



**City of Menlo Park
City Council Workshop
Held March 12, 2024**

March 2024



Table of Contents

Workshop Report.....	1
Workshop Overview	1
Opening Comments	3
Icebreaker Exercise	3
Effective Governance	3
City Council Procedures Manual	4
Discussion of Goals	5
Housing and Planning-related Projects.....	9
Mission, Vision, and Values	10
Staying on Track	11
Wrap-Up and Next Steps.....	11
Attachment – Workshop Evaluation Summary	13

Workshop Report

The City of Menlo Park City Council held a priority setting workshop from 5:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. on Tuesday, March 12, 2024, in the Council Chambers. The workshop provided an opportunity for Councilmembers to learn more about each other; review elements of effective governance; discuss and establish priorities for the coming year; review the City's mission, vision, and values; and strengthen teamwork. This report summarizes the workshop results.

Steve Mermell and Mary Locey with Baker Tilly facilitated the workshop.



Workshop Overview

Objectives

Create consensus on mission, vision, and values

- Establish Council priorities for Fiscal Year 2024-25
- Prioritize strategic housing and planning-related projects
- Provide direction for the City Council procedures manual
- Strengthen teamwork

Agenda

- Welcome and call to order by the Mayor

- Comments from the City Manager
- Icebreaker exercise
- Effective governance
- Discuss the procedures manual
- Review and establish priorities
- Public comment
- Discuss and create consensus on housing and planning-related projects
- Review the City’s mission, vision, and values
- Staying on track with priorities
- Wrap-up and next steps

Participants

Council



Mayor
Cecilia Taylor



Vice Mayor
Drew Combs



Councilmember
Maria Doerr



Councilmember
Betsy Nash



Councilmember
Jen Wolosin

Executive Staff

- City Manager Justin Murphy
- Assistant City Manager Stephen Stolte
- Deputy City Manager Nikki Nagaya
- City Attorney Nira Doherty

Workshop Preparation

In preparation for the workshop, the facilitators conducted individual interviews with Councilmembers; prepared an agenda, PowerPoint presentation, and other materials; and reviewed the workshop plan with the City Manager and Assistant City Manager.

Opening Comments

The workshop began with a welcome by Mayor Cecilia Taylor, who called the meeting to order. City Manager Justin Murphy then offered some opening comments about why the workshop was important, and what he hoped the participants would gain from the discussions. The City Manager turned the session over to the facilitators, who reviewed the workshop agenda, objectives, and ground rules for a successful session.

Bike Rack

Steve explained that items that were brought up but would not be discussed today would be added to a bike rack, for future attention. No items were added to the bike rack during the workshop.

Icebreaker Exercise

Mary led the group in an icebreaker exercise. The purpose of this activity was to kick off the workshop informally and to learn more about each other. Each Councilmember was asked to reflect on and share their first job, and what they learned from the experience. The responses varied from having a newspaper route, sales, food service, to being a reporter. The experiences gained included listening, the customer is always right, and being persistent.



Effective Governance

Following the icebreaker exercise, the group discussed good governance, teamwork, and attributes of effective Councils. The discussion's purpose was to share perspectives and ideas for effectively serving as a team, and to set the foundation for a productive and fulfilling year. It served as a short refresher on good governance practices and what makes a Council effective.

Steve provided an overview of why effective governance is important. He explained that effective City Manager and Council teamwork makes for good policy and a solid organization. He reviewed attributes of *effective* Councils and compared those to characteristics of *ineffective* Councils.

Steve asked Councilmembers to reflect on what they are doing well, and what could be improved.

City Council Procedures Manual

Steve engaged Council in a discussion about the City Council procedures manual. This discussion reviewed elements of the document and clarified where direction was needed to finalize the document.

The Assistant City Manager presented a suggested process for placing items on the Council agenda, as shown on the slide below.

The slide features a dark green header with the title "Suggested Process for Placing Items on the Council Agenda" in white text. Below the header, a white box contains a bulleted list of procedures. The list is organized into four main categories, each with sub-bullets. At the bottom of the slide, there is a small green icon on the left, the number "16" in the center, and the Baker Tilly logo on the right.

- City Councilmembers make request:
 - Via email to CCIN or to City Manager with Cc to Mayor no later than two business days before publication of the meeting agenda
 - Via verbal request during City Council reports at a City Council meeting
 - Item will appear under "City Council initiated items" for further discussion
 - City Council can direct City Manager to prepare staff report, direct item to advisory body, defer action to workshop
- Members of the public make request:
 - Via email to CCIN
- Non-agendized items:
 - City Council must make appropriate findings
 - Requires four-fifths vote
- Emergency items:
 - Item must affect public health or safety, like work stoppages, disasters, severe emergencies
 - Requires majority vote

It was noted that members of the public can submit suggestions for items for Council consideration, but they cannot request items to be added to an agenda. The procedures will be updated to clarify this.

Additional comments/suggestions made by Councilmembers included the creation of a form that has space for listing the request's relationship to the Council goals or a regular business need, and determining, if any, a limit to how many requests can be made.

Staff will consider all the comments provided and will bring forward a revised Council procedures manual for Council consideration in the near future.

Discussion of Goals

Steve started the goals conversation by setting the context through a review of the City’s recent accomplishments and challenges that were mentioned during the Council interviews. The accomplishments and challenges cited by Councilmembers are listed in Table 1 below.

Table 1. *Recent Accomplishments and Upcoming Challenges*

Accomplishments	Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval of the Housing Element • Filling key vacancies • Completion of park projects • Completion of protected bike lane • Zero emissions landscape equipment ordinance • Return of community events that were on hold due to COVID-19 pandemic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Loss of revenue and increased operating costs • Staff vacancies, attrition, and, in some cases, lack of experience • Court ruling limiting the City's ability to take action on climate change • Elections by district promote parochialism and loss of citywide focus • Addressing loss of affordable rental units; illegal evictions and housing discrimination • Effectively managing development both large and small

Mr. Stolte then presented information on the City’s financial outlook and indicated that staff was evaluating the overall structural balance between the City’s expenditures and revenues. He pointed out the following two important items:

1. For every dollar paid in property taxes, Menlo Park only receives 12 cents; and
2. There are significant impacts from Vehicle License Fee (VLF) shortfalls in the amounts owed to Menlo Park by the State of California, which also impact the City’s budget forecasting. The current fiscal year shortfall is \$2.8 million.

To further set the context for priority setting, Steve reviewed how staff currently allocate their time, and showed staff numbers at a glance. This helped illustrate why prioritization is so important. When looking at the City’s total staff and current responsibilities and vacancies, there are only eight staff positions available to assist with special projects.

Status of Current Goals

Mr. Stolte provided an update on the Council’s five current priorities, which are listed below, and reviewed the City’s current work plan.

-  Housing
-  Emergency preparedness
-  Climate action
-  Activating downtown/economic development
-  Safe streets

Priorities Mentioned by Councilmembers

Steve noted the difference between goals and priorities and strategies and projects, which are often used interchangeably. To provide clarification, he informed the group that the Council is a policymaking body that sets the goals and priorities that provide direction to the City Manager and staff. The City Manager, in conjunction with his staff, identifies the strategies and projects to further the goals established by the Council.

In response to a Councilmember’s question, members of the public should continue to advocate for projects that interest them. However, the City Manager needs to triage the various requests while considering the Council’s goals and the City’s available resources. Occasionally, projects take a long time to rise in relative priority given the many demands on the City.

Steve then reviewed the potential priorities that were suggested during the interviews. These priorities are listed below.



Community Input

Mr. Stolte provided information on a February 2024 community input survey that showed continued support for the established goals into the next year. The results are shown below.

Community Input

Main themes of **53 online submissions**:

- Overall, strong support for existing goals
- Climate action (63%)
- Safe streets (52%)
- Housing (41%)
- Emergency preparedness (25%)
- Activating downtown / economic development (21%)
- Other theme: quiet zone

Additionally, Mr. Stolte reviewed the results of the larger community survey conducted in November 2023 by Godbe Research. Those results are below.

City service priorities – community survey

Identified in community survey in Nov. 2023 by Godbe Research

- **Maintain street and pothole repair** (28.3% much support/42.6% somewhat support)
- **Maintain parks, open space, sports fields and children & play structures at City parks** (33% much support/37.1% somewhat support)
- **Keep public areas healthy, safe and clean** (26.4% much support/44.1% somewhat support)
- **Maintain police 9-1-1 emergency response and preparedness** (30% much support likely/34.7% somewhat support)
- **Enhance emergency preparedness for storms, flooding and wildfires** (28.5% much support/39.8% somewhat support)
- **Provide safe sidewalks and bike paths** (32.3% much support/36.7% somewhat support)

Based on a question from the Mayor, Steve mentioned that a best practice is to identify how items coming before the Council align with the Council goals, as this helps illustrate how progress is being made.

Following a short break, the Mayor opened public comments to hear from the 23 speakers in the Chambers and online.

Establishing Priorities

Following the discussion and establishment of the potential priorities for the coming year, and with the public comments received, public safety and quality of life were added as proposed goals.

Steve then led the group in a dot voting exercise. Each Councilmember was given four sticker dots and were asked to place their dots on their top four priorities. The results of the dot voting are presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Prioritization Exercise*

Goal	Votes
Climate action (mitigation, adaptation, and resilience)	4
Emergency and disaster preparedness*	4
Housing	3
Safe streets (routes)	3
Support for children and youth	2
Quality of life / public amenities	2
Activating downtown / Economic development	1
Financial sustainability*	1
Public safety	1
Addressing infrastructure needs	0
Advancing equity	0

*One half vote was placed for emergency and disaster preparedness and financial sustainability.

Comments from Councilmembers about the identified goals are listed below.

- Support for children and youth includes seeking their input and providing resources and infrastructure;
- Public safety should foundationally be provided for everyone, not only after a recent event or issue;
- The City does not have exclusive control over climate change but does have exclusive control over providing for the community’s desired quality of life;
- Emergency preparedness should include disaster preparedness;
- Does housing include affordable housing and protecting existing affordable housing;
- Since streets include sidewalks, pedestrians, and bicycles; should the goal be “safe routes?”; and

- The downtown/economic development is mostly under the control of property owners. However, the City can provide the environment for encouraging business development.

Steve reiterated that as staff develops its workplan to further the goals, the strategies will be identified and clarified.

Housing and Planning-related Projects

The City's Community Development Director, Deanna Chow, provided an overview of the Housing Element and shared that staff will now be committed to its implementation. There are over 30 programs to implement, and staff is seeking Council's feedback on the proposed prioritization. Two slides were presented and shown below.

Housing Element – major projects

Currently underway:

- Development of affordable housing on downtown parking lots

Comprehensive approach recommended:

- Anti-displacement strategy
- Update to Below Market Rate (BMR) Guidelines

Council direction needed at future meeting:

- Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) amnesty program
- Objective residential design standards

Planning-related projects

Undertake as staff capacity allows:

- Encourage/require community-serving, non-office ground floor uses along El Camino Real and Santa Cruz Ave
- Encourage/require community-serving, non-office ground floor uses in R-MU zoning district
- Park preservation ordinance
- Single-family residential use permit requirements review

Council engaged in a robust conversation about the various projects, the limited resources, and what priorities will benefit the community at large

without increasing the burden on staff and the Planning Commission. A consensus to reorder the priorities is as follows:

1. Single-family residential use permit requirements review;
2. Encourage/require community-serving, non-office ground floor uses in R-MU zoning district;
3. Encourage/require community-serving, non-office ground floor uses along El Camino Real and Santa Cruz Avenue; and
4. Park preservation ordinance (Councilmember Doerr noted that additional public input is needed).

Mission, Vision, and Values

Steve presented the draft mission and vision statements and values that were developed from the dialogue received during the Councilmember interviews. Councilmembers were then invited to select their preferred vision and mission statement and up to four values using the dot voting method.

Following the dot voting, Steve confirmed the mission statement that received three dots and the vision statement that received four dots. He then asked if any edits were needed to the statements. The draft statements are shown below.

Mission Statement

The City of Menlo Park services the community by addressing the current and future needs in alignment with residents' values and priorities.

Vision Statement

Menlo Park is a healthy, and safe place to live, learn, work, play, exercise, socialize, and thrive.

Values

Each Councilmember was given four dots to select from 10 suggested values. The results of the dot voting revealed the top six values as shown below with the votes indicated.

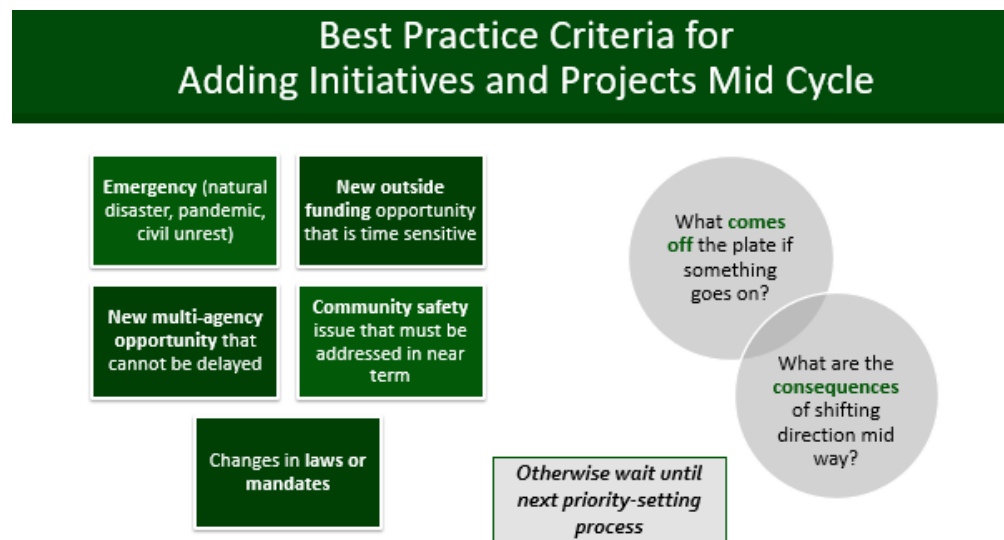
- Integrity, five votes
- Inclusion, three votes
- Diversity, two votes
- Service, two votes
- Accessibility, one vote

- Transparency, one vote

There was consensus that the draft mission and vision statements might need some additional work, which can be done at a subsequent Council meeting.

Staying on Track

Steve then reviewed best practices for staying on track with the established goals and priorities by staff providing regular progress reports and holding off on new Council initiatives until the next goal setting cycle. However, he did note, there may be times where adjustments mid cycle are needed and presented the below slide.



Wrap-Up and Next Steps

To wrap up, Steve explained that Baker Tilly would prepare this summary report and summarized the City Manager’s next steps. The participants filled out workshop evaluations, which are summarized in the attachment to this report.

Closing Comments

- To conclude the workshop, each Councilmember and the City Manager offered a key takeaway from the day’s discussions. The comments that were offered are summarized below.
- Helpful process and frustrating; wanted an easy button. We have made progress.
- Appreciate annual opportunities to step back and look holistically at goals and priorities.

- The goal-setting process is helpful for us and the community. We are working with limited resources and tradeoffs. It is a good reminder of how much our staff does and their support toward these efforts.
- To hear from the community reminds us that we represent the entire city.
- Agree with what has been said. We have made good progress. Appreciate the regular reports on priorities.
- The City Manager thanked the community for its input, the Council for its patience with the process and noted that Council's input is valuable to staff. The executive and management staff will work on delivering and reporting on progress.

Attachment – Workshop Evaluation Summary

**City of Menlo Park
City Council Workshop
March 12, 2024**

Workshop Evaluation

Facilitator(s): Steve Mermell and Mary Locey with Baker Tilly

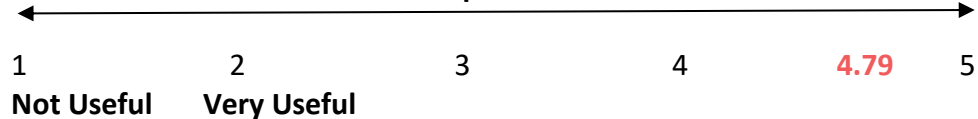
The best thing about this workshop was...

- Council and staff being together focused on priorities with excellent facilitation
- Having an honest dialogue with colleagues
- Clearly led with precise direction and kept moving without diversion
- The opportunity to have a broad discussion
- Harmonious – great tone
- Icebreaker – good addition!
- Appreciate the rapport developed with the Councilmembers to keep focused on high-level priorities

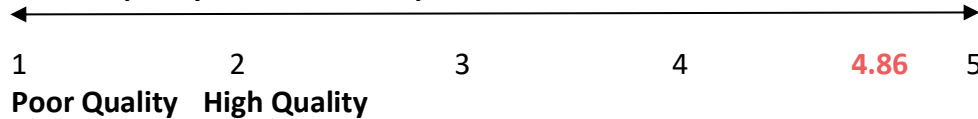
Something(s) which could have been better...

- Being able to send in comments on mission, vision and values handles my need to think and process this task
- Not sure – more dots
- These definitely work better on Saturdays
- Really good – nothing
- Not sure how useful the mission, vision and values process is
- Council needed clearer instructions on the mission, vision and values voting exercise

Overall usefulness of the workshop:



Overall quality of the workshop:



Other Comments

- Thank you – I appreciate your style of leadership – it has improved the goalsetting process
- You guys are great!
- Instead of goals, call them focus areas or topics – “housing” is not a goal – confusing for residents