

# A.

## PLAN OVERVIEW

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## A.1 SUMMARY

The El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan establishes a framework for private and public improvements on El Camino Real, in the Caltrain station area and in downtown Menlo Park for the next several decades. The plan's focus is on the character and extent of enhanced public spaces, the character and intensity of private infill development and circulation and connectivity improvements. It includes a strategy for implementation of public space improvements, such as wider sidewalks and plazas, and other infrastructure improvements.

The overall intent of the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan is to preserve and enhance community life, character and vitality through public space improvements, mixed use infill projects sensitive to the small-town character of Menlo Park and improved connectivity. As discussed later in more detail, the Specific Plan reflects the outcome of an extensive community outreach and engagement process.

“

*We need to do something.*

”

- Workshop #1 Participant

Illustrated in Figure A1, the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan:

- Encourages infill development of vacant and under-utilized lots along El Camino Real through increased intensities, coupled with strict building modulation and ground-floor setback and building profile requirements that both attenuate the mass and scale of larger buildings and create wider public sidewalks;
- Retains the existing “village” character downtown by keeping buildings low and requiring varied building massing, including through building profile and façade modulation requirements;
- Increases downtown activity, foot traffic and transit use through enhanced public spaces, mixed-use infill projects (including residential uses) and higher intensities of development near the commuter rail station;
- Enhances community life through an integrated network of widened sidewalks, promenades, pocket parks and public gathering spaces; and
- Enhances east-west connectivity across El Camino Real through crosswalk and sidewalk improvements, while accommodating north-south vehicular through-traffic, and across the railroad tracks through grade-separated pedestrian and bicycle connections.

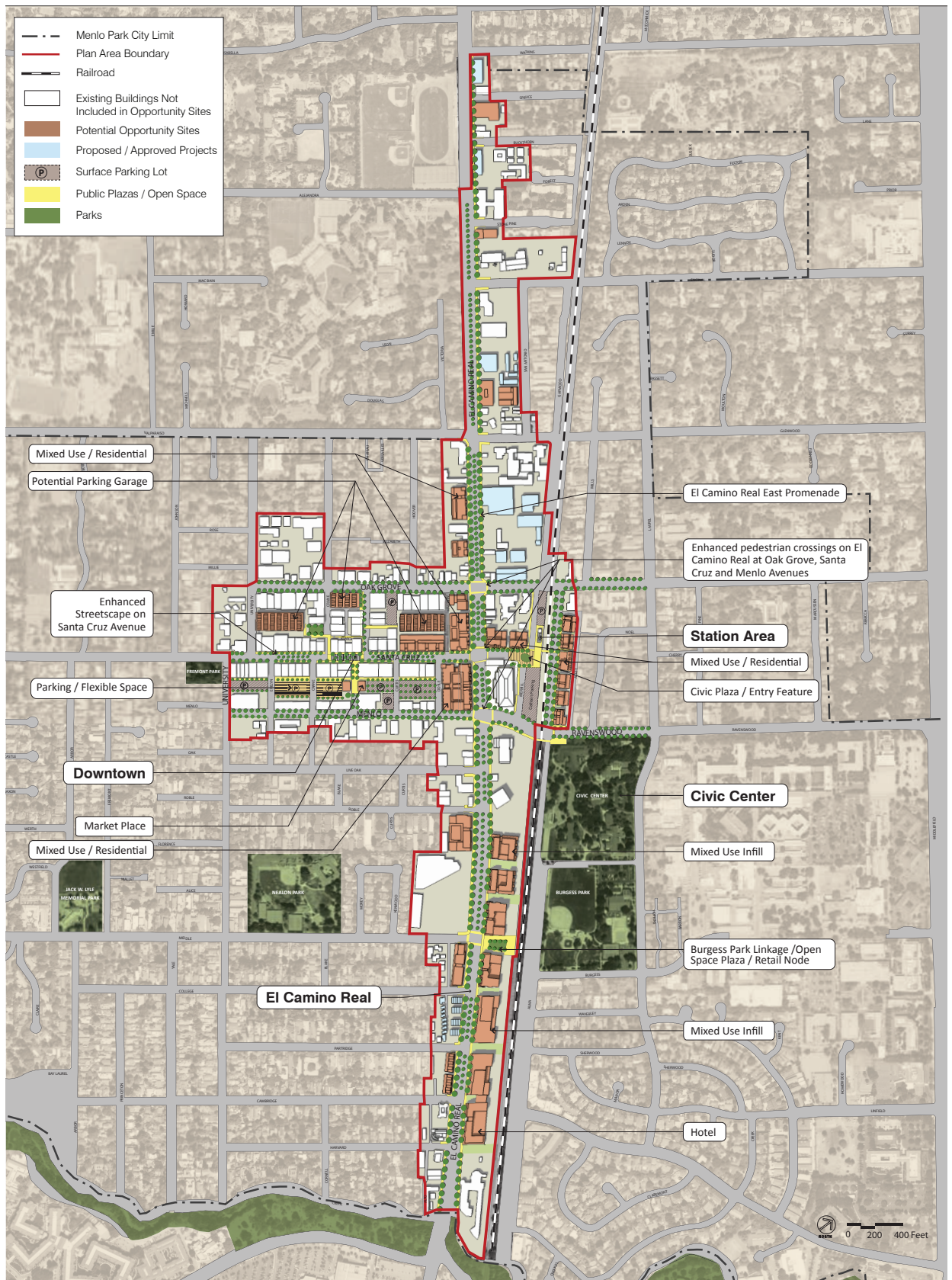


Figure A1. Illustrative Site Plan

The illustrative plan, as shown in Figure A1, depicts how the plan area could potentially build out over the next several decades in conformance with the overall planning principles and within the land use and development regulations and design guidelines contained in subsequent chapters. It is important to emphasize that the illustrative plan indicates only one potential development concept and that the actual build-out will likely vary from the initial projection.

As envisioned, the full build-out of the plan area could result in up to approximately 330,000 square feet of additional retail and commercial development, 680 new residential units and 380 new hotel rooms, resulting in 1,357 new jobs and 1,537 additional residents.

*It is important to emphasize that the illustrative plan indicates only one potential development concept and that the actual build-out will likely vary from the initial projection.*



Rendering of El Camino Real at Ravenswood, looking north

## A.2 SETTING AND BACKGROUND

The City of Menlo Park is located approximately 30 miles south of San Francisco on the Peninsula. Home to approximately 30,000 residents, Menlo Park is part of a string of communities connected to San Francisco and San Jose via El Camino Real (an historic road and State Highway), Caltrain rail service and Interstates 101 and 280. Figure A2 illustrates Menlo Park's regional context.

El Camino Real, the Caltrain rail station, and downtown, along with the nearby Civic Center, constitute the historic core of Menlo Park. Figure A3 illustrates the Specific Plan's plan area, which encompasses El Camino Real, the rail station area and downtown.

An historic route, El Camino Real is now State Highway 82, an active arterial roadway and commercial corridor. It was once home to a number of automobile dealerships, most of which are vacant today. Stanford University, the largest private land owner in the project area, owns 12.8 acres on the east side of El Camino Real south of downtown, encompassing most of the former automobile dealerships and the active Stanford Park Hotel.

Menlo Park's downtown includes relatively few historic buildings but retains its historic fabric of small parcels and local-serving, independent street-front retail businesses. Surface parking lots behind Santa Cruz Avenue,

downtown's main street, provide convenient parking for downtown visitors and employees. Extensive streetscape and sidewalk improvements on Santa Cruz Avenue, constructed in the 1970's, with additional improvements in later decades, lend a distinct character and pleasant tree cover to the street. The street's sidewalks, however, tend to be narrow and lack adequate social space and spill-out space for adjacent retailers that many in the community strongly desire.

The historic train station, currently providing commuter rail service to San Francisco and San Jose, is one block off El Camino Real opposite downtown. There is a relatively weak connection between the train station area and downtown, with limited foot traffic and activities that would otherwise generate more vibrancy in the area. In addition, the rail line, in combination with El Camino Real, run north-south, making east-west connectivity for vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle movement challenging.

In 2007, the City initiated a two-phase planning process to enhance and plan for the long-term success of El Camino Real, the Caltrain station area and downtown. As discussed in section A.5, Phase I established an overarching vision for the project area (discussed below). Phase II, this Specific Plan, refines the vision and establishes an implementation framework for future improvements to the area.



*Rendering of El Camino Real at Partridge, looking north*



Figure A2. Regional Map

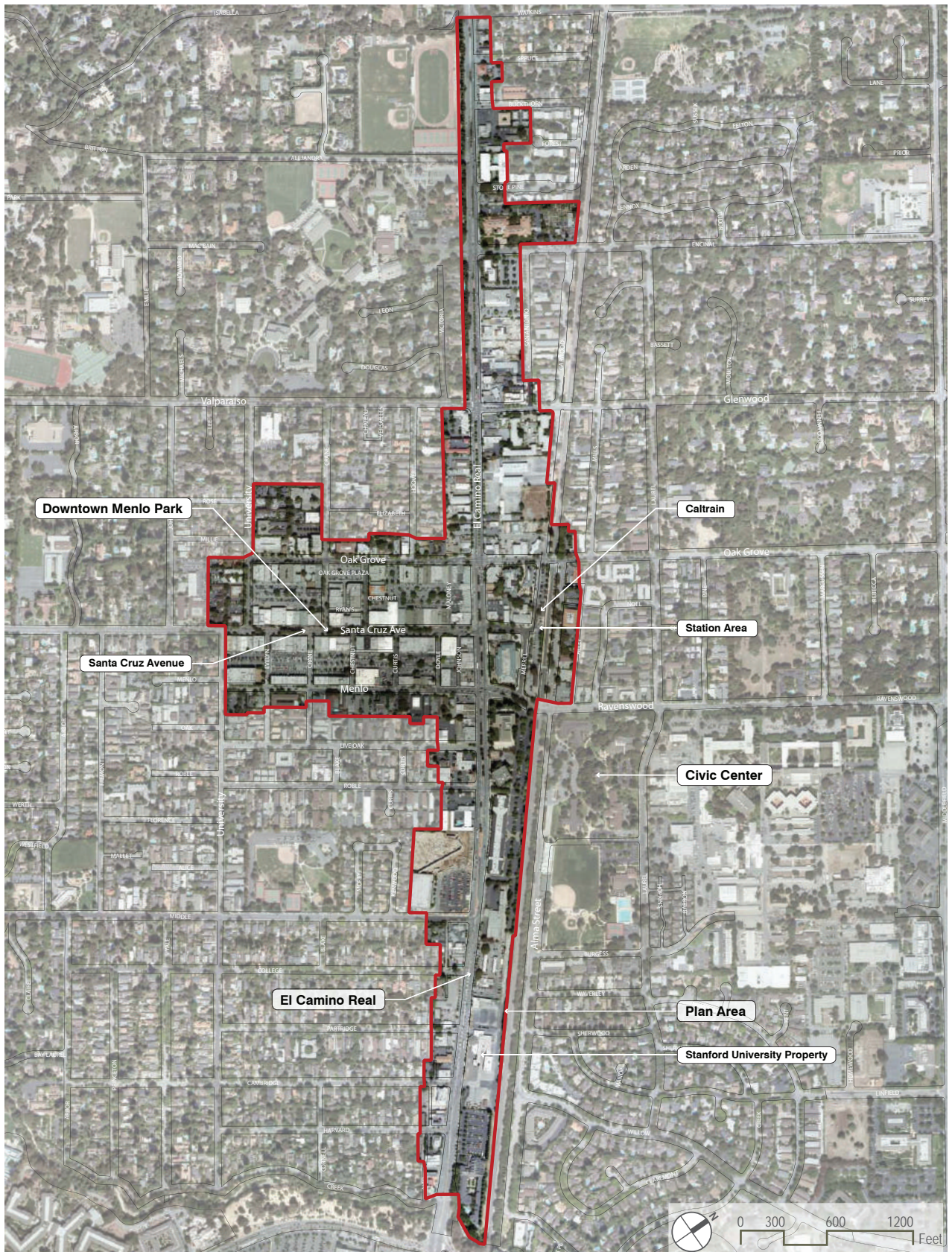


Figure A3. Plan Area Map

## A.3 SCOPE OF SPECIFIC PLAN

The El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan establishes the location and character of streetscape and public space improvements; the character and intensity of commercial and residential development; and the circulation pattern (vehicular, pedestrian, bicycle and transit) and parking strategy to support businesses and overall vitality, and enhance east-west connectivity. The Specific Plan includes standards and guidelines for public and private enhancements to the area, and it offers strategies for financing and implementing public improvements.

In general, a specific plan is a tool for the systematic implementation of the general plan. It effectively establishes a link between implementing policies of the general plan and the individual development proposals in a defined area. A specific plan may be as general as setting forth broad policy concepts, or as detailed as providing direction to every facet of development from the type, location and intensity of uses to the design and capacity of infrastructure; from the resources used to finance public improvements to the design guidelines of a subdivision.



*Rendering of Santa Cruz Avenue*



*The El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan builds upon the El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan, unanimously accepted by the Menlo Park City Council on July 15, 2008.*

*The sketches and photographs in the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan are meant only to relay particular concepts as described in the text or make reference to pertinent precedents and should not be considered exact models. Also, the Specific Plan provides standards and guidelines for private and public development, but does not include detailed plans.*

According to California law, Section 65451 of the Government Code mandates that a specific plan contain the following:

- (A) A specific plan shall include a text and a diagram or diagrams which specify all of the following in detail:
- (1) The distribution, location, and extent of the uses of land, including open space, within the area covered by the plan;
  - (2) The proposed distribution, location, and extent and intensity of major components of public and private transportation, sewage, water, drainage, solid waste disposal, energy, and other essential facilities proposed to be located within the area covered by the plan and needed to support the land uses described in the plan;
  - (3) Standards and criteria by which development will proceed, and standards for the conservation, development, and utilization of natural resources, where applicable; and
  - (4) A program of implementation measures including regulations, programs, public works projects, and financing measures necessary to carry out paragraphs (1), (2), and (3).
- (B) The specific plan shall include a statement of the relationship of the specific plan to the general plan.

The El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan builds upon the El Camino Real/Downtown Vision Plan, unanimously accepted by the Menlo Park City Council on July 15, 2008. In addition to the Specific Plan, the planning effort includes an associated Environmental Impact Report (EIR), fiscal impact analysis (FIA) and revisions to the Menlo Park General Plan and Zoning Ordinance to make this specific plan fully operational.

The sketches and photographs in the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan are meant only to relay particular concepts as described in the text or make reference to pertinent precedents and should not be considered exact models. Also, the Specific Plan provides standards and guidelines for private and public development, but does not include detailed plans.

## A.4 HOW TO USE THIS DOCUMENT

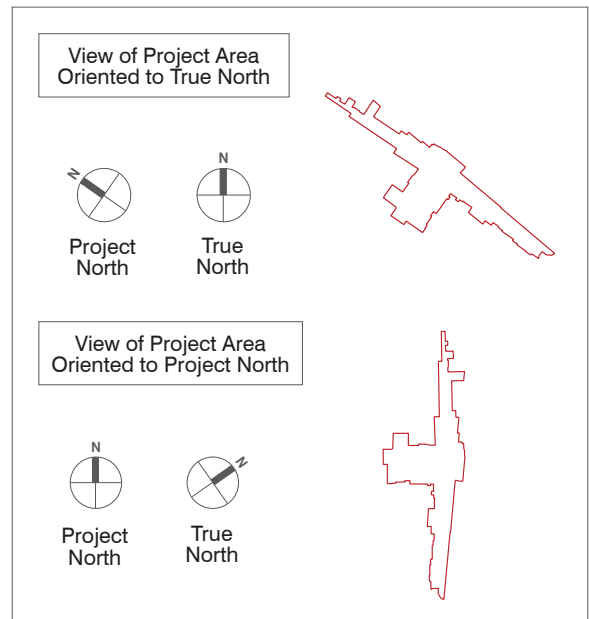
The El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan conveys an overarching vision for enhancements in the plan area for community residents, business and property owners, City staff and developers. It provides guidance for those making public and private improvement in the plan area.

The Specific Plan includes the following chapters.

- A. Plan Overview
- B. Plan Context
- C. Plan Principles, Framework + Program
- D. Public Space
- E. Land Use + Building Character
- F. Circulation
- G. Implementation
- H. Appendix

The first three chapters provide an overview, context and broad principles and concepts for the plan area, providing all readers with a broad framework within which individual improvements should be made. Chapters D, F and G focus on public improvements, including their character, associated standards and guidelines, and implementation strategies. Chapter E provides the regulatory framework for private development, including allowable building heights, allowable development intensities, setback requirements and other standards and guidelines. This chapter is the major focus for property owners and private developers, and it is used by City staff when reviewing private development proposals. Note: building diagrams in Chapter E are intended to illustrate how different standards are measured, and are not intended to necessarily dictate the placement of different uses or parking within a development.

Although each chapter presents information differently based on its focus, Figure A5 illustrates the types of information found within this Specific Plan.



**Figure A4.** “Project North” - Although El Camino Real and the Caltrain line do not run in a precisely north-south direction within Menlo Park, they are overall north-south corridors and are considered by the community as such. Directional references in this document use this convention.

**A. OVERALL DESCRIPTION / INTENT:** Each section / sub-section typically begins with an overall description that outlines the general objectives and intent.

**B. QUOTES / COMMENTS:** Quotes / comments from the community workshops appear in the sidebar to highlight the voices of the participants. The workshop number indicates where the quote / comment was collected. Occasionally, important points of emphasis also appear in the sidebar.

**C. PHOTO:** Photos that appear in the sidebar are intended to relay general principles and not serve as exact models.

**D. STANDARDS:** These are the aspects that **must** be implemented (strict requirements) for public and private development.

**E. GUIDELINES:** These are the aspects that **should** be implemented (not strict requirements) for public and private development.

**F. CONCEPT DRAWINGS:** Conceptual drawings serve as examples of one potential design, to be refined if and when the improvement is to be built.

MENLO PARK EL CAMINO REAL AND DOWNTOWN SPECIFIC PLAN

**A**

**Santa Cruz Avenue Sidewalks**

The Specific Plan calls for improving the pedestrian realm on Santa Cruz Avenue, increasing street activity and enhancing the image of downtown by widening sidewalks, providing ample space for informal gathering, sitting and outdoor dining and introducing new streetscape improvements. The plan establishes sidewalk functional zones, ensuring a pedestrian clear zone and more pleasant and functional sidewalks. It redistributes the right-of-way between traffic lanes, on-street parking and sidewalks in order to focus on an enhanced pedestrian experience while still accommodating vehicular circulation and on-street parking.

**Intent**


- Encourage walking and increase levels of street activity with wider, more functional sidewalks.
- Renew the image of downtown with updated streetscape elements.

**Character**


- Tree canopy with clear visibility to storefronts.
- Median trees retained, which are iconic features of downtown.

**Improvements**

- Retain existing median trees and integrate them into new streetscape design.
- Replace diagonal parking with parallel parking, and use reclaimed width to widen sidewalks.
- On the side with diagonal parking, replace the diagonal parking with parallel parking, narrow travel lane and widen sidewalk.
- On the side with parallel parking, retain parallel parking, narrow travel lane and widen sidewalk.
- Integrate street trees into on-street parking zones, particularly where sidewalks are narrowest.
- Upgrade streetscape elements, such as benches, seating, trash receptacles, newspaper racks, paving, and street lighting.



Existing Santa Cruz Avenue sidewalk (Menlo Park, California)



Widened sidewalks providing ample space for sitting and outdoor dining (City of Santa Cruz, California)

“Encourage restaurants and shops to utilize sidewalks and storefronts for public space gathering, dining, resting”

– Workshop #1 Participant

“I would absolutely trade parking spaces on Santa Cruz and El Camino for well-designed parking garages with safe, pleasant pedestrian paths!”

– Workshop #1 Participant

D10

CHAPTER D PUBLIC SPACE

**C**

- Implement and evaluate Santa Cruz Avenue sidewalk improvements on a trial basis, before moving forward with a permanent installation. The trial period shall be the basis for the review and consideration of a permanent installation.

**D**

**Standards**

**D.2.01** Streetscape improvements on Santa Cruz Avenue shall retain existing median trees to the extent possible.

**E**

**Guidelines**

Streetscape improvements on Santa Cruz Avenue should include the following:

**D.2.02** Provide widest sidewalk possible while retaining on-street parallel parking.

**D.2.03** Introduce safe pedestrian crossings by using elements such as marked crossings, clear signage, supplementary lighting, and curb extensions.

**D.2.04** Introduce street trees in parking zone to maximize sidewalk width, particularly in those areas where a 12 foot minimum sidewalk dimension cannot be achieved.

**D.2.05** Coordinate with streetscape improvements in the station area.

**D.2.06** Consider the following as criteria for streetscape furnishing selection: timeless, functional, easy maintenance, durability and sustainability.

**D.2.07** Achieve safe lighting for vehicular circulation and comfortable lighting for pedestrians; consider additional decorative lighting for nightscape.



12' wide sidewalk (Palo Alto, California)



Illustration of 19' wide sidewalk



Renewed/memorable image for downtown (San Jose, California)

“I like the wider sidewalks on Santa Cruz”

– Workshop #3 Participant

D11

CHAPTER D PUBLIC SPACE

**F**

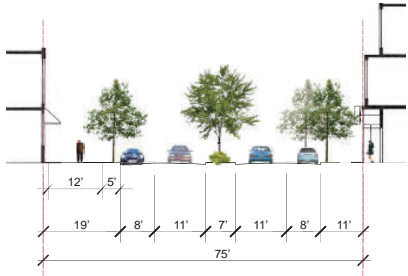


Figure D9. Section through Santa Cruz Avenue, showing two traffic lanes with parallel parking, median trees retained, diagonal parking removed, one moderately-sized sidewalk and one wide sidewalk.

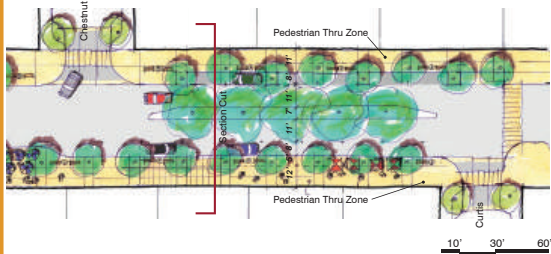


Figure D10. Concept Plan of Santa Cruz Avenue with Major Streetscape Improvements. This plan does not feature the Central Plaza described in the next section.

D13

Figure A5. Types of Information Found in Specific Plan

## A.5 PLANNING PROCESS

The El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan is the result of a multi-year process designed to evolve a community judgment about the future of the plan area. Community judgment, as opposed to public opinion, is a shared conclusion based on beliefs, values and factual information that results in a legitimate, lasting and implementable outcome. Community judgment consists of a shared and common sense of public priorities but is not the same thing as consensus. This public judgment emerged through a two-phase process involving thousands of community members (over 950 on the regular email update list alone); representatives of key stakeholder groups such as downtown and El Camino Real business and property owners; an Oversight and Outreach Committee that included representatives of important stakeholder groups such as residents and business/property owners; City Commissions; and the Menlo Park City Council. The process was supported by an extensive community outreach campaign through both phases that included project newsletters and postcards to every Menlo Park postal address (including both residential and commercial properties); stories in the Menlo Park quarterly newsletter that also went to all households and businesses; news releases, posters, fliers and an extensive email update system; and one-on-one outreach to stakeholders by Council Members, Oversight and Outreach Committee Members and staff.

“  
*I think the emerging plan strikes a good ‘reasonable’ balance between character and progress...by allowing reasonable development*  
”

- Workshop #3 Participant

“  
*I think the overall process has been a very constructive planning process!*  
”

- Workshop #3 Participant

## Phase I: Vision Plan

As is typical of planning processes designed to develop community judgment, the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan began with a community visioning process conducted in 2007 and 2008. This step included an educational speaker series, walking tours, three community workshops, one Planning Commission workshop and two City Council meetings. The visioning process was structured to gather together the core values, hopes and dreams the community has for the area so that when more specific decisions have been made later in the process, they are grounded in the community's decision about what is most important for the future.

The visioning effort was promoted by five city-wide mailings (including two return surveys), which were sent to all residential and commercial properties and which generated approximately 2,600 total returns. The outreach effort also included one-on-one outreach by the Oversight and Outreach Committee to members of their stakeholder groups, such as downtown businesses and residents. The City Council unanimously accepted the Vision Plan on July 15, 2008, and the Plan serves as the values base for the Specific Plan. The following section, Section A.6, lists the Vision Plan's twelve principal goals.



*Phase I visioning process*

## Phase II: Specific Plan Process

As recommended in the Vision Plan, the City subsequently commenced work on a Specific Plan, to contain elements such as detailed land use regulations, design guidelines and implementation measures. As was the case with Phase I, the Phase II process has been a community-oriented planning project, with unprecedented levels of public outreach and participation. The Specific Plan process has strived to result in a community judgment, as defined earlier.

The Specific Plan process included meetings, work sessions and workshops at critical project milestones:

- Interviews with Project Stakeholders at the beginning of the project;
- Meetings with the Oversight and Outreach Committee;
- Meetings/work sessions with the Planning Commission;
- Meetings/work sessions with the City Council; and
- Three Community Workshops.
- Detailed review of the Draft Specific Plan and EIR

### Community Workshops

Three community workshops, each attended by over 100 people, engaged members of the community in facilitated, interactive activities designed to move from the values and goals of the vision phase to an informed judgment about the detailed elements of the Specific Plan. This required workshop participants to learn about the current conditions in the area, generate ideas about what could be done to improve those conditions in order to realize the community vision, understand and weigh the impacts of those ideas and improvements, and make choices about which ideas to include in the plan based on deliberation with other community members.

**Workshop #1 on April 16, 2009.**

The purpose of the first workshop was to help the community confirm the Phase I vision and goals, to understand existing conditions, constraints and opportunities and to consider the primary issues and the possible positive and negative outcomes related to future potential changes in the plan area. The workshop was organized around four subject areas: connectivity, vibrancy, public space and character, all of which were based on the approved vision.



*Community Workshop #1*

**Workshop #2 on June 18, 2009**

The purpose of the second workshop was to build upon the discussion from the first workshop and to begin to discuss the impacts of the various plan elements that were emerging. The process involved a presentation and discussion, in break-out sessions, of alternative concepts for connectivity, vibrancy, public space and character, based on comments from the first workshop, feedback from the Oversight and Outreach Committee, Planning Commission and City Council and analyses conducted by the consultant team. The analyses included preliminary fiscal information, diagrams of site character and opportunities/constraints and a preliminary study of the impacts of potentially tunneling El Camino Real. It included preparation and consideration of various plan concepts, massing options and photomontages, street sections, development scenarios and public space improvements.



*Community Workshop #2*

### **Workshop #3 on September 17, 2009**

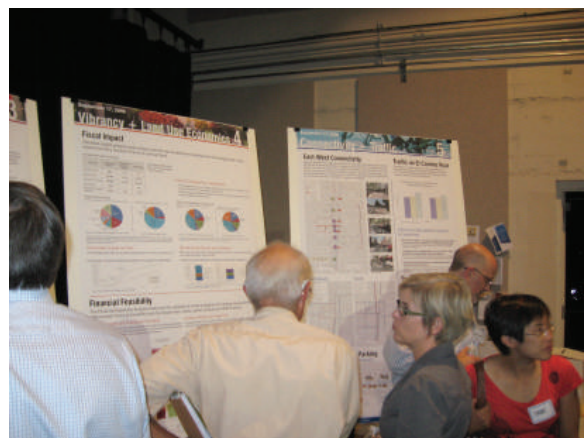
The purpose of the third and final Community Workshop was to present an Emerging Plan developed from Community Workshops #1 and #2, to gain critical feedback on the Emerging Plan and to help decide on revisions to the Emerging Plan. Attendees were able to weigh in on proposed public improvements, including expanded public spaces, wider sidewalks on Santa Cruz Avenue and enhanced crossings of El Camino Real. Attendees also considered a preferred direction for the use, size and character of private development, with its associated traffic and fiscal implications and potential public benefits.

### **Draft Specific Plan and EIR**

Following the Community Workshop process, the Draft Specific Plan was published on April 7, 2010, and the Draft EIR was published on April 29, 2011. Both documents were released to strong community interest. Following the Draft EIR comment period (discussed fully in the Final EIR), the Planning Commission and City Council were originally scheduled to hold one meeting each to provide direction on the Draft Specific Plan. However, both bodies expressed an interest and willingness to hold additional meetings in order to more fully explore and address comments, questions, and potential concerns, both from the Commission/Council and the public. The aim of this detailed review was to provide clear and specific direction on improvements and refinements to the plan.

The Planning Commission held five meetings in July-August 2011, and the City Council followed with four meetings in August-October 2011. Concurrent with the Planning Commission and City Council's review, the Housing, Transportation, and Bicycle Commissions conducted sessions on the Draft Specific Plan. Each of these Commissions recommended moving forward with the El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan process, subject to specific recommendations that were considered by the Planning Commission and City Council. All of these meetings benefited from diverse public input.

The City Council concluded its review on October 4, 2011 with direction for substantive improvements to the Draft Specific Plan, which have been incorporated as appropriate into this Final Specific Plan.



*Community Workshop #3*



## A.6 VISION PLAN GOALS



*Phase I visioning process*

The El Camino Real/Downtown Specific Plan builds upon the Phase I Vision Plan, as unanimously accepted by the City Council on July 15, 2008. The Vision Plan's twelve goals are:

Maintain a village character unique to Menlo Park.

Provide greater east-west, town-wide connectivity.

Improve circulation and streetscape conditions on El Camino Real.

Ensure that El Camino Real development is sensitive to and compatible with adjacent neighborhoods.

Revitalize underutilized parcels and buildings.

Activate the train station area.

Protect and enhance pedestrian amenities on Santa Cruz Avenue.

Expand shopping, dining and neighborhood services to ensure a vibrant downtown.

Provide residential opportunities in the Vision Plan Area.

Provide plaza and park spaces.

Provide an integrated, safe and well-designed pedestrian and bicycle network.

Develop parking strategies and facilities that meet the commercial and residential needs of the community.

Section C.1 of this plan further describes the relationship between these goals and the guiding principles of the Specific Plan.