

Foreword

PURPOSE OF THE REPORTS

Planning for Menlo Park’s future requires an understanding of current circumstances and the issues the community is facing. Accordingly, the attached Existing Conditions Reports addressing Land Use, Circulation, and Economics have been prepared to support the ConnectMenlo project, and they are complemented by a Community Character Report that documents unique features of the city’s many neighborhoods. In combination with the Guiding Principles established for the General Plan and M-2 Area Zoning Update, the information in these reports is intended to help the community create sound policies and programs to achieve the goals of the updated General Plan Land Use and Circulation Elements.

The reports can be read together or as stand-alone documents. They are intended to provide informative overviews and perspectives to help the community gain insight into how the General Plan can influence key local issues, and technical explanations of the complex, interconnected subjects the Plan must consider. The reports seek to distill a large amount of data in an accessible manner to act as a starting point for future policy discussions. Each Existing Condition Report has a concluding section entitled “Summary Key Findings” that emphasizes pressing issues and opportunities.

THE GENERAL PLAN UPDATE

Often described as each city’s “Constitution,” general plans are required by State law to guide land use and development, usually for a period of 10 to 20 years. With the Housing, Open Space/Conservation, Noise and Safety Elements having been recently updated, the focus of ConnectMenlo is on the Land Use and Circulation Elements. These two elements are central components of a general plan because they describe which land uses should be allowed in the city, where those land uses should be located, and how they may be accessed and connected. The Land Use Element frames the type and scale of potential development that may occur, particularly in the M-2 Area, which is generally between US 101 and the Bay and where most change is expected in Menlo Park over the next two decades. The Circulation Element will also address transportation issues throughout the city, and both updated Elements will be consistent with the other General Plan Elements.

PUBLIC REVIEW DRAFT FOREWORD

Community engagement is the foundation of the ConnectMenlo project, as updated policy language will only be meaningful if it helps achieve the community's vision for the future. The in-person public outreach and participation process has included workshops and open houses; mobile tours of Menlo Park and nearby communities; informational symposia; stakeholder interviews; focus groups; recommendations by a General Plan Advisory Committee (GPAC) composed of City commissioners, elected officials, and community members; and consideration by the City Council and Planning Commission at public meetings. Many more such opportunities will occur throughout the process to ensure that community members play a central role in guiding the General Plan and Zoning Ordinance updates. In addition, ConnectMenlo features a comprehensive project website, online surveys, and a mobile app that provides access to project information and documents, as well as self-guided tours.

The updated Land Use and Circulation Elements and zoning provisions will be evaluated by an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) that determines whether the potential changes may produce impacts that need to be mitigated. By incorporating implementation provisions that purposely reduce environmental impacts, the proposed updates can be made largely self-mitigating, which reduces the need for separate EIR mitigation measures, improves the efficiency of implementation, and increases the likelihood that development will be environmentally sustainable.

NEXT STEPS

Following release of the Existing Conditions and Community Character Reports, the City of Menlo Park will solicit additional community feedback regarding a potential future development scenario in the M-2 Area, as well as regarding policy directions to support that scenario. New goals and policies could impact city regulations, especially in regard to development in the M-2 Area, with implications for transportation improvements. Potential land use changes, in conjunction with new goals, policies, and programs, will affect the ways in which the Menlo Park built environment may evolve over time. These policies and programs will also establish the ways in which new developments contribute to the quality of life in Menlo Park.