

**Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan Update  
Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC)  
Role & Ground Rules**

**Role of the Citizens Advisory Committee**

The City of Palo Alto Citizens' Advisory Committee (CAC) has been appointed by the City Manager to represent a diversity of interests and will be responsible for reviewing sections of the City's existing Comprehensive Plan, updates developed by the Planning & Transportation Commission, supporting information, and public input received during and in advance of the meetings. Based on this review, the CAC will provide recommendations to staff regarding updates and changes to policies and programs in the current Comprehensive Plan. The CAC will primarily be engaged in reviewing and commenting on (rather than writing) policy and program language and will also assist staff with the evaluation of "open sourced" public input and with synthesizing all materials and inputs as they review plan language (policies/programs) and proposed revisions.

The City Council will provide direction to the CAC regarding the Comprehensive Plan structure, including its vision statements and goals, as well as critical issues and desired additions/revisions. The CAC will incorporate this direction into their work, and will meet periodically with the City Council to discuss issues and questions.

**Ground Rules For CAC Conduct and Decision Making:**

The following ground rules provide the basis for collaborative communication among CAC members, other stakeholders, staff, and decision-makers. They are also intended to serve as boundaries for fair and civil behavior and group decision making.

- 1. Meeting Procedure:** CAC meetings are subject to the Brown Act, which set standards for public notice as to meeting time, date and location as well as items to be discussed. Substantive issues will have higher priority than matters of procedural detail. The Chair or the Facilitator has discretion in guiding discussion of items among Committee members while allowing for appropriate public input. Staff may address the Committee at any time.
- 2. Meeting Preparation:** CAC members will receive meeting agendas and the materials that will be discussed in advance of each meeting. Members are responsible for reviewing these materials prior to the meeting, and for coming prepared for substantive discussions.
- 3. Meeting dates, time, and location:** CAC meetings will be held on the second Tuesday of the month from 5:30 to 8:00 pm at the Mitchell Park Library, 3700 Middlefield Road. Beginning in October, the CAC meeting will be held on the third Tuesday of the month from 5:30 to 8:00 pm at the Mitchell Park Library, 3700 Middlefield Road.
- 4. Problem Solving Approach:** Disagreements between participants will be regarded as problems to be solved rather than arguments to be won. At the discretion of the Chair or the Facilitator, disagreements may be tabled for discussion and resolution at a later meeting.
- 5. Decision-Making:** Decisions will be made by consensus. When consensus cannot be reached, decisions will be made by a majority of the voting members of the CAC who are present. A quorum for this process will be nine (9) members. No business can be conducted if fewer members than a quorum are present. A brief summary of CAC meetings will be posted to the project website ([www.paloaltocompplan.org](http://www.paloaltocompplan.org)) for any interested party to examine.

- 6. Clear and Timely Communication:** Every participant is responsible for communicating his or her position on issues under consideration. Each participant is also encouraged to clearly state their intentions and concerns at the earliest possible time in the course of the discussions. To move an agenda item forward, the Chair or the Facilitator may limit the time each member is allowed to speak or limit the discussion to high-level “deal breaker” issues. The Committee’s focus should be on ideas/concepts and not on wordsmithing.
- 7. Information Sharing:** Relevant information plays an important role in the development of informed consent. At the same time, too much information or information of limited relevance can cause confusion and slow down the process. Where individual members wish to share written or printed information with the group as a whole, such information should be provided to City Staff at least 72 hours prior to any scheduled meeting to allow for duplication and/or distribution prior to the meeting.
- 8. E-mail Communication:** Electronic communications shall be guided by the same general protocols for communication, problem solving and negotiation that are followed when the group is in general face-to-face sessions. All email correspondence shall be directed through the City Staff at least 24 hours in advance of meetings if possible. CAC members may not communicate in person, over the phone, or via email with a majority of CAC members. Doing so is a violation of the Brown Act requirements for open and transparent meetings. Compliance with the Brown Act also requires that members of the group refrain from commenting about the group’s activities on social media that may be viewed by a majority of CAC members.
- 9. Participation and Observation by Members of the Public:** All CAC meetings are open to the public and all observers are welcome. Members of the public will have an opportunity to address the CAC during each meeting for a period of time established by the CAC Chair or Facilitator. Separate workshops are geared to soliciting a broader public dialogue where public input is encouraged. Members of the public are encouraged to submit written materials in advance of the meetings via the City Staff.
- 10. Absence when Decisions are made:** When members cannot attend a meeting of the CAC, they should communicate their views to the Chair prior to that meeting; however members must be present to vote on decisions. Failure to attend meetings on a regular basis will constitute resignation from the Committee and members will be replaced if they do not attend at least 75% of the regularly scheduled meetings.
- 11. Timely adjournment of evening meetings:** To encourage public participation, evening meetings of CACs will be organized, agendaed, and run so as to finish at a reasonable hour. If the CAC finds its evening meetings habitually running past 8:30PM, staff and the Chair will work together to shorten the agendas and, if necessary, to expedite committee discussion and action on items.
- 12. Conflicts of Interest:** CAC members are not considered to be “public officials” as defined in §82048 of the California Government Code, and therefore are not subject to the State Political Reform Act and its disclosure provisions (Government Code §§ 81000 et seq.). Nevertheless, CAC members shall remove themselves from all discussions and votes on matters in which they have any direct personal financial interest, or where the member’s professional allegiance and/or personal bias cannot be set aside to allow the member’s fair consideration of the issue(s) at hand.
  - a** In gauging such extra-legal conflicts of interest and/or duty, each member shall exercise careful judgment and introspection in giving priority to the interests of fairness and

objectivity; if there is any reasonable doubt that the member has a conflict, the member shall refrain from participation in the committee's deliberations and vote(s).

- 13. Speaking for the CAC:** Only the Chair, Vice-Chair, or other duly authorized CAC member shall speak for the Committee at any applicable non-CAC public hearing, on social media, or in the press. When speaking in public, CAC members may identify themselves as members of the CAC, and may report on any formal actions (motions) adopted by the Committee. However CAC members may not speak for the CAC or characterize and report on discussions of the CAC unless explicitly authorized to do so by the group.

#### **Participant Roles:**

- 1. City of Palo Alto Role:** The City of Palo Alto convenes Comprehensive Plan Update process and is the agency with the responsibility of writing the Comprehensive Plan. In this regard, it will rely on the CAC to provide input and recommendation for the document that is responsive to neighborhood and community goals, conditions and aspirations.
- 2. Group Roles & Responsibilities:** The following points are offered as examples of behavior consistent with constructive dialogue, mutual respect and a commitment to collaboration:
  - a** Offer respect of different viewpoints and attention when others speak.
  - b** Share the responsibility of ensuring the success of the process and the quality of recommendations.
  - c** Make our best good faith effort to work towards reaching an agreement.
  - d** Represent the perspectives, concerns, and interests of agencies or constituencies whenever possible to ensure that agreements and recommendations developed by the group are acceptable to the organizations, agencies, or constituents being represented.
  - e** Ask questions of each other for clarification and mutual understanding.
  - f** Verify assumptions when necessary and avoid characterizing the motives of others.
  - g** Acknowledge and try to understand others' perspectives.
  - h** Stay focused on the task at hand and share airtime with others.
  - i** Refrain from distracting others through side conversations; silence all cell phones during meetings.
  - j** Concentrate on the content of discussions and allow the Chair or the Facilitator to focus on how to promote productive discussion.
- 3. Subcommittees:** If the Chair or Facilitator determines that a specific topic or agenda item requires a higher level of analysis and focus than allowed for during its meetings, he/she may appoint an ad hoc subcommittee to address specific information needs, refine options or resolve differences of opinion outside of its regular meetings. Subcommittees are not empowered to make decisions in place of the group as a whole, but rather to frame and refine issues and information needs for resolution by the CAC. They must number fewer members than a quorum of the full CAC. Subcommittees are limited duration groups in that they exist only as long as it is necessary for them to accomplish their task.
- 4. City Attorney:** Specific legal issues are to be directed through City Staff for a response from the City Attorney.

5. **The Chair/Vice Chair or Facilitator:** The Chair, Vice-Chair, or Facilitator shall work with City Staff to plan meeting agendas and conduct efficient meetings.