

Special Meeting
March 03, 2010

The City Council of the City of Palo Alto met with the Planning & Transportation Commission on this date in the Council Chambers at 7:05 p.m.

Present: Burt, Holman, Klein, Price, Scharff, Schmid, Shepherd
Fineberg, Garber, Keller, Lippert, Martinez, Tuma

Absent: Espinosa, Yeh

STUDY SESSION

1. Joint City Council/Planning & Transportation Commission Study Session Regarding the Comprehensive Plan Amendment and Housing Element Update.

Director of Planning and Community Environment, Curtis Williams provided an overview of the purpose of comprehensive plans, discussed some of the positives and negative outcomes resulting under the City's 1998-2010 Comprehensive Plan, and recounted the Comprehensive Plan Amendment work program approved by Council in 2006. He outlined four key issues for City Council and Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) consideration for the Amendment, including: 1) growth projections, 2) the Housing Element, and particularly the housing allocation by the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) and the City's approach to compliance, 3) the Vision Statements, goals, and policies of the Plan and the extent of potential revisions, and 4) possible components of the Amendment (e.g., area plans for downtown and south El Camino Real, high speed rail, and sea level rise) that would be outside the current scope of work. Staff suggested that the Council and PTC ask questions about these topics and then return at a second session to provide direction to staff and the PTC.

The Council and Commission discussed the various issues extensively, including but not limited to the following general observations (and not intended to represent a consensus):

- Most of the projects built under the current Plan, and those in south Palo Alto in particular, have been "neighborhood resistant;" the City should look at LEED-ND (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design - Neighborhood Development) as a possible guideline for new growth; and the work effort should be more than an "amendment;"
- The City should challenge the ABAG assumptions with respect to impacts on greenhouse gases, water conservation, etc., of increased development, especially for housing;
- The City's approach to the housing element should be a "bottoms-up" methodology to define what we can do, building on what is already realistic and zoned, not a directive to find a way to meet the ABAG RHNA housing allocations;
- The follow-up session should be treated as an action item (not a study session) so that votes may be taken to provide direction;
- The South El Camino Real Design Guidelines and associated Comp Plan policies and zoning codes should be considered and updated in the short term rather than awaiting completion of the Comp Plan effort;
- There is a need to reconcile inconsistent vision statements and policies, and for some reformatting to make the Plan more user-friendly; and to provide more practical and "operational" statements and policies;
- Area plans should be a more frequently-used tool than has been the case, to guide development;
- The City should evaluate the potential for litigation if the City does not comply with housing element law, as well as preemptive measures to challenge those regulations;
- The City should deal with the housing element issues before acting on the Stanford project or the concept plans;
- The housing element should address the difficulty of providing "moderate income" units and the fact that the City was over its total housing allocation for the prior period with no "credit" for that; and that the City already has provided pedestrian-transit oriented zoning in advance of ABAG projections and SB375; and that ABAG should consider the least-cost methods for meeting greenhouse gas objectives;

- The City needs to consider SB375 implications in its housing plans, and should "step up to the bar" to provide adequate housing for the area; and
- Staff and the PTC should provide a list of questions for the Council to respond to, at least 2 weeks in advance of the next session.

Many other detailed comments and questions were provided for response and direction at the follow-up session. Staff is to schedule a second study session followed by an action item to allow Council to provide direction on a number of these issues. The PTC would be involved in the study session portion of the deliberations.

Winter Dellenbach, La Para Avenue Barron Park, stated the new Comprehensive Plan should adhere to quality urban design.

Elaine Meyer, 609 Kingsley Avenue, spoke on the damaging effects from accommodating large housing developments.

Irvin Dawid, 753 Alma Street Apartment 126, spoke on SB 375 and the California Environmental Protection Agency Air Resources Board.

Robert Moss, 4010 Orme Street, spoke on the Association of Bay Area Governments stipulation to impose Below Market Rate housing in Palo Alto.

Michael Eager, 1960 Park Boulevard, spoke on population growth rates.

Virginia Saldich, 27 Crescent Drive, spoke on the quality of life in Palo Alto.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

None

ADJOURNMENT: The meeting adjourned at 10:15 p.m.