in Section 4 Transportation and Circulation, and that there were no mitigations to reduce impacts to less than significant. He said there would be major traffic problems on the inside streets as well. He said the only alternatives looked at reducing square footage; he said other sites should be looked at alternatively such as Nealon Park, the Fremont School site or along El Camino Real.

Chair Riggs closed the public hearing.

Commission Comment: Commissioner O'Malley said that any major new project in town with traffic concerns would require the Council to issue a statement of overriding consideration. He said he agreed with Ms. Fry's comments about parking and traffic. He said he also agreed with Ms. Borgeson letter related to energy impact and usage. He questioned the conclusions of the parking study and noted he did not have confidence in the assumptions made about parking.

Commissioner Ferrick said the proposed location was good because of its proximity to Caltrain and other recreational services. She suggested additional bike racks and additional parking along Alma Street to alleviate traffic and parking problems. She said the Commission had previously raised concerns about the possibility of high speed rail impacting Alma Street and had been assured by Public Works Director Steffens that would not occur. She said also the Commission had suggested gray water reclamation, energy efficient lighting and the potential use of solar panels.

Commissioner Keith indicated concurrence with the comments made, and emphasized the concerns about the adequacy of the parking.

Commissioner Bressler said parking spot checks should be done during periods of heavy use.

Commissioner Kadvany said the findings on the parking were misleading as the studies assume all six parking lots were equally useful to Burgess patrons. He said that people expect to park reasonably close to their Burgess destinations and that the Alma lot, next closest to the Library after its adjacent lot, was 1/4 of a mile away from the Library. That distance, he said, would be considerable for children or seniors, and wondered what options might be for handicap parking. He said he supported the gym projects, but thought the proposed gym would not be used optimally because of parking limitations. With multiple intersection ratings increasing to level F, he said it made sense to consider cumulative traffic impacts of other proposed projects on or near El Camino Real. He said that the new gym might be better sited on El Camino Real, directly across from Burgess Park, if combined with the much-discussed proposal of a bike/pedestrian tunnel near Middle Avenues. He said the facility seems to be shoehorned into the proposed site in terms of its size and the available land. The alternate site, he said, would allow for optimal use of the new gym.

Commissioner Keith asked about the outcome of discussions with SRI about parking. Engineering Services Manager Ekers said the status was unchanged and SRI was willing to discuss overflow traffic if needed. She said there had been no discussion since the parking analysis was done but believed the option to be viable.

Chair Riggs said there was a challenge in obtaining additional land to site the project but expanding the campus would be a benefit. He said at least half of the westsiders use El Camino Real to go right on Ravenswood Avenue to get to Burgess Drive. He said an added turn lane from El Camino Real if needed would be achievable as the City owns the parcel at the corner.

Planner Fisher said that as part of the 1700 El Camino Real Project that there would be required traffic mitigation to design improvements to the intersection to add another lane to turn from El Camino Real and that the Burgess Gym Project would contribute \$20,000 toward those improvements.

Chair Riggs said that Ms. Fry in her letter and two of the Commissioners had questioned the use of February as a study month for parking. He said Ms. Fry's concerns about construction traffic and parking were valid, and he said a construction related traffic plan was needed. He said there might be a temporary road built out to Laurel Drive so that undue burden was not put on Burgess Drive and the southerly neighborhoods. He thought that parking lot 5 might handle construction vehicles and equipment. He said that traffic mitigation for Alma Street and Ravenswood other than taking the long way around should be looked at. He said he agreed with Ms. Borgeson comments and hoped that if current funding or other reasons meant solar panels on the roof could not be installed that at least the project would include conduit and location for special meters for PG&E. He said the City of San Francisco was considering leasing a large roof to a third party as that party could get tax deduction and could provide upfront costs. He said he would like to hear from the architect on how to attain passive solar. He asked if the pool used solar power for heating. Engineering Services Manager Ekers said the pool was heated by both solar and gas. Chair Riggs said that parking lots 3 and 6 would be most impacted and noted that those lots were the ones he used the most. He said the need to park at a distance reinforced the need for short-loop transit. He asked about the rows of heritage trees on the west side of the existing gym and whether any of those would be removed. Mr. Scribner noted that part of the project was not finalized but there potentially could be some conflict because of what would be the footprint of the gymnastics center. He said buildings would be designed around some of the larger oaks.

Commissioner Pagee said she agreed with all of the comments made by the other Commissioners. She said that traffic would queue on Alma Street to get to the library or gym. She said people did not understand the no left turn onto Ravenswood and she thought that some type of arterial was needed there. She said children in Menlo Park were encouraged to bike but there was a traffic problem. She said that the SRI parking lot was nowhere near this site. She said that West Menlo residents liked to park near the library and that people in general wanted to park near their destination. She said since the gym would face parking lot 6 that there should be easy access from the parking lot on Burgess to the new gym. She said the pathway from Laurel Drive through Burgess Drive to the back of the gym should be well defined and accessible. She said related to energy use that the building would have to comply with Title 24, which meant windows would be double paned, and insulation and energy efficient lighting would be needed. She said the project should also design for passive ventilation. She said she was somewhat disappointed to see the design duplicate City Hall; she thought the new gym could be in the same style as City Hall but elevated to a different level. She said she agreed with the one public speaker about the addition of trees for screening.

2. **Architectural Control and Use Permit/Susan Burns/4025 Bohannon Drive:**
Request for a use permit and architectural control for exterior modifications and interior remodeling of an existing one-story building that is nonconforming with regard to parking in the M-2 zoning (General Industrial) district. ***Continued to the meeting of May 18, 2009 at the request of the applicant.***

D. REGULAR BUSINESS

1. **2009-2010 Capital Improvement Program/General Plan Consistency:**
Consideration of consistency of the 2009-2010 Capital Improvement Program with the General Plan.

Staff Comment: City Public Works Department Senior Civil Engineer Matt Ocamou said that the Capital Improvement Program was arranged in a slightly different format than in prior years by General Plan goals or policies. He said the Commission was being asked to consider the consistency of the 2009-2010 Capital Improvement Program with the General Plan.

Questions of Staff: Commissioner Kadvany asked if there was an update related to the bike tunnel and a plan for a study. Senior Civil Engineer Ocamou said he understood that the Transportation and Bicycle Commissions had discussed possible routes and locations for an undercrossing with staff, but there was no final decision on the route. Commissioner Kadvany said he thought there had been an engineering feasibility study done. Engineering Services Manager Ekers said there had been a site analysis done and the consultant had led several meetings with the community and with the Transportation and Bicycle Commissions. She said both commissions made recommendations, which staff was now reviewing in consultation with the City Attorney. She said that they would develop a plan line which would come to the Commission after the City Council adopted a notice of intention to adopt a plan line. Commissioner Kadvany asked whether a preliminary feasibility analysis could be done or if the location had to be determined first. Engineering Services Manager Ekers said that the location would need to be determined in the plan view for future planning purposes and that included development of concept drawings that looked at the height of the berm and the potential width of high speed rail. She said there were alternatives representing possible approaches based on the existing location of the tracks.

Chair Riggs closed public comment.

Commission Action: M/S Keith/Pagee to find all components of the 2009-10 Capital Improvement Program consistent with the General Plan.

Chair Riggs asked about the Onetta Harris Community Center Gym Floor Project. Mr. Ocamou said that \$30,000 was budgeted for the project which was to sand the floor of the gym and refinish it. Chair Riggs asked if the Bike Lane and Parking Mitigation Study

would be done just within Menlo Park or whether it would be coordinated with surrounding jurisdictions. Engineering Services Manager Ekers said that it was within Menlo Park but where there were other jurisdictions the Transportation staff coordinated with those other jurisdictions to greatest degree possible. Chair Riggs said on Ringwood Avenue that the bike lane was pretty much abandoned and used for parking and drop off to Menlo Atherton High School. He said Ringwood Avenue connected the main area of the City with northerly neighborhoods and asked whether the City had a relationship to allow for discussion about the bike lane with the administrative neighbors. Engineering Services Manager Ekers said there was. She noted that Ringwood Avenue near the location of Laurel School would have bike lane improvements funded by grant funds, and that there had been extensive dialogue between the City and County about those planned improvements. She said there were not any designated bike lanes for the remainder of Ringwood Avenue that was within the County's jurisdiction.

Commissioner Ferrick asked for clarification on the costs of individual projects. Mr. Ocamou said the Burgess Gym Project would cost the most and the Kelly Park improvements would have significant cost and were funded by Measure T. He said the Sharon Heights' Pump Project was projected at \$2,000,000. He said the paving project would be funded from several sources. He said the Sidewalk Project and the Reservoir Reroofing Project would each cost \$325,000. He said the overall expense of the 2009-10 Capital Improvement Program was about \$18,000,000.

Chair Riggs said the motion on the floor was to make the findings that the 2009-10 Capital Improvement Program was consistent with the General Plan, and called for the vote.

Motion carried 7-0.

E. COMMISSION BUSINESS

1. Review of planning items on City Council agendas.
 - A. El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan (Phase II) Process

Planner Chow said the Oversight and Outreach Committee would meet on May 21 and the next workshop would be June 18.

B. Gross Floor Area Zoning Ordinance Amendment

Planner Chow said that the City Council adopted the Gross Floor Area Zoning Ordinance Amendment on April 21.

C. 1706 El Camino Real – Traffic Impact Analysis Determination

Planner Chow said the City Council at its April 21 meeting found that the traffic impact was less than significant by unanimous vote, and the applicant was proceeding with the preparation of a Mitigated Negative Declaration.

D. Burgess Gymnasium and Gymnastics Center

Planner Chow said on May 19 the Council would hear an informational item on the proposed Burgess Gymnasium and Gymnastics Center Project and on June would consider a Resolution of Intent to Abandon a Portion of Alma Way and Mielke Way, which would then come to the Commission for consideration of that action's conformance with the General Plan.

The Study Session tentatively scheduled for June 29, 2009 would become a Regular Meeting, if needed, to consider architectural control for the Burgess gymnasium project and the consistency with the General Plan of the Notice of Intent to Abandon a Portion of Alma Way and Mielke Way.

Planner Chow said that Commissioners met with City Attorney McClure for training and a refresher on the Brown Act. Chair Riggs said there were several Commissioners present.

F. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

There were none.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:34 p.m.

Staff Liaison: Deanna Chow, Senior Planner

Recording Secretary: Brenda Bennett