



**COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE
CITIZENS ADVISORY COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE AGENDA
LAND USE & COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT**

Monday, May 2, 2016

City Hall, Flexible Meeting Space, Ground Floor
250 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto, CA 94301
1:00 PM TO 4:00 PM

TITLE: Land Use and Community Design Element Subcommittee Discussion
FROM: Elena Lee, Interim Planning Manager,
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Background

To date, the CAC has had three meetings to discuss the Land Use and Community Design Element, and the subcommittee has met once. The focus up to this point has been on incorporating policy and program suggestions from CAC members and on forging compromise on several key issues. With this work substantially complete and the focus shifting to preparation of a preliminary draft element, staff suggests that attention be turned to tightening up the policy framework so that it lays out a clear and compelling vision for land use and community design. To do this:

- headings should be added to serve as signposts through the element and to help the reader navigate;
- policies and programs should be ordered to move from the general to the specific;
- the policy framework can be streamlined, and policies and programs can be combined in order to eliminate duplication and repetition;
- policy and program language should be rephrased into positive language to clarify the desired outcome.

Attachment A - Revised Policy Framework incorporates recommendations on the key issues received from the full CAC at the April 19 meeting as well as initial efforts by staff and the consultant team to tighten up the policy framework. For clarity's sake, Attachment A shows the current version without displaying previous edits; however, for informational purposes, Attachment B presents the original text of the element with all the edits made to date.

The purpose of this meeting will be to hear further recommendations from the subcommittee on tightening up and streamlining the policy framework. Following the meeting, staff and the consultants will refine the framework further in response to subcommittee recommendations received and produce a full preliminary draft element for CAC review and comment on May 17, 2016.

What to Expect at the Meeting

At the outset of the meeting, time will be given over to public comment from members of the community. Speakers will be allowed up to three minutes to share their thoughts on land use and community design. Time limits are necessary to ensure that there is an opportunity for members of the public to express their opinions, while also ensuring that the subcommittee can complete the agenda set out for the meeting.

The subcommittee meeting will be run as a working session, with policies and programs onscreen so that edits can be made by staff and the consultant in real time, based on subcommittee recommendations. Staff suggests that the group can proceed through the element goal by goal. Staff and the consultant will briefly introduce the key concepts associated with each goal to kick off the discussion of streamlining the policies and programs that support it. Then subcommittee members will be invited to make suggestions and discuss refinements.

Summary of CAC Direction on Key Issues

Height Limit (Goal L-1):

A citywide height limit of 50 feet was established in the 1970s in response to community concerns about the growing number of taller buildings and its effect on the character of the community. In the current context of rapidly rising housing costs in Palo Alto and throughout the Bay Area, however, the CAC has discussed the possibility of recommending that City Council review the height limit. Given prevailing real estate market conditions in Palo Alto, allowing height limit exceptions under certain conditions represents an opportunity to potentially incentivize desirable development and negotiate community benefits. A height limit of 55 feet would facilitate residential-mixed use developments with ground floor retail and up to four residential stories above it, as retail generally requires a floor height of 15 feet and residential requires a floor height of 10 feet. This configuration would be possible with wood-frame construction and a concrete podium, which is more cost-effective than a concrete and steel.

The CAC discussed the question of height limit increases over the course of two meetings, and while unanimous consensus was not achieved, there was support for allowing exceptions to be considered for developments that would create housing in proximity to transit, particularly housing targeted to seniors, disabled people and other disadvantaged populations of all income. This is in line with current City policy in the adopted 2015-2023 Housing Element. Specifically, Housing Element Program H2.1.1 permits high-density residential in mixed use or single use projects in commercial areas within one-half a mile of fixed rail stations. The program also states that the City is to consider amending the zoning code to allow limited exceptions to the 50-foot height limit for Housing Element Sites within one-quarter mile of fixed rail stations. As such, two policies are proposed for consideration for the draft:

NEW POLICY PROPOSAL: Maintain a 50-foot limit on building heights in Palo Alto, but allow heights up to a maximum of 55 feet for residential and retail mixed use projects to facilitate contemporary floor to ceiling heights.

NEW POLICY PROPOSAL: Height limits over 50 feet may be considered for areas well-served by transit as a way to facilitate a mix of multi-family housing, including affordable units, units targeted to seniors and other special needs populations, and micro-units designed to accommodate members of the workforce, without generating new traffic and parking impacts. , [There is disagreement among CAC about limited increases to the height limit and this issue will be decided by the City Council.]

Promoting Mixed Use in Appropriate Locations (Goal L-1):

The commercial land use designations in the current Comp Plan all allow for a mix of land uses; however, the consensus on the CAC is that a tool that encourages mixed use projects with no office component would be a valuable addition. This concept has been incorporated into the framework in the form of the following new program under Policy L-9:

NEW PROGRAM: Update the municipal code to include zoning changes that allow a mix of retail and residential but no office uses. The intent of these changes would be to encourage a mix of land uses that contributes to the vitality and walkability of commercial centers and transit corridors.

Adaptive Growth Management (Goal L-1):

The current Comp Plan contains absolute numerical caps on the amount of non-residential development citywide and in the downtown area. City Council will consider whether to preserve and/or modify these policies; however, staff has recommended supplementing or substituting the caps with a mechanism that relies on Congestion Management Plan data for new office/R&D uses throughout the city. The CAC also discussed developing an adaptive growth management tool that would address the impacts of growth by establishing performance standards that must be monitored and met as a condition of approval. While no consensus was reached on the standards or metrics to monitor, there was general interest among CAC members in recommending the issue be explored further in order to clearly define the issues and develop appropriate metrics to address them with an adaptive growth management tool that complements numerical caps. As such, the following policy and program were incorporated into the framework:

NEW POLICY: Monitor new residential and non-residential development and proactively address its adverse effects. It is the City's intent to allow new development while taking steps to minimize its impacts.

NEW PROGRAM: Amend the municipal code to incorporate requirements for performance standards, monitoring and enforcement provisions to minimize the adverse effects of growth.

Coordinated Area Plans (Goal L-2):

Chapter 19.10 of the Palo Alto Municipal Code provides guidance for coordinated area plans, establishing the required contents and the procedures for initiating, developing and permitting coordinated area plans. Coordinated area plans are intended to guide development in a specific area of the city and to achieve goals and objectives established by City Council that complement and supplement the vision described in the Comp Plan. They may be initiated at any time by Council motion and the Planning and Transportation Commission can also recommend initiation by Council. Community involvement is an important component of the coordinated area plan process and the municipal code defines the required elements of a public involvement program that must be undertaken.

While a coordinated area plan is a valuable tool for building a shared vision for the future, developing one is a time and resource intensive undertaking that requires extensive community outreach and dedication of considerable staff time to complete. For this reason, although the 1998 Comp Plan included a number of programs that called for developing coordinated area plans to guide change in key areas of the city, only the South of Forest Area (SOFA) has received the benefit of this detailed planning process to date. In view of the intensive resources and time required to develop a coordinated area plan, the land use subcommittee identified the Fry's Site and South El Camino Real as areas of the city that should be prioritized for coordinated area plan processes, as these locations represent the areas of greatest opportunity for positive impact. On the whole, the CAC supported this direction, with recommendations that additional detail about the location and objectives of coordinated area planning processes be included. To reflect this recommendation, the following new policies and revised programs have been incorporated into the draft:

NEW POLICY: Consider preparing coordinated area plans to guide development in areas of Palo Alto where significant change is foreseeable. Address both land use and transportation at an equal level of detail, define the desired character and urban design traits of the areas, identify opportunities for public open space, parks and recreational opportunities, and address connectivity to and compatibility with adjacent residential areas. If development is proposed before the coordinated area plan is initiated, rigorous review of all of the issues described above shall be undertaken. [L51]

NEW PROGRAM: Prepare a coordinated area plan for the South El Camino corridor from Curtner Avenue to West Charleston Road, as shown in the diagram below. The plan

should articulate a vision for the corridor as a well-designed complete street with an enhanced pedestrian environment including wider sidewalks, increased building setbacks, public open spaces, safe pedestrian crossings at key intersections, trees and streetscape improvements. Mixed use residential and retail development on shallow parcels should be encouraged to support a more walkable and bikeable environment along the corridor, with appropriate transitions to the surrounding single-family neighborhoods. The plan should also foster improved connections to surrounding destinations.

NEW PROGRAM: Prepare a coordinated area plan for the Fry's site and the surrounding area. The plan should describe a vision for the future of the Fry's site as a walkable neighborhood with mixed density multi-family housing, ground floor retail, a public park, and an interconnected street grid.

NEW POLICY: Encourage community involvement in the planning process for development projects proposed in the South El Camino corridor and the Fry's Site area.

Parkland Acquisition (Goal L-8):

Parks are an important part of the exceptional quality of life in Palo Alto; however, with few large, undeveloped parcels available in the urban service area, creation of new parks is a challenge. Several CAC members have suggested that the Comp Plan should plan for acquisition of land for new parks and not just collection of in lieu fees to fund construction of new parks, which the municipal code currently allows developers to opt to do. The subcommittee considered a range of tools at the City's disposal to help address the need and made a range of recommendations that were supported by a majority of CAC members. These recommendations, with some refinements are incorporated in the draft with the following policy and programs:

NEW POLICY: Facilitate creation of new parkland to serve Palo Alto's residential neighborhoods, as consistent with the Parks, Trails, Open Space and Recreation Master Plan, while maintaining adequate land for affordable housing.

NEW PROGRAM: Explore ways to encourage dedication of new land for parks, including regulations and incentives for new development and programs to solicit bequests of land in single-family neighborhoods.

NEW PROGRAM: Pursue opportunities to create linear parks over the Caltrain tracks in the event the tracks are moved below grade.

NEW PROGRAM: Explore ways to dedicate a proportion of in-lieu fees towards acquisition of parkland, not just improvements.

NEW PROGRAM: Pursue Explore opportunities to dedicate City-owned land as parkland to protect and preserve its community serving purpose into the future.

Next Steps

Subcommittee recommendations will inform development of the full preliminary draft element, with narratives, maps and supporting graphics. The preliminary draft will be circulated in the packet ahead of the CAC meeting scheduled for May 17, where the CAC will review and comment. It is anticipated that the discussion on May 17 will result in additional follow up actions for the subcommittee in order to revise and refine the preliminary draft element for presentation to City Council. As such, another land use subcommittee meeting will be scheduled for later in the month of May.

The revised preliminary draft Land Use and Community Design Element would then go back to the CAC on consent at their June meeting. Subsequently, the element would be presented to City Council in September.