



# PLANNING DIVISION

## STAFF REPORT

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**TO:** PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

**FROM:** Beth Bourne, Senior Planner      **DEPARTMENT:** Planning and  
Community Environment

**AGENDA DATE:** April 26, 2006

**SUBJECT:** 3401, 3415, and 3445 Alma Street (Alma Plaza) [06PLN-00020]: City Council direction to the Planning and Transportation Commission for an initial review of a request by McNellis Partners and Greenbriar Homes Communities, Inc. for preliminary review of the demolition of the approximately 45,000 s.f. retail building (the vacant Albertson's store and two adjacent buildings developed as Planned Community #1362) and construction of: (1) a three-story, mixed-use building fronting Alma Street comprised of approximately 19,200 s.f. of commercial area and fourteen residential apartments on the upper floors (with associated underground tenant parking spaces), (2) forty-five detached single family residences, and (3) landscaped parking facilities on the remainder of the site.

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### **RECOMMENDATION:**

Staff requests that the Planning and Transportation Commission (P&TC) comment on the proposed development in this initial review. The P&TC should provide direction and identify key issues for the City Council (Council) and staff to consider prior to further review by the P&TC. This request is made in conformance with the Development Project Preliminary Review [PAMC Section 18.97.040(a)].

### **BACKGROUND:**

On January 30, 2006, the City Council directed the Planning and Transportation Commission to initially study the proposal prior to the Council study session on May 1, 2006. The verbatim minutes from this meeting will be transmitted to the Council prior to their meeting.

Pursuant to PAMC Section 18.97.040(a), one or more noticed public study sessions can be held to accomplish the purposes of a preliminary review. As provided for by Chapter 18.97 of the Zoning Ordinance, the purposes of a preliminary review are:

- a) To maximize opportunities for meaningful public discussion of development projects, at the earliest feasible time, for the guidance of the public, project proponents, and city decision makers.
- b) To focus public and environmental review of development projects on the issues of greatest significance to the community, including, but not limited to, planning concerns, neighborhood compatibility, Comprehensive Plan consistency, economics, social costs and benefits, fiscal costs and benefits, technological factors, and legal issues. These procedures are not intended to permit or foreclose debate on the merits of approval or disapproval of any given development project.
- c) To provide members of the public with the opportunity to obtain early information about development projects in which they may have an interest.
- d) To provide project proponents with the opportunity to obtain early, non-binding preliminary comments on development projects to encourage sound and efficient private decisions about how to proceed.
- e) To encourage early communication between elected and appointed public officials and staff with respect to the implementation of city policies, standards, and regulations on particular development projects.
- f) To facilitate orderly and consistent implementation of the city's Comprehensive Plan and development regulations.

#### Site Information

The 4.2-acre project site is located on Alma Street between East Meadow Road and El Verano Avenue. Surrounding land uses are apartments to the north, single-family residential to the east and south, medical offices to the south, and Alma Street and the railroad lines to the west. The site contains a total of 45,161 s.f. of building area in three buildings: (1) the 17,168 s.f. former Albertson's store, (2) the 14,630 s.f. two-story retail building, and (3) the 13,363 s.f. single-story retail building. There are 257 existing surface parking spaces at the site. The site is currently vacant with the exception of three businesses: Mandarin Cuisine restaurant, Alma Shoe Repair, and Jacquie's Sew & Sew.

#### Project Description

The applicant proposes a conceptual plan for redevelopment of the site that includes the following:

1. Mixed-use building with 19,200 s.f. of commercial retail area on the ground floor and 14 rental units (one- and two-bedroom) located on the second and third floor. Underground parking garage for rental tenants and retail employees.
2. Forty-five detached, small lot, single family residences with a mix of two and three-stories and ranging in size from 1,690 s.f. to 2,150 s.f.. A vesting tentative map to subdivide the parcels and create condominium units would be required.
3. Surface parking for commercial retail shoppers and guests of the single family housing.
4. Site amenities, including tot lot, pedestrian and bicycle connections, gathering spaces and public art.

The applicant has provided additional project information in their project binder, entitled "Alma Plaza: Visionary Mixed Use" (Attachment B).

## **SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES:**

Attachment A provides the policies and programs listed in the Comprehensive Plan and Housing Element that are pertinent to each of the key considerations. As incentive to build affordable housing and to revitalize the neighborhood center, the City Council may consider where flexibility of certain zoning standards and development policies (as stated in the adopted Housing Element) may be appropriate for this application.

### **Change of Land Use**

The change in land use from commercial retail to a mixed-use development of commercial and residential benefits the City by (a) revitalizing a neighborhood center, and (b) providing affordable and market rate housing.

The Comprehensive Plan land use designation for the project site is Neighborhood Commercial. The proposed mixed-use development is consistent with this land use designation, which includes "... shopping centers with off-street parking or a cluster of street-front stores that serve the immediate neighborhood. Examples include Alma Plaza, Charleston Center, Edgewood Center and Midtown. Typical uses include supermarkets, bakeries, drugstores, variety stores, barber shops, restaurants, self-service laundries, dry cleaners and hardware stores. In some locations, residential and mixed-use projects may also be located in this category. Non-residential floor area ratios will range up to 0.4." The proposed project does not alter the uses suggested in the land use definition and the proposed non-residential floor area ratio calculates to 0.15 to 1.

The zoning district for the project site is (and has been since 1951) Planned Community (PC). As part of the application review process, the City will discuss what types of uses are appropriate for redevelopment of this site. In particular, the Business and Economics Element of the Comprehensive Plan has broad goals for the City that can be summarized as: providing a thriving business environment that is compatible with Palo Alto's residential character; providing a diverse mix of uses; providing for new businesses that provide needed local services and municipal revenues, contribute to economic vitality and enhance the community's physical environment; and providing attractive vibrant business centers. The emphasis is on economic vitality with a diversity of services while maintaining compatibility with residential neighborhoods.

In adopting the Housing Element in 2002, the City Council confirmed the appropriateness of building affordable housing on this site. The proposed 59 housing units exceed the objective of the City's Housing Sites Inventory that identifies the site for a minimum of 8 units.

The City will have to consider the economic consequences of allowing residential on an existing commercial retail site and thereby reducing the square footage available for sales tax generating retail use in the city. Comprehensive Plan Policy L-7 states, "Evaluate changes in land use in the context of regional needs, overall City welfare and objectives, as well as the desires of surrounding neighborhoods." Several retail studies and economic analyses addressing this issue were provided to the Commission members.

Housing Density, Type and BMR Housing Unit Requirement

The applicant is proposing fourteen Below Market Rate (BMR) rental units located above the commercial retail building and forty-five detached, small lot, single family residences, for a total of 59 housing units and a density of 14 units per acre. Residential density in mixed residential and nonresidential projects in multi-family zones (RM-15 and RM-30) are computed based upon the total site area, irrespective of the percent of the site devoted to commercial use.

	<b>Site Area</b>	<b>Number of Units</b>	<b>Density</b>
Multi-Family Housing	4.2 acres	14	3.3 units per acre
Single Family Housing	4.2 acres	45	10.7 units per acre
Combined	4.2 acres	59 total	14 units per acre

The project site provides an opportunity for the City to require a mix of BMR units to facilitate the objectives of the Housing Element. The City’s BMR requirement for affordable housing at below market rates for very low, low, and moderate-income households is fifteen percent of all housing units in sites of five acres or less. The applicant is proposing that the fourteen rental units above the retail building be affordable units to meet the BMR requirements (15% of the total units, or 9 units) for the entire site. The applicant is proposing that the rental units be operated by a non-profit housing organization.

Size of Retail Area and Neighborhood Center Viability.

The applicant is proposing 19,200 s.f. of commercial retail area. The building is proposed to contain a space (approximately 9,000 s.f. to 11,000 s.f.) for a small grocery store and three to five additional tenant spaces for small retail and personal services. The applicant has stated that in order for the retail portion of the project to be economically feasible, housing would be required on the site. Past retail feasibility studies of Alma Plaza have concluded that because the site is located mid-block, on an arterial with an entrance driveway that is unsignalized, it may not be economically viable for additional retail to locate on the site.

The proposed mixed-use development is consistent with Comprehensive Plan policy B-27 because the new development would “support the upgrading and revitalization of Palo Alto’s four neighborhood commercial centers,” which includes Alma Plaza. The Business and Economics Element of the Comprehensive Plan also lists other pertinent policies that support the applicant’s proposal in conformance with the Plan. These policies can be summarized as maintaining distinct neighborhood shopping areas that are attractive, accessible and convenient to nearby residents.

Staff recommends that the larger retail tenant space for the grocery store would be specifically limited to that use. The other ground floor tenant spaces would be designated for such other uses that are compatible with the Comprehensive Plan and intent of the commercial center. Office use would not be allowed. Staff believes that the proposed size of the commercial retail area is consistent with the intent of the Comprehensive Plan policies for the site as a “neighborhood” serving center. Without the provision of a considerably larger anchor grocery store (from 30,000 s.f. to 40,000 s.f.) and providing additional access from Ramona Street, it is unlikely that more commercial retail space would be viable at this center.

### Physical Constraints and Opportunities

Physical constraints and opportunities regarding the proposed use of the site include:

- ingress/egress,
- parking,
- design enhancement exceptions (DEE's), and
- site amenities.

#### *Ingress/Egress*

The existing unsignalized condition at the entrance driveway would be maintained. At the time a formal application is submitted, staff will further analyze the constraints of the site to ensure the proposed ingress and egress to the site are sufficient and that it will not interfere with the nearby street and rail intersection, as well as easements with abutting properties. The proposal does not include vehicular access to Ramona Street or Emerson Street, though pedestrian access would be provided between the site and Ramona Street.

#### *Parking Regulations*

The zoning code regulations allow flexibility to modify the current off-street parking and loading regulations used by all districts in the City (PAMC Section 18.83.120). The applicant is proposing one space per 250 s.f. of retail floor area and one space per 1,500 s.f. of storage areas. This ratio is less than the City's standard for retail and personal service of one space per 200 s.f. The proposed 73 on-grade parking spaces for the retail use also include spaces from the redevelopment of Alma Street frontage near East Meadow and some shared parking with the BMR rental units, due to different peak hours of demand.

The Comprehensive Plan encourages relaxed parking standards as an incentive for redevelopment. Business and Economics Element Policy B-17 states "where redevelopment is desired, encourage owners to upgrade commercial properties through incentives such as reduced parking requirements, credit for on-street parking, and increase in allowable floor area. Use such incentives only where they are needed to stimulate redevelopment or contribute to housing or community design goals."

#### *Design Enhancement Exception (DEE)*

The applicant proposes bringing the commercial retail building forward towards Alma Street to within 5 feet of the property line. The project site has a special street setback of 30-feet on Alma Street, which is a designated arterial in the Comprehensive Plan. Current zoning standards do not permit a building to encroach into the street setback without a DEE. The applicant is also proposing minor DEE's for setbacks and daylight planes for the market rate housing adjacent to the apartment buildings on the north property line and Ramona. At the time a formal application is submitted, staff will review the project for compliance with the proposed zone district. DEEs are not required with PC districts, as the PC district allows for flexibility of development standards in exchange for a public benefit.

#### *Open Space/Site Amenities*

The proposed project incorporates open space on the site for both the residents of the BMR rental housing and market rate housing. Site amenities include a tot lot, landscaped pedestrian pathways, and gathering spaces. Thirty percent of the site is proposed as open space for the

single family housing, including the tot lot and private courtyard patios. The BMR housing units would be required to include common and private open space as well.

### Zoning Process

The applicant is proposing that the site be rezoned from Planned Community (PC) to a different underlying zone or combination of zones. As described in the applicant's project description, a Development Agreement is proposed to ensure the phasing of the development, building types and uses, site improvements and project benefits (see Attachment B).

The site is currently zoned PC-1362, which refers to the originating ordinance that established the zone in 1951. PC districts are established to "...accommodate developments for residential, commercial, professional, research, administrative, industrial, or other activities, including combinations of uses appropriately requiring flexibility under controlled conditions not otherwise attainable under other districts. The PC district is intended for unified, comprehensively planned developments, which are of substantial public benefit, and which conform with and enhance the policies and programs of the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan." Any use may be permitted or conditionally permitted in a PC district, as long as it is a use that is approved at the adoption of the zone. For PC-1362, the listed uses coincide with that of the then C2 zone plus a service station. The C2 zone has since been replaced by the CN (Neighborhood Commercial) zone. However, certain development standards for the CN zone do not currently apply to this PC zone, because each PC zone has its own development standards that are adopted at the time the PC zone is adopted.

As the project is further defined, staff will review the project for conformance with the proposed change in zoning as well as Comprehensive Plan goals, policies and programs, such as those relating to site and building design and neighborhood relationships. The PC zoning district may offer greater flexibility for the proposed development in regards to site regulations while providing the community with a public benefit.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

No environmental review is required for this Preliminary Review application, as it is not considered a project under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). When a project application is filed, staff will develop the Initial Study in compliance with CEQA guidelines. The outcome of this Initial Study will determine the type of environmental document staff will produce to evaluate this proposal in regards to CEQA guidelines.

Potential environmental impacts to be analyzed include public facilities and services such as utilities, parks and open space, libraries, transportation and schools. As mitigation towards these impacts, the project is subject to requisite Development Impact Fees intended to offset capital costs for the increased demand for community facilities and schools. Also, the project is within the Charleston-Arastradero traffic impact fee area, Development Impact Fees would be required for any redevelopment of this site that increases vehicle trips above the site's baseline conditions.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

Attachment A: Key Considerations/Policy Implications Matrix

Attachment B: Applicant's Project Description and Project Binder (binder for P&TC members only)

**COURTESY COPIES:**

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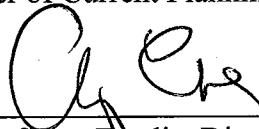
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**ALMA PLAZA  
PRELIMINARY REVIEW APPLICATION  
KEY ISSUES/POLICY IMPLICATIONS MATRIX**

KEY CONSIDERATIONS	POLICIES
<p>1) <b>Change in Land Use</b> – From retail only to a mixed-use retail and residential development</p> <p>Comprehensive Plan consistency - “Neighborhood Commercial” land use map designation allows housing and retail.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Land use map designation</u> as “Neighborhood Commercial: Includes shopping centers with off-street parking or a cluster of storefront stores that serve the immediate neighborhood. Examples include Alma Plaza, Charleston Center, Edgewood Center, and Midtown. Typical uses include supermarkets, bakeries, drugstores, variety stores, barber shops, restaurants, self-service laundries, drycleaners, and hardware stores. In some locations, residential and mixed use projects may also locate in this category. Non-residential floor area ratios will range up to 0.4.”</li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Goal L-4: Inviting, pedestrian-scale centers that offer a variety of retail and commercial services and provide focal points and community gathering places for the City’s residential neighborhoods and employment districts.</u>  <i>Neighborhood Centers are small retail centers with a primary trade area limited to the immediately surrounding area; often anchored by a grocery or drug store and may include a variety of smaller retail shops and offices oriented toward the everyday needs of surrounding residents. Selected streets provide walking and biking connections from adjacent neighborhoods. As with the Multi-neighborhood Centers, future plans include local transit or jitney service and new public gathering places around which new retail uses may be clustered. Palo Alto’s four Neighborhood Centers are Midtown, Alma Plaza, Charleston Center, and Edgewood Plaza.</i></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy L-7: Evaluate changes in land use in the context of regional needs, overall City welfare and objectives, as well as the desires of surrounding neighborhoods.</u></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy L-19: Encourage a mix of land uses in all Centers, including housing and an appropriate mix of small-scale local businesses.</u></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy L-37: Maintain the scale and local-serving focus of Palo Alto’s four Neighborhood Centers. Support their continued improvement and vitality. Neighborhood Centers are smaller than Multi-neighborhood Centers and have more</u></li> </ul>

<p>2) <b>Housing Density and Type</b> – Proposal includes 45 units of small lot single family homes and 14 rental units proposed above retail building, for a total of 59 units. Density is 14 units to the acre.</p> <p>Project site is listed on the Housing Sites Inventory (minimum of 8 dwelling unit yield).</p> <p>Project BMR housing units would be 15% for under 5-acre site (9 units).</p>	<p>limited service areas. They should be pleasant, attractive places that provide opportunities for shopping as well as social contact with friends and neighbors.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy N-39: Encourage the location of land uses in areas with compatible noise environments. Use the guidelines in the table “Land Use Compatibility for Community Noise Environment” to determine compatibility.</u></li> <li>• <u>Housing Element Policy H-3: Continue to support the re-designation of suitable vacant or underutilized lands for housing or mixed uses containing housing.</u></li> <li>• <u>Housing Element Program H-3: Encourage the conversion of non-residential lands to residential use to both increase the supply of housing, particularly affordable housing, and decrease the potential for the creation of new jobs that exacerbate the need for new housing.</u></li> </ul>
<p>3) <b>Commercial Retail and Economics</b>– Project includes 19,200 square feet of retail area. What is the measure of sufficient retail—minimum size of retail area?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Program L-38: Revise land use and zoning designations as needed to encourage medium density housing (20 to 25 units per acre) within or near Neighborhood Centers served by public transportation to support a more vital mix of commercial activities.</u></li> <li>• <u>Housing Element Policy H-2: Consider a variety of strategies to increase housing density and diversity in appropriate locations. Emphasize and encourage the development of affordable and attainable housing.</u></li> <li>• <u>Housing Element Program H-1: Increase housing density immediately surrounding commercial areas by either increasing allowed densities or encouraging development at the higher end of the existing density range for sites along San Antonio Road.</u></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy B-18: Create incentives for providing multi-unit housing on top of parking lots in or near commercial centers and transit hubs.</u></li> </ul>
<p>3) <b>Commercial Retail and Economics</b>– Project includes 19,200 square feet of retail area. What is the measure of sufficient retail—minimum size of retail area?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy B-2: Support a strong interdependence between existing commercial centers and the surrounding neighborhoods as a way of encouraging economic vitality.</u></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Program B-2: Implement the City’s Economic Resources Plan. The Palo Alto Economic Resources Plan presents the City’s long-term strategy for working with the local business community. The Plan has four objectives:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish a stronger working relationship with the business community to maximize</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

<p>Feasibility of additional retail area without requiring a large grocery store. Neighborhood Centers are small retail centers serving the immediately surrounding area.</p> <p>Fiscal costs and benefits – retail sales tax revenue leaking to nearby cities.</p>	<p><i>local benefits from long-term economic trends;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Consider the City's economic future when making growth decisions;</i></li> <li>- <i>Revisit past policies that affect business to determine whether they are still relevant;</i></li> <li>- <i>Establish a market perspective within the City organization.</i></li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Program B-13</u>: <i>Review the effect of size caps, parking requirements, and other land use restrictions on the viability and competitiveness of neighborhood centers.</i></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy B-27</u>: <i>Support the upgrading and revitalization of Palo Alto's four Neighborhood Commercial Centers. Neighborhood Centers include Midtown, Alma Plaza, Charleston, and Edgewood Plaza. The primary concern in these Centers is revitalization. The City wishes to increase the economic competitiveness and vitality of these areas and is willing to examine regulatory changes and public improvement programs to achieve this objective. This could involve the use of tax or assessment districts to finance necessary improvements.</i></li> </ul>
<p><b>4) Design Constraints/Opportunities:</b></p> <p><b>Ingress/Egress</b> – Access only from Alma Street, no signalized intersection. No ingress/egress from Ramona or Emerson streets. Easement for adjacent properties for Alma Street egress.</p> <p><b>Parking</b> – Proposal includes shared parking (retail employees and apartment tenants) in parking garage below retail, credit for off-street parking, and reduction in required parking for retail.</p> <p><b>Design Enhancement Exception</b> – 30' special setback on Alma Street, proposal requires DEE to bring retail</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy L-78</u>: <i>Encourage development that creatively integrates parking into the project by providing for shared use of parking areas.</i></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy T-1</u>: <i>Make land use decisions that encourage walking, bicycling, and public transit use.</i></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy T-14</u>: <i>Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to and between local destinations, including public facilities, schools, parks, open space, employment districts, shopping centers, and multi-modal transit stations.</i></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy T-16</u>: <i>Create connecting paths for pedestrians and bicycles where dead-end streets prevent through circulation in new developments and in existing neighborhoods.</i></li> <li>• <u>Comprehensive Plan Policy T-23</u>: <i>Encourage pedestrian-friendly design features such as sidewalks, street trees, on-street parking, public spaces, gardens, outdoor furniture, art, and interesting architectural details.</i></li> <li>• <u>Housing Element Program H-18</u>: <i>Encourage the development of housing on or over parking lots by adopting incentives that will lead to housing production while maintaining the required parking.</i></li> <li>• <u>Housing Element Program H-38</u>: <i>Encourage the use of flexible development standards and creative architectural solutions in the design of projects with a substantial BMR</i></li> </ul>

towards the street.

**Open Space/Amenities** – Provide adequate open space, landscaped buffers and other site amenities. Proposed lot, pedestrian pathway connecting to Emerson Street.

- *component. The intent of this program is to allow individual projects to develop individual solutions to create an attractive living environment both for the project and adjacent development and to address specific project needs, such as provision of open space.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Policy B-6: Maintain distinct neighborhood shopping areas that are attractive, accessible, and convenient to nearby residents.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Policy L-15: Preserve and enhance the public gathering spaces within walking distance of residential neighborhoods. Ensure that each residential neighborhood has such spaces.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Policy L-18: Encourage the upgrading and revitalization of selected Centers in a manner that is compatible with the character of surrounding neighborhoods.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Policy L-20: Encourage street frontages that contribute to retail vitality in all Centers. Reinforce street corners with buildings that come up to the sidewalk or that form corner plazas. Well-designed storefronts with attractive display windows and building entries at frequent intervals are inviting to shoppers. They help support retail vitality by encouraging people to stay in the area and move from store to store. These features are particularly important at corners because they draw shoppers across streets to continue shopping. They also provide opportunities to convey the image and character of the center to motorists.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Policy L-21: Provide all Centers with centrally located gathering spaces that create a sense of identity and encourage economic revitalization. Encourage public amenities such as benches, street trees, kiosks, restrooms and public art.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Policy L-38: Encourage maximum use of Neighborhood Centers by ensuring that the publicly maintained areas are clean, well-lit, and attractively landscaped.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Policy L-39: Facilitate opportunities to improve pedestrian-oriented commercial activity within Neighborhood Centers.*

**5) Zoning Process** – Rezone to new zone district or combination of zone districts.

Proposed Development Agreement would restrict housing density, prohibit

- *Comprehensive Plan Policy L-9: Enhance desirable characteristics in mixed use areas. Use the planning and zoning process to create opportunities for new mixed use developments.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Program L-15: Establish a planning process for Centers that identifies the desired character of the area, its role within the City, the locations of public gathering spaces, appropriate land uses and building forms, and important street and*

office use, and control phasing.

A vesting tentative map to subdivide the parcels and create condominiums would be required.

*pedestrian connections to surrounding Residential Neighborhoods.*

- *Comprehensive Plan Program L-36: Evaluate current zoning to determine if it supports the types of uses and scale of buildings considered appropriate in Neighborhood Centers.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Program L-37: Encourage property owners within Neighborhood Centers to prepare master plans, with the participation of local businesses, property owners, and nearby residents.*
- *Housing Element Program H-14: Rezone, where necessary, those sites identified on the Housing Sites Inventory, using appropriate residential or mixed use zoning districts, prior to 2004.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Policy B-1: Use a variety of planning and regulatory tools, including growth limits, to ensure that business change is compatible with the needs of Palo Alto neighborhoods.*
- *Comprehensive Plan Program B-13: Review the effect of size caps, parking requirements, and other land use restrictions on the viability and competitiveness of neighborhood centers.*



# Alma Plaza Project Description

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Taking into consideration both the site's constraints, as well as the best practices from New Urbanism, the proposed mixed-use project for Alma Plaza offers:

- Neighborhood serving retail services of an appropriate size and with a tenant mix that will ensure long-term viability;
- Forty five single-family detached homes that will be compatible with existing neighborhoods; and
- Below market rate apartments to be operated by a non-profit housing organization.

At the back of this **Section 1** we have included a Zoning Summary of building areas, density and parking along with a Site Plan, Retail and BMR building elevation, Single-family homes sample elevations, Ingress/Egress diagram, and an illustration of the Retail Building areas including garage parking.

## The Site and Its Constraints

The subject property is transitional site with respect to land uses. **The project encompasses 182,952 square feet (approximately 4.21 acres)**, the western edge of which fronts onto Alma Street. The site is surrounded on the north by the three-story Stanford Villa 1950's vintage apartment complex (zoned RM-30) that is among the densest housing in Palo Alto. On the east there is a two-story apartment building zoned RM-15, also from the 1950's, and single-family homes on Ramona Street. On the south there are the single-family homes on the Emerson cul-de-sac and a one-story medical office building developed in the 1960's.

**Development of the site is impacted by severe limitations with respect to ingress and egress.** Residential neighbors insist that they be protected from vehicular access to the site from either Ramona Street or Emerson Street. Accordingly, site access is limited to Alma Street.

The apartment complex to the north, and the medical office building to the south, burden the Alma Plaza site with easements that ensure that each of these neighboring properties share a two-way drive lane to a common point of ingress/egress along Alma Street. The Alma Street access must be placed no further south than the current entry drive. Were the entry drive to be moved further south, it would interfere with the East Meadow/Alma Street signalized intersection where traffic backs up along Alma Street during peak hours of vehicular traffic. This coincides with signal controls imposed by Cal Train at its commuter hours. The lack of a signal controlling the left turn into Alma Plaza further limits access. Additionally, the City has rejected a signalized left turn pocket into Alma Plaza due to its closeness to the Alma/Meadow signal.

City consultants have referred to the Alma Plaza site constraints:

- **Gruen Gruen – 1992:** “The layout of the Center is poor, with limited visibility from its Alma points of entry.”
- **Keyser Marston – 1995:** “The Center has an awkward L-shaped configuration with no visibility from the Street.”
- **Gruen Gruen – 1996:** “Alma Plaza has been adversely affected by physical constraints related to poor visibility and relative lack of access. Alma Plaza’s potential trade area is circumscribed by railroad tracks bordering Alma Street on the west that substantially hinder cross traffic. Alma Plaza’s mid-block location dictates that it have a signal major entry point, limiting its access. The lack of a traffic signal at its single entrance compounds this limitation.”
- **Sedway Group – 2000:** “Signage and accessibility are also barriers to the success of the center. Access to the center is restricted to the west by train tracks, with crossings approximately 1/8 of a mile south at West East Meadow and one mile north at Colorado Avenues. Signage is limited to a small and almost inconspicuous billboard on Alma Street. In addition, the closest building is located approximately 140 feet back from Alma Street.”

**Resident, Winter Dellenbach, described the poor access from Barron Park:** “I live in the heart of Barron Park and I would like to have a food market near my neighborhood, but Albertson’s will not be that market. The fastest and most direct way for me to get to Alma Plaza from Barron Park is to drive to a nearby Barron Park stop sign, then turn onto Los Robles, drive to a stop light at El Camino and Los Robles, then cross El Camino, when I can, onto El Camino Way to stop at the stop sign at the Goodwill Store, then turn left onto East Meadow driving to the next stop sign, then proceed to the railroad crossing at Alma and El Camino – if there is no train go a bit further to the Alma stop light, then turn left, next quickly maneuver to the right lane where there may or may not be another stop light in the future to negotiate at the entrance of the Plaza, and then hunt for a parking space.”

## The Retail Building

The proposed retail building, of about 19,200 square feet, will be located immediately adjacent to Alma Street, not only significantly enhancing the view corridor and walking desirability along Alma, but also eliminating the “sea of parking” vista often encountered with suburban shopping centers. Urban Design Guidelines for Palo Alto and other communities favoring New Urbanism encourage buildings to be placed as near the street and sidewalk as possible in order to create a pedestrian “edge” bordering high-volume, wide vehicular arterials. Our proposed design accomplishes this.

The retail portions of the Alma Street building will be contained primarily on the first floor with a ceiling height of about 18 feet in order to create attractive retail environments. We anticipate the development of shared handicap-accessible toilet rooms rather than requiring each tenant to have its own toilet rooms. There will also be dedicated retail storage and small office areas located in the under ground garage located directly under the retail building. These efforts will maximize the area of retail display and direct customer service.

**The retail building is designed to accommodate a full-service, neighborhood grocery store** of between approximately 9,000 and 11,000 square feet with deli, bakery and coffee service as is the case for all neighborhood grocers. **In addition to an “anchor” grocery operator there will be space for as many as five other retail or personal service tenants** --- all at sizes that are designed to create the best opportunity for long-term success. Among the types of users likely to participate in a true neighborhood retail center are a coffee shop, a small restaurant, a dry cleaner drop station, a small postal service, an ATM or other banking services and other retail services such as those found in Midtown.

All of the retail stores will open onto the easterly or “inboard” side of the building, thereby focusing the retail inward to the surrounding neighborhood and accentuating their neighborhood-serving uses. To address the concerns of neighbors at the southern edge, no pedestrian access will be provided to or from Emerson Street.

**The retail building will provide adequate parking spaces on site** with between 62-68 spaces on site. Additionally, up to 16 on-street parking spaces will be provided in the upgraded portion of Alma Street which converts the obsolete two-way drive west of Emerson and east of Alma Street at the East Meadow into a one-way drive with diagonal parking.

Architecturally, a diversity of materials will be achieved through a mix of brick and plaster with wood detailing. The result will blend aesthetically with the new residential community.

## **Public Amenities Prescribed for Neighborhood Centers**

The Comprehensive Plan discusses the features that should be incorporated into any revitalized Neighborhood Center. While it is premature to provide details about specific features, **Alma Plaza will accommodate the following amenities** necessary to create a successful pedestrian-friendly environment:

- Information Kiosk
- Attractive Signage
- Public Art
- Benches and Gathering Places
- Bicycle Parking
- Pedestrian and Bicycle Connections
- Street Trees
- Attractive Landscaping
- Unobtrusive Lighting

## **Market Rate Community Homes**

In addition to the fourteen affordable apartment units, Greenbriar Homes Communities will develop **45 single-family detached homes** behind the retail building and extending to Ramona Street on the east and Emerson Street on the south. A great deal of care has been taken to assure that the proposed project fits well into the existing traditional single-family neighborhood, as well as the two and three-story apartments that border the project on the north and east side.

The three Ramona Street homes will be two-story homes, each with a driveway and garage facing Ramona in keeping with the character of Ramona Street. Forty-two of the homes will consist of two and three-story residences ranging in size from 1,690 square feet to 2,150 square feet and each with a two-car garage that will be accessed by alleys at the rear of these homes. Pedestrians will enter the homes from heavily landscaped paseos, and will have at-grade private courtyards.

Project amenities for the residences will include an enhanced entry, featuring beautiful landscaping, architectural embellishments and public art, to provide a discernable sense of place. The retail and residential uses in Alma Plaza will share a principal entrance to create a welcoming gateway into a cohesive and vibrant neighborhood. This will be strengthened by the landscaped paseos throughout the entire new community. While the retail will also share vehicular access rights across its parking lot with the single-family residences, decorative masonry walls will separate the two aspects of this mixed-use project, giving each a separate sense of identity. A tot-lot will be centered within the community. Signage will be clear and informative, and lighting will be comprehensive, but unobtrusive, for the new and surrounding residences.

**Parking for the single-family homes will satisfy all requirements with 2 covered parking spaces in garages for each of the 45 homes (none of these spaces will be tandem)**

and 14 guest parking spaces that are in addition to any spaces that might be available on a shared basis with the retail center.

**Zoning requirements will be satisfied by the residential project with respect to technical matters: height (35 feet); open space (30%); site coverage (40%); setbacks and daylight planes will require only a few minor Design Enhancement Exceptions adjacent to the three-story apartment building on the shared north property line as well as the two-story apartment building on Ramona Avenue.**

## **14 BMR Housing Units**

Striving to meet the City's work force housing needs, this project proposes to meet its **below market rate (BMR) obligation by approximately 14 one-and-two-bedroom BMR rental apartment units**, above the retail building. The BMR rental units will be provided exclusive parking in an underground garage located directly underneath the retail building with about 25 parking spaces thereby meeting the full parking requirement for the BMR rental units.

The BMR rental units will be operated by a non-profit housing organization such as **the Palo Alto Housing Corporation**. Once the concept for Alma Plaza is approved, we will work diligently to develop affordable rental housing units that satisfy specifications of a non-profit affordable housing group.

## **Sustainable Design Features**

Each of the retail, below market rate rental units and the single-family homes will introduce **sustainable design features consistent with and in excess of Palo Alto's adopted policies**.

Among the required sustainability elements that will be implemented are the following features:

- Reduced light pollution beyond the project site
- Reduced ozone depletion through use of HCFC-free refrigeration/HVAC
- Salvage of construction and demolition materials
- Compliance with C-3 storm water management with a combination of bio-swale and pervious parking areas to treat on-site storm water

Among the voluntary elements of the sustainability program are the following:

- Evaluate exceeding Title 24 performance standards
- Energy Star appliances
- Fly ash will be used in concrete foundations and slabs
- Interior access to daylight
- R-19 insulation using recycled contents
- Ground floor access to outdoor areas for single-family homes
- Balconies for BMR units
- Low E insulated glass for the retail building

- Enhanced canopy with extensive new trees
- Double paned windows for the rental housing units
- Passive shading for the retail building
- Evaluation of photovoltaic panels
- Retain a LEED accredited professional to review retail construction documents

### **Greatly Reduced Traffic Impacts**

A Traffic Analysis prepared by Fehr and Peers is attached at the back of this section 1.

The analysis demonstrates a 1,111 daily trip reduction by implementing the proposed project when compared to current land use. A diagram also shows that moving the drive lane from Alma into this site is improved when moved further north as proposed by this application.

# Alma Plaza Project Description

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Plans, renderings and a detailed Project Description are provided at **Section 1** of the **Alma Plaza Binder**.

The Proposed Alma Plaza Project is summarized below with the Site Plan attached:

**Site Area:** 183,546 sf (4.21 Acres)

## **Retail Project:**

Building Area = 19,200 sf (including some basement storage)

FAR = 10.5%

Required Retail Parking – 73 Spaces:

4 Spaces Per 1,000 sf for 17,700 sf Retail=	72 Spaces
1 Space Per 1,500 sf for Storage =	<u>1 Space</u>
	73 Spaces

73 Spaces are provided, including new spaces along the Alma Street frontage.

**Note:** 4 parking spaces per 1,000 square feet was approved by P&TC in January 2003. Policy B-17 of the Comprehensive Plan encourages reduced parking as an incentive for Neighborhood Retail Centers.

## **Below Market Rate Housing:**

**Number of Units:** 14

Density: 3.3 Units Per Acre

Building Area: Approximately 17,000 sf

FAR: 9.3%

Required BMR Parking:	Six 2-Bedroom @ 2 Spaces =	12
	Six 1-Bedroom @ 1.5 Spaces =	9
	Guest Parking @ 1 + 10% =	<u>3</u>
		24 Spaces

## **Single-Family Housing:**

**Number of Units:** 45

Density: 10.7 Units Per Acre

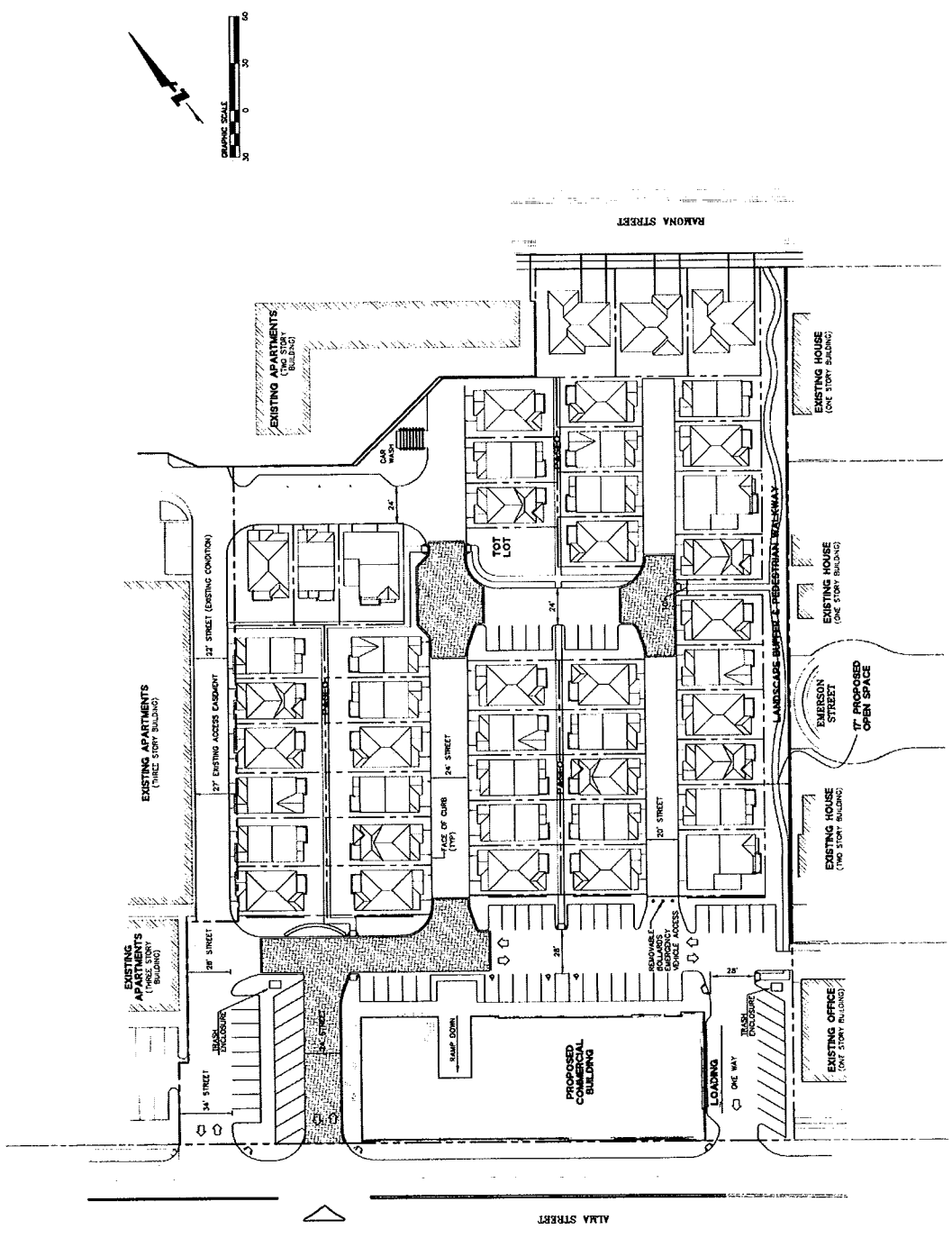
Building Area: 101,436 sf

Site Coverage: 45,903 sf

FAR: 55.3%

Unit Sizes: 1,692 sf to 1,956 sf, Plus Garage

Required Parking: 104 Spaces	2 Spaces Per Home =	90
	Guest Spaces =	<u>14</u>
		104 Spaces



**BKF**  
 BKF Architects  
 233 SHORELINE DRIVE, SUITE 200  
 PALO ALTO, CA 94303  
 650-492-4200  
 650-492-4298 (fax)

**JOHNSON CYMAN ARCHITECTS**  
 JOHNSON CYMAN ARCHITECTS  
 1000 UNIVERSITY AVENUE, SUITE 100  
 PALO ALTO, CA 94303  
 650-492-4200  
 650-492-4298 (fax)

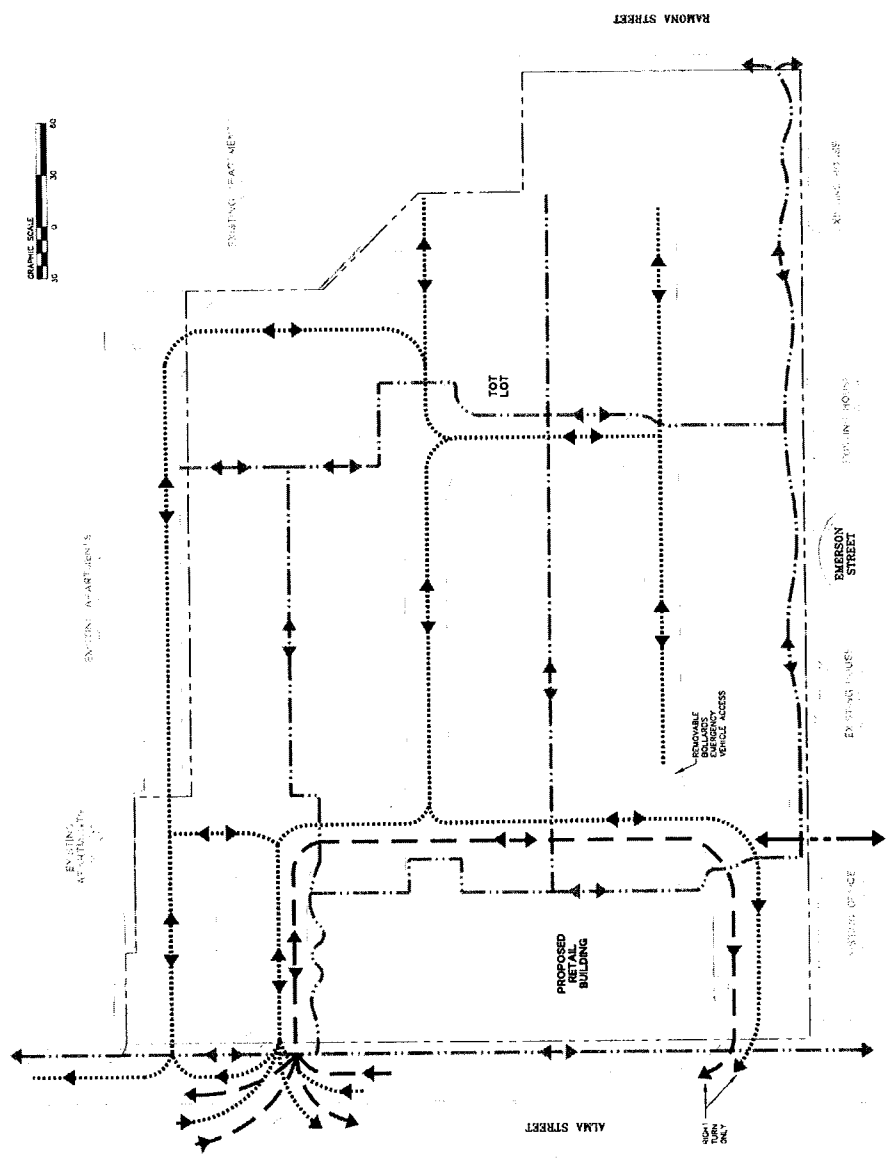
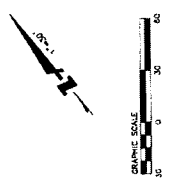
**DAHLIN GROUP**

PROPOSED SITE PLAN  
 PROJECT NO. 355.039  
 Date 04.01.05

2871 Drive, Canyon Rd.  
 San Ramon, CA 94583  
 925.837.7343

ALMA PLAZA PROPERTY  
 PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

GREENBRIAR HOMES COMMUNITIES INC. / MC NELLIS PARTNERS



- LEGEND**
- > RETAIL VEHICULAR CIRCULATION
  - .....> RESIDENTIAL VEHICULAR CIRCULATION
  - > PEDESTRIAN CIRCULATION
  - ==> INGRESS/EGRESS BASEMENT FOR RETAIL NEIGHBOR

**BKF**  
 Business / Architecture / Planning  
 11500 E. 15th Avenue, Suite 200  
 Greenwood Village, CO 80120  
 303-441-4300 (fax)

**JOHNSON  
 LYMAN  
 ARCHITECTS**  
 1000 California Street, Suite 1000  
 San Francisco, CA 94109  
 415.774.2500

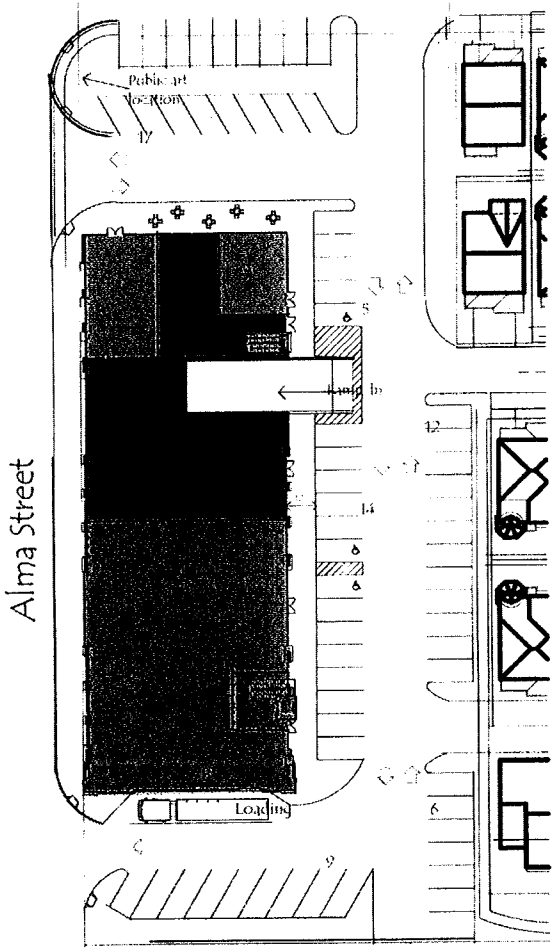
**DAHLIN GROUP**

CIRCULATION PLAN  
 PROJECT NO. 393-039  
 DATE 04.01.06

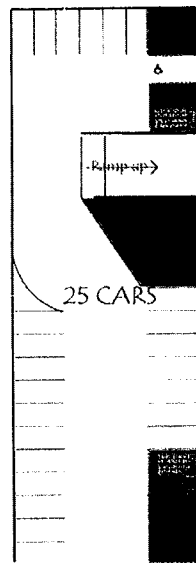
**ALMA PLAZA PROPERTY** PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

GREENBRIAR HOMES COMMUNITIES INC./ MC NELLIS PARTNERS

6871 Cole Court West, Bldg.  
 San Ramon, CA 94583  
 925.837.8886  
 925.837.2545 Fax



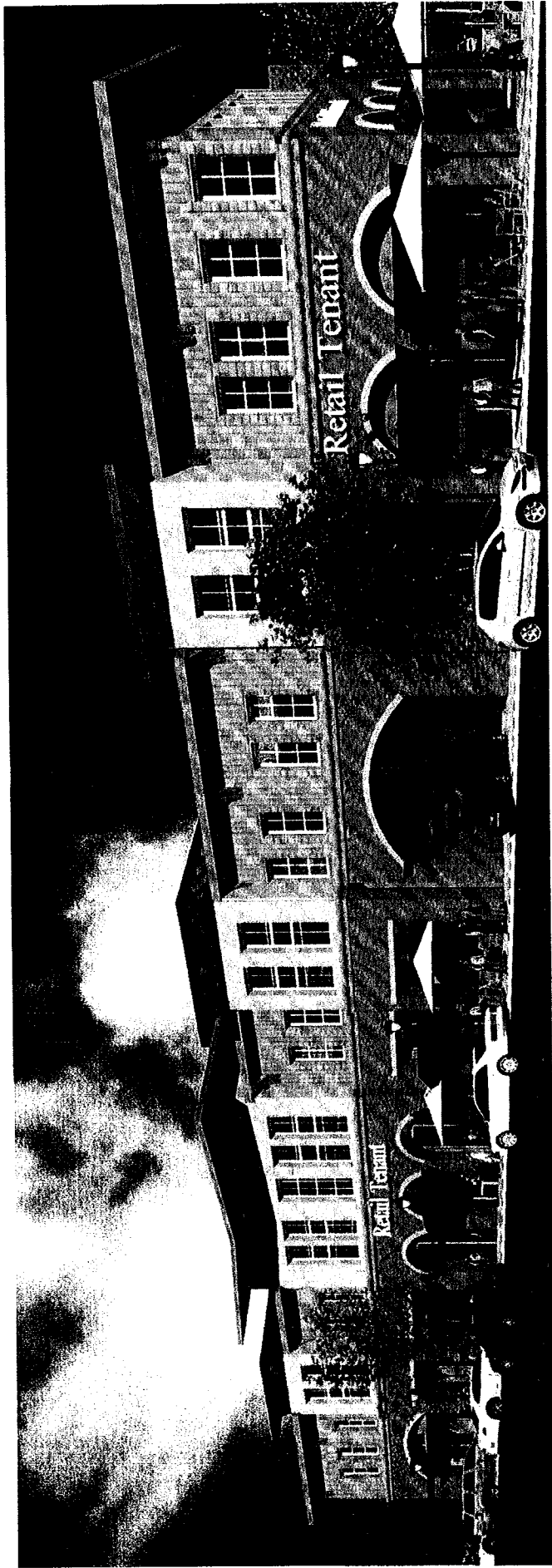
Ground Level Plan



Basement Level Plan

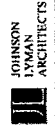
# Alma Plaza

Palo Alto, California



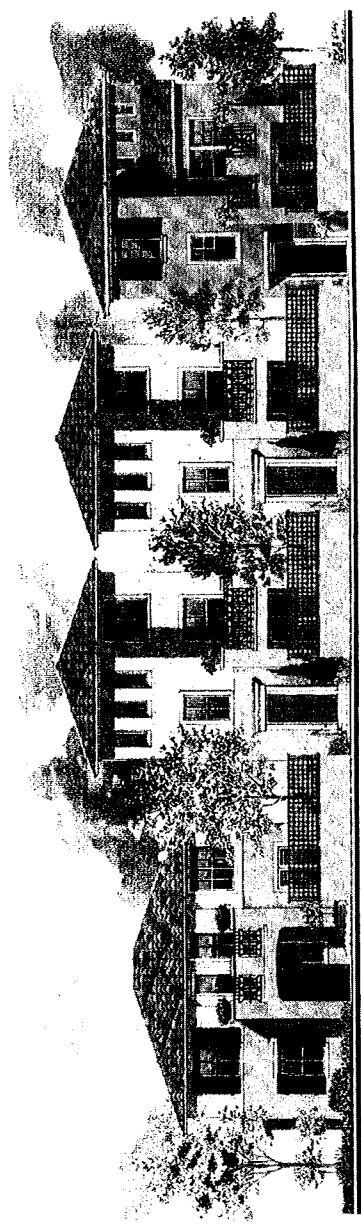


RAMONA STREETSCAPE



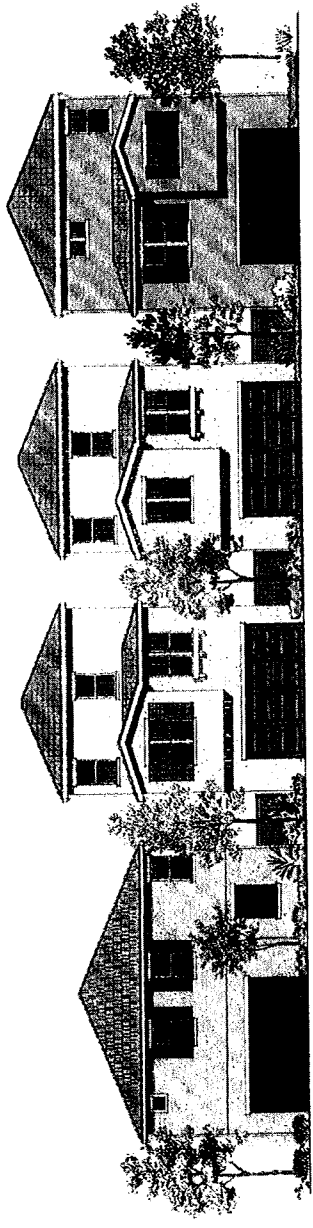
**ALMA PLAZA PROPERTY** PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA  
**GREENBRIAR HOMES COMMUNITIES INC./ MC NELLIS PARTNERS**

341 Clay Street, N. Palo Alto, CA 94301  
Tel: 650.321.1000 Fax: 650.321.1001  
PROJECT NO. 340.03P



PLAN 3- LOT # 38      PLAN 1- LOT # 39      PLAN 1- LOT # 40      PLAN 2- LOT # 41

STREETSCAPE 1



PLAN 2- LOT # 41      PLAN 1- LOT # 40      PLAN 1- LOT # 39      PLAN 3- LOT # 38

ALLEY STREETSCAPE 1

**ALMA PLAZA PROPERTY**

PALO ALTO, CALIFORNIA

GREENBRIAR HOMES COMMUNITIES INC./ MC NELLIS PARTNERS

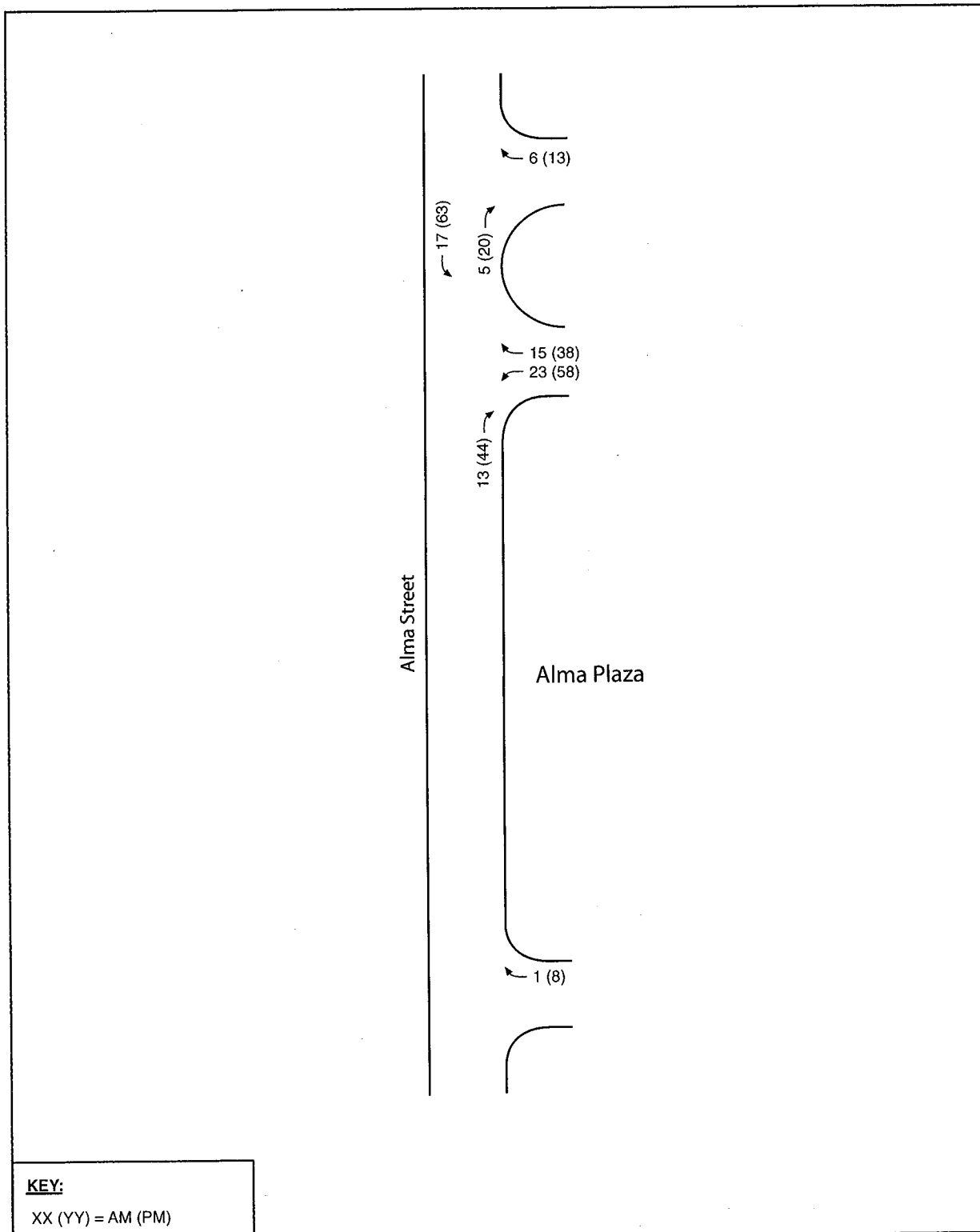


201 Cow Canyon Rd  
Palo Alto, CA 94301  
Tel: 650.327.8500  
Fax: 650.327.8543  
PROJECT NO. 365.039

**Estimated Trip Generation for Greenbriar Housing Project  
April 7, 2006**

Use	Size (ksf or unit)	Rates (per 1,000 sq. ft. or per unit)							Trips						
		Daily	In	AM Out	Total	In	PM Out	Total	Daily	In	AM Out	Total	In	PM Out	Total
<i>Existing Uses</i>															
Supermarket	17.6	102.24	1.98	1.27	3.25	6.82	6.59	13.41	1,799	35	22	57	120	116	236
Specialty Retail	28.0	44.32	0.63	0.40	1.03	1.39	1.79	3.18	1,241	18	11	29	39	50	89
										61%	39%		51%	49%	
<b>Existing Site</b>	<b>45.6</b>	<b>66.68</b>	<b>1.16</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>1.89</b>	<b>3.49</b>	<b>3.64</b>	<b>7.13</b>	<b>3,040</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>159</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>325</b>
<i>Proposed Project</i>															
SF Detached Homes	45.0	11.08	0.22	0.69	0.91	0.73	0.42	1.16	499	10	31	41	33	19	52
Apartments	14.0	16.75	0.14	0.64	0.79	1.14	0.64	1.79	234	2	9	11	16	9	25
Supermarket	10.000	102.24	1.98	1.27	3.25	7.70	7.40	15.10	1,022	20	13	33	77	74	151
Specialty Retail	9.200	44.32	0.63	0.40	1.03	2.07	2.72	4.78	408	6	3	9	19	25	44
										61%	39%		51%	49%	
<b>Proposed Project</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>na</b>	<b>1,929</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>83</b>	<b>129</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>247</b>
<b>Net Trip Generation</b>									<b>-1,111</b>	<b>-17</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>-3</b>	<b>-30</b>	<b>-48</b>	<b>-78</b>

Source: Institute of Transportation Engineers, *Trip Generation*, Seventh Edition, 2003.



**FEHR & PEERS**  
TRANSPORTATION CONSULTANTS

April 2006  
SJ05-779A

Alma Plaza

**TRIPS AT PROJECT DRIVEWAYS**

**FIGURE 1**

