

PLANNING COMMISSION MINUTES

Regular Meeting
November 4, 2013 at 7:00 p.m.
City Council Chambers
701 Laurel Street, Menlo Park, CA 94025

CALL TO ORDER – 7:01 p.m.

ROLL CALL – Bressler, Eiref (Vice Chair), Ferrick, Kadvany (Chair), Onken (absent), Riggs, Strehl (departed during item D1)

INTRODUCTION OF STAFF – Arlinda Heineck, Community Development Director; Kyle Perata, Associate Planner; Thomas Rogers, Senior Planner

A. REPORTS AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

- A1. Update on Pending Planning Items
 - a. El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan Initial Review City Council November 19, 2013

Senior Planner Rogers reported that the City Council was scheduled to conduct the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan Initial Review at its November 19 meeting.

B. PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were none.

C. CONSENT

C1. Approval of minutes from the October 7, 2013 Planning Commission meeting

Commission Action: M/S Strehl/Riggs to approve the minutes with the following modifications.

- Page 17, 4th paragraph, 2nd line: Replace "Chair Kadvany said it was to have the ability with a project below the current threshold values that because of some unusual aspect would negotiate for public benefit. He said if the threshold was low the City had retained that option." with "Chair Kadvany said it was to have the ability, for a project below the current threshold values, to have the option to negotiate for public benefit. He said if the threshold was lower the City retained that option."
- Page 20, 6th paragraph, 1st line: Replace "ensured" with "ensued."
- Page 20, last paragraph, 6th line: Start a new paragraph after the word "district."

- Page 21, 4th paragraph, 1st line: Replace "...overview of comments and thoughts about the design and layout of the Middle Avenue Plaza." with "...overview of public comments about the design and layout of the Middle Avenue Plaza."
- Page 22, 5th paragraph, 1st line: Replace "he understood" with "he had understood."
- Page 22, 6th paragraph, last line: Replace "it nothing" with "it had nothing."
- Page 22, last paragraph, 1st line: Replace "ages" with "pages."

Motion carried 6-0 with Commissioner Onken absent.

D. PUBLIC HEARING

D1. Conditional Development Permit Amendment/Bob Linder/350 Sharon Park Drive: Request for a Conditional Development Permit (CDP) amendment for a project at an existing multi-building apartment complex located in the R-3-X (Residential Apartment, Conditional Development) zoning district. The project would include the demolition of the existing recreation building, the construction of a new recreation building and a new leasing office and associated parking area, façade improvements to all of the existing apartment buildings, and landscaping modifications. The proposed modifications would result in an increase in the maximum building coverage of up to 40 percent at the subject site, which would exceed the current maximum of 30 percent, set by the existing CDP. The proposed amendment to the existing CDP (which covers multiple sites in the vicinity) would apply only to the subject site, and would not alter the development standards for any of the other properties within the CDP. As part of the proposal, 62 heritage size trees throughout the approximately 15.6-acre site are proposed for removal.

Staff Comment: Planner Perata said copies of email correspondence received after the publication of the staff report up until 6:45 p.m. on November 4, 2013 had been distributed to the Commission and were available to the public at the table in the back of the room. He said that most of the comments received were about the proposed heritage tree removals. He noted Attachment D, the proposed resolution to amend the Conditional Development Permit (CDP), had been corrected changing the date to November 4, 2013 and correcting the City Clerk's name. He said a colors and materials board had been distributed to the Commission.

Questions of Staff: Chair Kadvany asked staff to provide an overview of the proposed amendments to the CDP. Planner Perata said the request was to increase the building coverage on the site from 30% to 40%. He said the existing building coverage was at 38.75%. He said as part of the change there would be construction of a new leasing center, a reconstruction and expansion of the existing recreation center, and other onsite improvements. He said the applicant was requesting the removal of 62 heritage trees, 50 related to poor health and 12 related to construction.

Chair Kadvany said the underlying CDP seemed to cover multiple sites in the vicinity and questioned if this requested amendment would apply to all sites or just to the subject site. Planner Perata said the original Sharon Heights subdivision included a CDP for multiple properties in the area, but the applicant was requesting an amendment to their specific property and not to any of the other properties under the original 1965 CDP. He said Attachment A showed the boundaries of the properties under the CDP.

Public Comment: Mr. Bob Linder, BRE Property, said that Frances Ouellette with BRE Property and their entire design team including the architect, civil engineer, arborist and landscape architect was available to answer questions.

Mr. Linder provided a PowerPoint presentation about the proposed project. He said currently the leasing center was in a shared building with the clubhouse and fitness center. He said there was a lack of storage for incoming packages and competing interests for use of the center. He said also it was hard for prospective tenants to find the leasing center and parking. He said this project would provide a marketing window to the community, a safe entry from Sharon Park Drive, and additional parking for the leasing center. He reviewed the other proposed improvements.

Mr. Linder said they were proposing to remove 62 heritage trees. He said heritage tree replacement only required 15-gallon trees at a one to one basis and they were proposing to plant 331 replacement trees, which would increase the number of trees currently onsite by 86 trees. He showed a visual of an 86-inch box Oak that would be planted at the entrance of the proposed leasing center. He said most of the replacement trees were heritage species and would grow to over 30 feet in height. He said all would be minimum 24-inch boxes and most would be 36-inch and 48-inch box trees. He showed slides of other apartment complex renovations they had done.

Commissioner Eiref asked about construction phasing. Mr. Linder said after project approval the first phase would include renovation of three buildings and construction of the new leasing center, and he expected that to take eight months. He noted the Fire District was requiring all improvements to occur within three years. He said they were working with their existing tenants on phasing the construction.

Commissioner Bressler noted slide 27 that showed the existing pool with numerous trees, and asked why all of those would be removed. Mr. Linder said those were non-native species and were not a good species for the location. He said the property was built in 1960s and he did not believe there was a tree ordinance at that time to specify root barriers, specific species, and proximity to buildings.

Chair Kadvany said the proposed recreation center was significantly taller than the existing building, and asked if that was to give the second floor fitness center high ceilings. Mr. Linder said that was correct. He said users enjoyed the vista at another site they had improved similarly to what was being proposed. Chair Kadvany asked about shadow effects on the pool. Mr. Linder said they had not done a shadow study as

the building was set far enough back so it would not cast shadows. He confirmed with his team that the ridge height was 36-feet and that was four feet less than the existing residential buildings. Chair Kadvany said it appeared that some of the proposed tree removals were because of issues with pruning and maintenance and others because of aesthetics. Mr. Linder said aesthetics was not the primary reason for any of the tree removals noting some were being removed because of construction.

Mr. James Easton, tenant at the project site, said was a dedicated pool user, and his primary concerns were the tree removals and the pool. He noted the small size of the current clubhouse. He said he was concerned that no shadow study had been done for the proposed new structure. He said currently the sun was directly behind the smaller clubhouse and one third of the entire area became shaded at 2 or 3 p.m. He said more people use the pool than the workout room. He said a number of trees were affecting the foundations of buildings and he could understand the need to remove those. He said he did not think a two-and-a half story recreation center and clubhouse were needed. He said he rented the site because of the pool and was concerned with the pool being shut down to build the project. He requested a shadow study.

Mr. Ron Snow, resident, said the City should think about the community. He said that the project should not be allowed to go to 40% building coverage. He said if the complex was already exceeding 30% it should be retrofitted back to 30% lot coverage. He said that trees were being removed for aesthetics and if the trees had been properly maintained they would be in much better condition. He said some trees had root problems and some were too old but the onus on the applicant should be to keep the trees. He expressed concern with how many trees in the state, county and the City were being lost, and asked the Commission to protect the trees. He said there was a whole row of offices directly across from the complex and those should be used for offices rather than using the residential and recreational area of this site for office space.

Mr. Alex Fogel, tenant, said he was concerned also about the tree removal proposal as the trees were one of the key strengths of the complex. He said this was a very long construction process and it would have a lot of noise. He asked if there were protection measures to protect the tenants and the community at large from the noise impacts. He said he was concerned about health and safety as well. He said the environmental impacts of a lengthy construction project would be significant. He said Proposition 65 warnings were posted all over the complex related to cancer causing chemicals. He said the windows in the complex were old and would leak bringing dust, chemicals and pollutants into the buildings. He said the first phase should include replacement of all of the windows before other construction began.

Mr. Uzi Bar-Gadda, Menlo Park resident, said he had lived in the area for 42 years. He said the area where the leasing office was proposed was a very busy traffic area, and there had not been an adequate study of impacts from extra traffic entering and exiting the parking lot. He said the complex was old and did not meet current ADA standards

which limited who could live there. He said he had lived over six years in the complex. He said the buildings and trees were not maintained well. He said although he wanted to see the buildings upgraded, sprinkler systems installed, and ADA compliance that the reason he chose to continue to live there was because of the park like environment. He said also the construction worried him because of some of the materials used in the older buildings.

Ms. Amy Poon, Menlo Park, former tenant, said it was alarming that so many trees were proposed to be removed. She said the buildings and trees had not been well maintained, and there was no accessibility. She said some of the building windows had been upgraded to include sliding glass doors but not all. She said one tenant had their roof collapse. She said money should be spent on maintaining rather than expanding the site. She said the current leasing office was very nice, the existing clubhouse was spacious, and the site's fitness center was well used. She said there were large areas of lawn where there were no trees where she thought it made more sense to build. She said the City's arborist should assess the trees as the number proposed for removal seemed excessive. She said the rents were excessive, and increased often, which was why she had moved. She said the company did not support the community.

Ms. Carole Clark, Menlo Park, said she lived across the street. She said every other day seven bins were put on her street for garbage collection. She noted how busy the street was with pedestrians and two busy driveways for other complexes. She said it was a dangerous situation, noisy and unsightly and jarring in an affluent area such as Sharon Heights. She said if the applicants were going to remodel they should find a better place for their garbage and recycle pick up.

Ms. Aruni Nanayakkara, tenant, said she moved to Menlo Park because of its beauty. She said she found out later that the City protected its trees, which explained why it was beautiful. She said a massive number of trees would be removed, which was troubling as the community greatly appreciated and enjoyed the existing landscaped grounds. She questioned the sacrifice of trees to allow for more packages to be delivered.

Mr. Siegfried Schoen, said he had lived on different continents and chose Menlo Park for its greenery and beauty. He commented on the unique park nature of the complex. He said he was invested in Menlo Park whereas the applicants were a for-profit corporate property holding company. He said the rents increase substantially each year, and he thought this was an effort to clean up the site for sale and not for the sake of the complex and tenants. He said many of the trees proposed for removal were healthy. He said on the site there had been many instances of trees removed without replacement trees being planted. He said he would like to see the final City arborist report and did not think the residents had gotten sufficient information prior to this hearing.

Ms. Rosa Kurtz said she had lived at the complex most of her life and this was where she met her best friend. She noted memories of playing and talking with her friend

under the trees. She said the trees on the site were special to her and all of the others here tonight who have lived there. She said it would not be the same even if the trees were replaced.

Ms. Joanna Hershberger, Menlo Park resident and former tenant at the complex, requested the Commission deny the request to remove any of the trees. She said that the number of trees proposed for removal was one-third of the trees on the site. She said as a bicyclist she thought it was better to be riding under the trees than cycling in a room and not getting anywhere. She said cutting a large tree down would make a great impact.

Ms. Amy Malay, tenant, said she moved into this complex because of its park-like environment. She said she agreed with the comments that the windows needed to be replaced for safety reasons. She said her two greatest concerns were loss of privacy and increased sound impacts. She said that she opened her windows for natural lighting because of the privacy the trees provide. She said the complex's proximity to La Entrada School, the shopping center, and people using the streets near it to get to the freeway created sound that was mitigated by the trees.

Ms. Kathryn Browne, Menlo Park, said she chose to live in Menlo Park because it was so beautiful. She said she owned a home in Sharon Oaks and her family visits with friends in Sharon Green. She said the project site was beautiful and green. She said she would like to see a full arborist report. She said if trees were unhealthy then she thought it was due to a lack of proper maintenance. She asked the Commission to do whatever it could to require the company to take care of its trees. She said she was concerned about the leasing office in front and that it needed to be 7,000 square feet noting the complex was always full.

Ms. Ellen Krengel, Menlo Park, said she has spent a lot of time walking by and through Sharon Green. She encouraged the Commission to visit the site before making a decision on it. She said the leasing office was larger than her home and it was home to four people and a dog. She said in this community that the recreation happened in the outdoors, in the pool, and under the trees, not inside a building. She said she believed in property rights but that the request to remove so many mature trees caused her concern. She said she could not support increasing the building coverage and was concerned about impacts to schools.

Ms. Anya Chernykh, said she was from Kazakhstan, and that because there were not that many trees there, each one was a treasure. She said to have so many trees removed would be a big loss, and that the property owner should take care of the existing trees. She said it would take centuries for a tree to get as large as some of them are now. She said she and many others moved to Menlo Park because it was green and protected its trees.

Mr. Dennis Hanley, tenant, said he was disabled because of a car accident and the complex was not ADA accessible.

Chair Kadvany closed the public hearing.

Commission Comment: Chair Kadvany asked if people would need to be moved out of their apartments to facilitate construction. Ms. Frances Ouellette, BRE Properties, Senior Director of Redevelopment, said construction would occur in occupied buildings. She said the first part of the project would be creating the fire lane; the next would be construction of the leasing office and renovation of three buildings. She said there would be construction noise. She said new windows and roofs would be installed. She said they were looking at 18 to 20 months for the whole project to be completed in four phases.

Chair Kadvany said the cover letter in the staff report indicated they had met with tenants in October, and asked what the outreach had been. Mr. Linder said notices went out in July that an application had been filed. He said about a month and a half ago, Planner Perata had provided them with a packet of emails that had been received about the project. He said they then invited all of the tenants who had sent emails to meet to discuss concerns. He said there had been seven people at the public meeting. He said the tenants were provided plans and the City's arborist report. He said they would add 186 trees beyond the one-to-one replacement and the replacement trees would be large, mature trees.

Commissioner Strehl asked about window replacement and if that would occur before construction of the proposed leasing office. Mr. Linder said all the windows would be replaced and they would look at whether those could be done all at once. Commissioner Strehl said it was appreciated that sprinklers would be in all buildings and asked whether they would make ADA upgrades. Mr. Linder said the apartments were built prior to any ADA codes but all of the new buildings would meet current ADA standards. He said there was an approved path to travel around the entire site and they currently met code. Commissioner Strehl asked about ingress into the apartments. Mr. Linder said they would remain the same as they could not put elevators in or retrofit them to new standards as that was not feasible.

Commissioner Strehl noted she had to leave the meeting due to a previously committed to engagement.

Commissioner Eiref said there trees were definitely growing out of the foundations of some of the buildings. He said there plenty of other trees that appeared in good shape and were not close to buildings. He asked if the trees were being removed because they needed to be or for convenience. He asked what the Commission's prerogative was regarding the proposed tree removals.

Planner Perata said the City contracted with an independent arborist to audit the applicant's proposal for tree removal. He said the arborist looked at every tree and reviewed the findings, and made recommendations for removal proposed by the project arborist and provided his own report that was included in the staff report outlining his agreement with the proposed heritage tree removals. He said regarding the proposed tree removals and upgrade to the site that the Planning Commission was the recommending body to the City Council.

Commissioner Eiref asked about criteria supporting tree removal. Planner Perata said the criteria was the same as that used for approval of a heritage tree removal in the Heritage Tree Protection Ordinance and was a combination of construction impacts as well as existing overall health and structure of the tree.

Commissioner Bressler noted that the garbage was collected offsite on a street and if there was anything in the CDP agreement about that. Planner Perata clarified that it was a CDP but not an agreement and the original CDP had nothing related to trash collection. Commissioner Bressler asked if there was something in the new proposal to modify that. Planner Perata said that was correct. Commissioner Bressler asked if generally garbage collection was required internally on multi-residential complexes. He said he did not think this location of collecting garbage was appropriate for the community. Mr. Linder said that they had looked into the garbage collection when the neighbor came forward with her concern. He said was the garbage collection company, Recology, that dictated where and when pickup occurred. He said when the site was developed there were no standards for such things as interior turnarounds and garbage collection locations. Mr. Linder went off the microphone and was describing on a site map where collection occurs. Another gentleman described that there were two entrances to Sharon Oaks and the seven bins were pulled by tractor with four at one location and three at another location. He said the Recology truck completely blocked one side of the street when doing the pickup. Speaker was identified as David Dunning.

Commissioner Riggs asked about the concerns related to toxins released during construction such as possibly asbestos and lead paint as it was an older site. Mr. Linder said they would comply with whatever regulation or authority they needed to. Commissioner Riggs said to get a building permit they would have to sign a hazardous waste agreement which would be for the protection of the residents. Mr. Linder said they were taking an older structure making it cleaner and installing fire sprinklers for the safety of the tenants.

Commissioner Riggs asked why they needed a new leasing office as it sounded like they were fully leased. Mr. Linder said they were expanding not just to handle package deliveries, but because currently they had to share space with the fitness group and maintenance unit as well. He said also it was to operate their business in a functionally efficient manner. He said they needed the space to better serve their residents and to draw in more tenants as they were not 100% occupied all year long. He said BRE was a long term holder of their assets and they were not renovating the site to sell it.

Commissioner Riggs asked how many units there were. Mr. Linder said there were 296 units. He said more people were renting and with that expected a certain level of amenities.

Commissioner Riggs asked whether the Tulip trees in the area of the leasing office would stay. He noted that many of the trees were being removed because of structural issues and not because of poor health.

Jonathan Cardenas, project arborist, said they had done an assessment a year prior based on each tree's merit and without any information relating to the proposal that was now before the Commission. He said they found in many cases that trees had been planted very close to buildings. He said for a tree to be successful in the long run and to be a safe tree to live around it had to be the right tree in the right location. He said at this site there were Monterey pine and Eucalyptus very close to buildings and that most of the heritage trees for removal were in that category. He said with the introduction of the plans some trees were proposed for removal because of construction and that information was added to the report.

Commissioner Riggs said it did not appear that the tulip trees were next to buildings. Mr. Cardenas said that there were some that would remain but he thought some would be removed, and suggested the landscape architect could better answer. Commissioner Riggs said the size of the replacement trees was noteworthy, and asked about the relationship between the largest trees removed and those proposed for replacement

Mr. Dennis Sullivan, landscape architect, said if the site was just being developed now there would be more discipline with the placement of the trees. He said larger trees such as the 84-inch Oak would be planted in the perimeter areas as there was more room for larger trees to grow. He said internally the trees would be more vertical and would not have invasive roots close to the buildings. He said they were using larger specimens to help with the growth initially. Commissioner Riggs asked how old those large box trees were. Mr. Sullivan said depending on the specimen it could be three to five years old.

Chair Kadvany said there were competing interests related to the removal and replacement of trees at the site. He said he walked one side of the site and had tried to determine which trees would be removed. He said there were volunteer trees and individual trees and several sets of value judgments related to the trees and the age of the buildings. He said he was concerned about the construction phasing and the removal and replacement of windows and new appliances, and the relationship of the community with the owners.

Commissioner Bressler said the noise ordinance addressed hours of construction and noise at the property line but the residents were within the property lines. He asked if

the noise ordinance addressed that. Planner Perata said that noise was measured from property lines.

Commissioner Bressler said there was a fairly high turnover at the site and it seemed the applicant expected tenants to leave. He said there were questions of property owner rights and the tenants' rights but he thought it was strange that so many heritage trees would be removed at one time. He asked if the tenants could appeal the heritage tree removals to the Environmental Quality Commission (EQC). Planner Perata said the Council would consider the project and take action by resolution on the proposed heritage tree removals and any person could present their concerns to the City Council. He said the Council's action was not appealable to the EQC.

Commissioner Bressler said that the removal of so many heritage trees was not supportable. He said many of the removals were for aesthetic reasons and to reduce future maintenance costs. He said the applicant was not bringing buildings to current ADA standards, the rents charged were high and he thought some of the money saved from the former and earned from the latter could go to savings trees.

Commissioner Eiref asked if the applicant would consider reviewing the trees further to see if some could be retained.

Commissioner Ferrick said she also was concerned about the trees and whether the applicant was willing to review again what trees actually needed to be removed to gain the space needed for the construction or any trees that were too dangerous in terms of safety to stay. She said she appreciated the plan to add more new trees, which would help, but found that the construction project plan seemed separate from the tree removal plan.

Chair Kadvany asked if this was one of the largest rental complexes in Menlo Park. Senior Planner Rogers said the new St. Anton project on Haven Avenue would be 394 units. Commissioner Kadvany suggested the applicant could have done a walkthrough with the tenants to review and explain why trees were proposed for removal. He said the complex was very nice.

Commissioner Eiref said that some of the balconies had rotted wood and metal windows, which were clearly out of date, so it was important for the buildings to be renovated. He said he had no objections to building a leasing office, increasing building coverage, and updating the recreational facility. He said the tree removals were a separate recommendation and suggested the Commission could comment on that separately to the City Council. He asked if the parking lots were going to be substantially improved. Planner Perata said he did not think there were any improvements to the parking structures.

Recognized by the Chair, Senior Planner Rogers said one option would be for the Commission to recommend approval or denial of the various elements of the proposal with or without conditions to the City Council. He said those could be overlaid with other recommendations, or the Commission could continue the item and require additional analyses to be conducted prior to returning to the Planning Commission.

Commissioner Riggs said he had no issue with the request to increase the building coverage area but he was not able to make a positive recommendation because of the trees. He said the City by agreement honored all trees of a certain size and made a commitment to preserve those trees. He said he thought there were at least three clusters of heritage trees not adjacent to buildings for which he needed more explanation of why they needed to be removed. He moved that the project be continued with the goal of greater transparency as to the reasons for the removal of heritage trees and that those trees be marked with distinguishing ribbon so the Commission and others could visit the site and understand which trees were proposed for removal. Chair Kadvany said he would second the motion. He said in the evaluation of the trees one thing not being included was the screening these trees provided the community. He said nearly all of what was being proposed for the buildings looked good except for the end of buildings, which had wide stucco faces. He said trees, even volunteer trees, helped soften the look.

Commissioner Ferrick said she concurred and liked the building improvements. She said she would like those to happen first. She said she did not have enough information to recommend the heritage tree removal.

Commissioner Bressler said if the project came back to the Commission that the requested tree removals should be just for those needing to be removed to build the project and the other tree removal requests should be remanded to the City's EQC. He said they were also missing the trash area concern. He said the garbage truck needed to come off the public street one way or another. Commissioner Riggs said he agreed. Commissioner Ferrick said she also agreed and that their recommendation was to suggest the applicant look at revising how garbage was collected. Commissioner Eiref agreed with all of the comments, but noted the lack of ADA accessibility into the buildings bothered him. Senior Planner Rogers said the Building Official had been involved in a preliminary project review meeting, but had not identified that as a requirement. Commissioner Eiref said he would look for clarification on that for the next meeting. He said optimally the applicant should provide some ADA compliant and accessible units.

Commissioner Riggs said he would like to add to the motion that the applicant work with Recology to determine if onsite trash collection was feasible. Chair Kadvany said he supported that addition as the maker of the second.

Commissioner Riggs said the project would make significant improvements to the interior and exterior of the buildings and units and that signified a new concept of management and that these would be better buildings and managed in a different way. Commissioner Eiref noted each unit would have its own laundry facilities.

Planner Perata said the reasons for the continuance were to clarify the need for the tree removals specifically related to the non-construction tree removals and to work with Recology to find alternative locations for garbage collection.

Commissioner Riggs said his point related to clarification about the tree removals was that those trees that were not an immediate threat to buildings and foundations be identified in some way so the Commission and other City volunteers such as EQC members and neighbors could view on a particular day which heritage trees were intended for removal.

Commissioner Bressler said his expectation was that when the project returned the number of heritage tree removals would be greatly reduced and demonstrably identified in the way Commission Riggs described. He said the tree removals could be pursued through a different mechanism.

Chair Kadvany said he would like to get greater clarity about the construction phasing but was not requiring that as an action under the continuance.

Commissioner Ferrick said it seemed there was an immediate need for improvements to the buildings and suggested that should be part of Phase I rather than a new amenities building.

Commission Action: M/S Riggs/Kadvany to continue the item with direction including the following:

- Comprehensively reevaluate the proposed heritage tree removal requests, in particular for removals that would not be directly construction-related, and to subsequently mark (e.g. ribbons) the trees proposed for removal in order to enable clear onsite review by Planning Commissioners and/or the public; and
- Work with Recology to determine if onsite trash collection is feasible.

Motion carried 5-0 with Commissioners Onken and Strehl absent:

REGULAR BUSINESS F.

E1 Architectural Control/Rita Parasnis/727 El Camino Real: Request for Planning Commission review of compliance with conditions of approval regarding the proposed material for a portion of the front façade and the general signage location and size, related to an approved architectural control request to remodel and construct additions to an existing hotel in the SP-ECR/D (El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan) zoning district. The overall project was reviewed and approved at the Planning Commission meeting of September 23, 2013.

Staff Comment: Planner Perata said a colors and materials board was being distributed to the Commission.

Public Comment: Mr. Thom Jess, Arris Studio Architects, said the item was partially continued by the Commission to reconsider the front wall treatment and the general signage location and requirements. He said the comments about the front wall were that it was a single mass previously and a stacked stone veneer, neither of which were acceptable. He said they now proposed using contrasting materials to break up the wall. He said they were restricted to the depth of the stone veneer currently on the wall so as not to increase encroachment in the front property line. He said they have about six-inches in depth to work with to create the break in the plane. He said they did a textured, dark stone veneer to contrast with the smooth, white plaster of the wall behind it. He said the textured stone was aligned with the top of the lobby which was about 14 feet. He said they looked at a variety of different solutions, including a green screen wall but the concern was the year round appearance of it. He said initially they wanted to do it as a floating plane but they had a hard time making it work within the six-inch requirement. He said they also looked at a cast in place concrete wall and there the concrete would be a darker hue than usual to contrast with the wall behind it.

Mr. Jess said regarding the signage that the hotel has not been branded yet but were proposing a wall sign that met sign ordinance requirements. He said they would not install a monument sign. He said they intended to also do a blade sign which under the City's sign ordinance could be three feet, which they did not think was adequate. He said they were completely removing the pole sign and the existing blade sign. He said for people coming from the north that the sign for Cook's Seafood extended to the sidewalk and limited visibility of this property. He said they were proposing a nine-foot blade sign which was significantly smaller than what was there now but larger than what was allowed under the sign ordinance. He said the ramification of missing the driveway to the site was that a person would have to drive down two signals before being able to make a u-turn. He said they thought it was important for guests to see the hotel before they actually got to the hotel.

Chair Kadvany asked about the six-inch depth limitation. Planner Perata said the face of the existing wall could not encroach more into the front property line than it was currently and the six inches was the depth of the existing stone veneer that was being removed.

Chair Kadvany asked the architect about extending the wall fully or a combination of materials. Mr. Jess said they looked at a number of options including extending the wall all the way up, all the way down, and making it minimal. He said it was the two-thirds height they thought was best and it made sense to line it up with the lobby creating another plane that was just slightly out in front of the wall.

Commissioner Riggs said he did not think what was being proposed was an improvement. He said it might work in Beverly Hills but would not work in Menlo Park. He said the color palette was not inviting. He said he agreed with the blade sign. He asked if they had considered a glass material or some material less rejecting of pedestrians. He said other frontages on El Camino Real that used slate materials were not well received in Menlo Park and Atherton.

Commissioner Ferrick said the more she looked at the proposed change the more she liked it. She said the slate materials mentioned by Commissioner Riggs were thin veneers. She said this treatment was more like a monument. She said the blade sign proposal was supportable and would work with the overall design. She said this was a vast improvement over the "lava" wall.

Commissioner Bressler said he did not originally support the project but he thought this was an improvement. He said he thought an accent light would help and he was not opposed to allowing an encroachment of more than six-inches into the front setback.

Commissioner Eiref said he had liked the original design but thought this was fine too. He said he thought the design pulled the eye to the office.

Chair Kadvany said the color better integrated with the rest of the structure.

Commissioner Riggs asked if there would be a small lawn. Mr. Jess said it would not be lawn but landscaped shrubs. He said the finished project would be several notches above what was there currently.

Commission Action: M/S Kadvany/Ferrick to approve the item as recommended in the staff report.

- Make findings with regard to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) that the proposal is within the scope of the project covered by the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan Program EIR, which was certified on June 5, 2012. Specifically, make findings that:
 - a. The project is categorically exempt under Class 1 (Section 15301, "Existing Facilities") of the current CEQA Guidelines.
 - b. Relevant mitigation measures have been incorporated into the project through the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (Attachment F), which is approved as part of this finding.
 - c. Upon completion of project improvements, the Specific Plan Maximum Allowable Development non-residential use total will be reduced by 3,497 square feet, accounting for the project's share of the Plan's overall projected development and associated impacts.

- 2. Adopt the following findings, as per Section 16.68.020 of the Zoning Ordinance, pertaining to architectural control approval:
 - a. The general appearance of the structure is in keeping with the character of the neighborhood.
 - b. The development will not be detrimental to the harmonious and orderly growth of the City.
 - c. The development will not impair the desirability of investment or occupation in the neighborhood.
 - d. The development provides adequate parking as required in all applicable City Ordinances and has made adequate provisions for access to such parking.
 - e. The development is consistent with the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan. The exterior changes would comply with relevant design standards and guidelines. In particular, standards and guidelines relating to ground-floor window transparency, orientation to the street, and architectural projections to create interest would be addressed. In addition, the project would adhere to standards and guidelines relating to the provision of usable open space. The revised front façade and signage would be consistent with the overall proposal and other buildings in the vicinity.
- 3. Approve the architectural control request subject to the following standard conditions of approval:
 - a. Development of the project shall be substantially in conformance with the plans prepared by Arris Studio Architects, dated received September 9, 2013, consisting of 28 plan sheets and approved by the Planning Commission on September 23, 2013, and the revised plans prepared by Arris Studio Architects, dated received October 23, 2013, consisting of two plan sheets and approved by the Planning Commission on November 4, 2013, except as modified by the conditions contained herein, subject to review and approval of the Planning Division.
 - b. The applicant shall comply with all West Bay Sanitary District, Menlo Park Fire Protection District, and utility companies regulations that are directly applicable to the project.
 - c. Prior to building permit issuance, the applicant shall comply with all requirements of the Building Division, Engineering Division, and Transportation Division that are directly applicable to the project.

- d. Prior to building permit issuance, the applicant shall submit a plan for any new utility installations or upgrades for review and approval of the Planning, Engineering and Building Divisions. Landscaping shall properly screen all utility equipment that is installed outside of a building and that cannot be placed underground. The plan shall show exact locations of all meters, back flow prevention devices, transformers, junction boxes, relay boxes, and other equipment boxes.
- e. Heritage trees in the vicinity of the construction project shall be protected pursuant to the Heritage Tree Ordinance.
- Approve the architectural control request subject to the following projectspecific conditions of approval:
 - a. Prior to building permit issuance, the applicant shall pay the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan Preparation Fee, which is established at \$1.13/square foot for all net new development.

Motion carried 5-0 with Commissioners Onken and Strehl absent.

El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan/Initial Review: Initial evaluation of the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan, which was approved in 2012. As specified by Chapter G ("Implementation"), the Planning Commission and City Council will conduct an initial review of the Plan one year after adoption, with ongoing review at two-year intervals thereafter. This review is intended to ensure that the Plan is functioning as intended, as well as to consider the policy-related implications of various Plan aspects. Depending on the results of the initial review, potential modifications may be formally presented for Planning Commission recommendation and City Council action at subsequent meetings. Any such modifications may require additional review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Continued from the meeting of October 28, 2013

Staff Comment: Senior Planner Rogers said staff would prepare a voting tally summary to the City Council that the Commission would be able to review at its November 18 meeting.

Commissioner Eiref said he listened to both of the meetings he had been unable to attend at which the Commission had reviewed the Plan. He said for the most part he agreed with those discussions but he was concerned about the public bonus trigger. He thanked staff for sending him a document published in March 2012 that reviewed densities and trigger points. He said he was still concerned in reading through the document that the assumptions and the report were made during a market with extremely tight credit, persistent unemployment and a weak economy. He said 389 and 1906 El Camino Real were being developed under the old standards which were

roughly half of what the limits were under the Plan. He said he did not recall reviewing the document previously. He said for the record that he supported the envelope in the Plan but was concerned that the threshold for public bonus discussion was set so high that it probably would never be used. He said they probably would never an opportunity to make sure the projects brought to the Commission were really meeting the spirit of the Plan as the bonus was given from the start to the developers. Chair Kadvany said that the thresholds for public benefit then become the de facto building envelope. Commissioner Eiref agreed. He said he personally would communicate his concern to the City Council.

Commissioner Bressler said this was also his concern. He said the economic assumptions made, particularly regarding the cost of land, were not always applicable. He said for the Stanford project there needed to be a low threshold for public benefit and a development agreement. He said if it was a large project being proposed the City needed to be able to review the project noting that the Commission serves the residents and there should be the opportunity to negotiate a development agreement.

Commissioner Eiref said that Stanford had been responsive but noted there was a lot of real estate along El Camino Real potentially that could be developed under the Plan and he was concerned that benefit was being given away to developers.

Commissioner Riggs said that both 1706 and 1906 El Camino Real projects were disasters for the developers, and were sold and built by other developers.

Commissioner Ferrick asked how often the Plan would be reviewed by either the Commission and/or Council. Senior Planner Rogers said the Plan recommended an initial review after one year and at two year intervals thereafter.

Chair Kadvany said they had received a letter from Stanford that day. He reviewed the process and content recommendation for Section D "Middle Plaza & ECR SE Zone" enumerating eight items to add as Plan text:

- 1. Eliminates a role for High Speed Rail in Middle Avenue tunnel design or construction.
- 2. Makes design and construction of tunnel and plaza, and a bicycle/pedestrian tunnel, simultaneous with earliest ECR SE building(s) design and construction.
- 3. Includes plaza design goals to: prioritize plaza placement, access and public space quality over Middle Avenue vehicular access; places the plaza at ground level, and with safe and well-coordinated access to/through the tunnel.
- 4. Sets default funding for plaza and tunnel design and construction to be provided by ECR SE developer(s) and/or owner in whole, as negotiated with City Council and/or designated group. Such funding may count toward public benefit as relevant. Comment: Partial funding as a negotiation outcome is addressed under "Infrastructure."

- 5. Provides for Planning Commission approval of Middle Avenue plaza and tunnel design, and vehicular access, along with ECR SE architectural control.
- 6. Provides flexible criteria for ECR SE building breaks, maximum front setbacks and retail parking siting to facilitate optimal Plaza design and retail parking access.
- 7. Recommends City and ECR SE property owner/developer to work with Cortana Corporation as property owner to determine potential role of "panhandle" property located inside Middle Avenue development area.
- 8. Defers abandonment of Cambridge Avenue easement to a future date when potential city need for the easement is certain.

Discussion:

 Eliminates a role for High Speed Rail in Middle Avenue tunnel design or construction.

Commissioner Ferrick asked why they would do this. Chair Kadvany said there no longer seemed a pressing concern that high speed rail would be an issue. Commissioner Ferrick said doing that could eliminate a stakeholder who might assist with the tunnel. Chair Kadvany said it only referred to having high speed rail in the Plan as an obstacle to the tunnel and his suggestion was to take that out of the text.

Senior Planner Rogers said this related to page D45, "Burgess Park Linkage/Open Space Plaza", last paragraph; "Because this open space and linkage amenity is located partly on Stanford University property, it [Plaza] should be part of development review with the City when Stanford University chooses to redevelop the land. The rail crossing itself should be undertaken in conjunction with High Speed Rail improvements." He said that there was an expectation that High Speed Rail would happen. He suggested: "The rail crossing itself should consider High Speed Rail improvements, but may be undertaken at any time."

D. MIDDLE PLAZA & ECR SE ZONE

1. Eliminates a role for High Speed Rail in Middle Avenue tunnel design or construction. Revise text on Specific Plan page D45 (third paragraph) to read: "The rail crossing itself should consider High Speed Rail improvements, but may be undertaken at any time." (exact wording may be refined)

There was unanimous Commission support for the proposed change to the Chair's proposed text change related to Page D45 of the Plan.

2. Makes design and construction of tunnel and plaza, and a bicycle/pedestrian tunnel, simultaneous with earliest ECR SE building(s) design and construction.

Chair Kadvany said Stanford's letter indicated challenges to this related to getting permits and agreement with the multiple agencies. Commissioner Eiref asked about reasonable effort. He said after reading Stanford's letter that he understood there was

complexity in building a tunnel but still thought it was important to have it built as early as possible.

Senior Planner Rogers said, as an example, when Caltrans approval was needed such outside forces could prevent a project but applicants needed to try their best to get those approvals. He said there were requirements to establish that a good faith effort was made and that was something they could discuss with the City Attorney.

Community Development Director Heineck said there was wording related to a good faith effort being made that would not absolutely limit Stanford's ability to move forward with their project.

Commissioner Riggs noted the Commission would be just recommending to Council and asked whether this would need to be vetted by the City Attorney. He said the recommendation could be to make a good faith effort. Senior Planner Rogers said it was not necessary for the Commission to determine wording this evening and the City Attorney would be at the Council meeting.

Commissioner Bressler said there was confusion about the City's responsibility and Stanford's responsibility. Senior Planner Rogers said that the project subcommittee negotiated with Stanford for a significant contribution for the tunnel as part of their project. Commissioner Bressler said Stanford should do whatever was under their control to make the tunnel happen. He said there should be a clear understanding of what their financial contribution would be and a good estimate of what it would cost to get the tunnel improvements done. He said that should be written and said when the project was approved. He said making a good faith effort did not resonate with him.

Senior Planner Rogers said from staff's perspective there was the difficulty of requiring one private entity to undertake things that have regulatory approvals from other agencies and that have other private property owners needing to agree. He said the panhandle of the Big Five Shopping Center was not owned by Stanford and to construct improvements on it would require Stanford purchasing the property or for the other property owner to provide an access easement. He said the City has the conceptual ability to acquire land through eminent domain for public use but Stanford did not. He said eminent domain has a process for establishing fair market value with litigation and appeal processes.

Commissioner Riggs asked if the suggestion was for the Commission to recommend that the tunnel be built as soon as possible. Chair Kadvany said it was but this was putting the language into the Plan. He said while it might be too strong it was there to get attention and discussion.

There was unanimous Commission support for item 2.

3. Includes plaza design goals to: prioritize plaza placement, access and public space quality over Middle Avenue vehicular access; places the plaza at ground level, and with safe and well-coordinated access to/through the tunnel.

Chair Kadvany said this was about the plaza and not the process. Commissioner Eiref said it did not seem strong enough to drive fundamental design decisions. He questioned where vehicular access would be provided for the Stanford project. Chair Kadvany said that he and Commissioner Bressler had suggested flexibility related to building breaks and looking at ways to solve.

Commissioner Ferrick said she understood the need of the driveway at Middle Avenue, but there needed to be separate plaza space. She thought clarifying the need for vehicular ingress and egress and providing plaza space was enough.

Commissioner Riggs questioned the functionality of a plaza next to a driveway and cars going in and out of a parking lot. He said it was something he would not approve. He said a plaza compromised by a driveway would never get the Commission's approval. He asked staff if Stanford understood the City's expectations for a public plaza. Senior Planner Rogers said one proposal was presented in January, but the general comment from the public and Commission was that the design emphasis was not right. He said at the Council meeting in April Stanford presented another proposal which indicated they were hearing concerns. He said there was a request at the draft Plan stage by Stanford to reduce the break requirement from 120 feet to 60 feet; the Council considering the draft Plan suggested the building break could be 90 feet; but in the detailed review of the Plan staff pushed that 120 feet was necessary to provide auto access and create a meaningful public space. He said if the design came back a third time and still was not right that the Commission, if it could make findings of fact, could potentially direct that the break be wider and reduce the size of the buildings there and made up for elsewhere. He said there was nothing in the Plan that prevented the break from being wider but 120 feet was the minimum.

Commissioner Bressler said he thought this was a weak statement and that it should not be included. He said he would like a legitimate pedestrian overcrossing over El Camino Real; he said they should indicate what was wanted.

Commissioner Ferrick suggested leaving this one out as the Commission had already taken a straw vote previously. Commissioner Riggs said he wanted it taken it out altogether and to not muddy waters about the plaza.

4. Sets default funding for plaza and tunnel design and construction to be provided by ECR SE developer(s) and/or owner in whole, as negotiated with City Council and/or designated group. Such funding may count toward public benefit as relevant. Comment: Partial funding as a negotiation outcome is addressed under INFRASTRUCTURE.

Chair Kadvany said the tunnel was important as the Stanford project would locate people on these sites and they needed east-west connectivity or they would be isolated. Commissioner Bressler said the tunnel would make a development more profitable. Commissioner Eiref said this was essentially negotiating public benefit for the desired infrastructure. Commissioner Riggs asked what this item would achieve. Chair Kadvany said it was to set a starting point for significant contribution. Commissioner Riggs said that item 2 was the message indicating the importance of getting the tunnel improvements done. Chair Kadvany said this was a recommendation of what the City's perspective should be relating to funding this improvement. He said that funding for this major piece of infrastructure should begin with the developer/owner. Commissioner Riggs said in the Commission's initial review of the Plan that this suggestion was to tell the Council how to negotiate the development agreement. He said he could support emphasizing the need for the improvements but he questioned modifying the Plan to add this language.

Commissioner Ferrick said they talked and voted about communicating to Council the highest public benefit priority. She said their top one was this tunnel and undercrossing, and funding these improvements. She said she was concerned with limiting this to ECR SE developers and owners. She said it was not a needed item.

Commissioner Bressler said he had spoken with a Council member and the expectation was the developer(s) would pay for this project. He said he supported this as it sent a message. He said his priority as a Commissioner was to support the residents.

Commissioner Riggs said they should not be making modifications to the Plan to make a philosophical point.

Commissioner Eiref said this was the marquee public benefit but there would no doubt be other needs and they were limiting themselves.

Commissioner Ferrick said they had not yet seen a representative set of projects. She said they were seeing one large project and some small projects. She said she thought there would be future larger projects that would come across differently. She said they should not change the Plan for this individual project noting in this case Stanford owns the land.

Commissioner Bressler said he supported this statement as otherwise they were not allowing for needed public benefit. Chair Kadvany said he thought this statement was essential for the Stanford project.

Commissioner Ferrick said they could all agree they want the tunnel built and that this would be a benefit to Stanford to see that it was built but this had already been covered in prior discussion. She said Commissioners Bressler and Eiref had missed those discussions and straw votes. She said they had been careful to not put redundancies in as they wanted to be clear on what things needed to be changed.

Commissioner Eiref said he was not voting for this for the right reasons but was voting for it because he had not been given any other way to negotiate for public benefit through the process. He said this was a recommendation and the Council could reject it.

Commissioner Ferrick said she did not want them to limit themselves to this one public benefit. She said this language was too prescriptive and she wanted to make sure that the Council received the big and important message that although here were a lot of funding mechanisms described in the Plan there was not a lot of clarity about implementing those. She asked how public improvements would be funded if no developer brought a project in that was over the public benefit threshold.

Commissioner Bressler said voting for this statement was equivalent to saying the City wanted at least \$20 million from this project and that if they did not vote for this the City would get very little funding from the project.

Chair Kadvany said that he thought the statement was important related to constraints, goals, challenges and inconsistencies, and the more they could clarify those the better the benefit.

Commissioners Bressler, Eiref, and Kadvany supported this item, while Commissioners Ferrick and Riggs did not.

Commissioner Ferrick said she felt strongly about communicating the importance of getting the tunnel funded. She said they have communicated that already in their discussions. She said that this funding did not necessarily have to come from ECR-SE exclusively as the default. She said the communication was to explore how to fund infrastructure improvements like the tunnel / undercrossing but the proposed statement was too prescriptive and exclusionary.

5. Provides for Planning Commission approval of Middle Avenue plaza and tunnel design, and vehicular access, along with ECR SE architectural control.

Chair Kadvany said this stated that approvals for the listed items would come to the Planning Commission notwithstanding the Stanford project subcommittee work.

Commissioner Riggs asked if staff could explain how architectural control would apply to the plaza and tunnel design, and vehicular access.

Senior Planner Rogers said if the words "and tunnel design" were removed that the plaza was already part of the ECR-SE architectural control. He referred back to page D45, "Burgess Park Linkage/Open Space Plaza", last paragraph; "Because this open space and linkage amenity is located partly on Stanford University property, it [Plaza] should be part of development review with the City when Stanford University chooses to redevelop the land." He said that clarifies the plaza design was under the project review which was mainly architectural review. He said that the tunnel design was not necessarily under the control of the Stanford University project applicant.

Chair Kadvany said this was probably redundant. He asked if the project would come to the Commission from the Subcommittee. Senior Planner Rogers said the Council's subcommittee work was completed. He said the subcommittee had directed that a working group for the plaza be established with the stakeholders. He said that group's recommendations would then come to the Commission for public review.

Chair Kadvany said there was no need to vote as this item was not necessary.

6. Provides flexible criteria for ECR SE building breaks, maximum front setbacks and retail parking siting to facilitate optimal Plaza design and retail parking access.

Commissioner Eiref said he had not been part of the prior discussions, but he thought this sounded reasonable.

Commissioner Ferrick said she was concerned with the portion related to building breaks as this might affect traffic flow and projections and such changes could impact the EIR. She said the reason there were minimum and maximum front setbacks was to create a more consistent street frontage and pedestrian experience. She said she would want retail to succeed there and to have an optimal plaza design but that they have discussed this and determined it was too great a change to make.

Commissioner Riggs said he thought the Commission was not going to discuss things previously discussed, and this was definitely previously discussed.

Senior Planner Rogers referred to page 2 of the staff report. At the October 7 meeting the Commission had considered: "The Planning Commission should have the power to modify the requirements for building breaks in the ECR SE district in order to facilitate the successful design of the Middle Avenue plaza." There had been a straw vote tally of 2-2, but Commissioner Eiref had been absent. He said that procedurally the Commission could conduct a vote again in order to break that tie. He said that staff had explained during the first review that anything that affected graphics or core principles of the Plan were changes that potentially would take greater time to do. He said the Commission had responded to comments from the public about the maximum setback being something that could not vary and that that would create a continuous wall. He said staff tried to clarify that the Plan has different requirements and has a minimum and maximum setbacks but there were also building breaks and modulation requirements. He said these have to interrelate so there were areas where breaks might be wider than the minimum requirements. He said they have to evaluate the overall length of those for any individual property within the requirement that building breaks could not exceed 25% of the entire frontage. He said widening breaks was not categorically prohibited by the Plan.

Commissioner Ferrick said "provides flexible criteria for ECR SE building breaks" seemed a substantial change and asked if that would require additional CEQA review and if there were other delays. Senior Planner Rogers said it had the potential to be more of a major change. He said he thought there was already flexibility to potentially have wider setbacks than required and to have breaks or plaza areas that were more than the minimum requirement so long as the overall development met certain parameters. He said he did not think the language needed to be changed to achieve the same result.

Commissioner Eiref said the plaza at Middle Avenue would be the crown jewel and he would be open to any changes that could be made along El Camino Real to improve it.

There were three Commissioners supporting and two Commissioners not supporting.

7. Recommends City and ECR SE property owner/developer to work with Cortana Corporation as property owner to determine potential role of "panhandle" property located inside Middle Avenue development area.

Commissioner Ferrick asked if this was intended to be part of the Plan or a recommendation to the Council. Chair Kadvany said it could just call out the property owner and delete "Cortana Corporation."

Chair Kadvany noted the Commission was silent on this item.

8. Defers abandonment of Cambridge Avenue easement to a future date when potential City need for the easement is certain.

Senior Planner Rogers said during the draft Plan process that bicycle/pedestrian train track under crossings were shown at two locations: one at the Caltrain Station and one at Middle Avenue. He said concurrently the building breaks section of the Plan showed a publicly accessible building break at Middle Avenue and Cambridge Avenue. He said the one at Cambridge Avenue did not go anywhere. He said there was a request to revise the building breaks and consider changing the Cambridge Avenue break so that it was a recess. He said what was shown in the draft Plan was not intended as a crossing for the train tracks and was not in the Final Plan. He said there was never an easement that had been abandoned. He said it would be a fairly big change to apply one now. Chair Kadvany asked about a publicly accessible building break. Senior Planner Rogers said in this case the building break requirement was revised to be a recess in that location and that would require a change from a recess to a break and then from a private to a public break. He referred to the visual in Chapter E on page E27 under the massing and modulation section and description of recess as 60 feet in width and 40 feet in depth. He said once past that the building could assume a Ushape.

Chair Kadvany noted the Commission was silent on this suggestion.

This concluded the Planning Commission's review of the Plan. The Commission at its November 18 meeting will check the final voting tallies.

F. COMMISSION BUSINESS

There was none.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 11:37 p.m.

Staff Liaison: Thomas Rogers, Senior Planner

Recording Secretary: Brenda Bennett

Approved by the Planning Commission on December 9, 2013