CITY OF PALO ALTO

PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

Issues of Interest

Message from the Director

Thanks to everyone who attended the Our Palo Alto 2030 Summit on May 30. About 350 people joined elected and appointed officials, staff and our consultant team for a day-long interactive discussion to help plan for the City's future. It was a great opportunity for City representatives to hear from the community about issues that concern them, with particular focus on transportation, growth management, and housing.

If you weren't able to attend the Summit or have more ideas that you would like to share, you can go here to view three short videos and answer the nine questions that were discussed during the small group sessions at the Summit. All of the comments from the sessions are already posted on the Comp Plan website here and are being analyzed by research associates from Stanford University. Their analysis will identify major themes and unique ideas for consideration by the Citizens Advisory Committee that will be appointed by the end of the month to help guide the next phase of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

There will be many more opportunities for you to participate. Sign up on Open City Hall and subscribe to the Our Palo Alto monthly e-newsletter to stay informed.

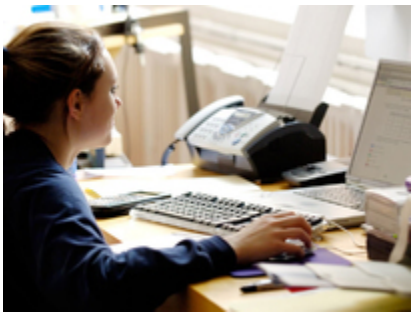
Hillary Gitelman

Director of Planning and Community Environment

Focus on Ground Floor Retail Continues

On June 15, 2015, the City Council extended the Urgency Ordinance originally adopted on May 11, 2015 to prevent the conversion of any ground floor retail or “retail-like” use to any other use on a Citywide basis. The ground floor retail protections will now extend for close to two years, providing time to examine existing protections within the Municipal Code to see how they can be expanded or strengthened. The first area that will be considered is the area surrounding California Avenue. The Planning and Transportation Commission is expected to discuss a draft ordinance addressing this area at their July 8, 2015 meeting.

Annual Office Limit Moves Forward

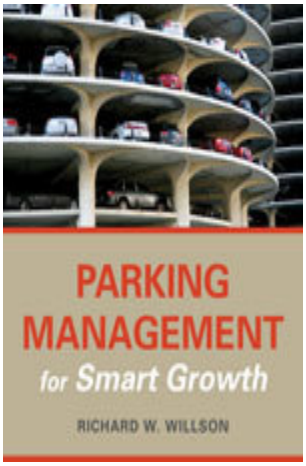


The City Council is considering placing an annual limit on the amount of office space that can be developed in the fastest changing parts of Palo Alto, and provided direction to staff about specific parameters of the program on June 15, 2015.

Currently, the City’s Comprehensive Plan contains an overall cap on the amount of non-residential development that can occur in the City, but does not limit the pace of development. To address this issue, the City Council expressed their desire to establish an annual limit of 50,000 square feet of net new office/R&D development that would apply to an area including Downtown, the California Avenue Area, and the El Camino Corridor. Based on the Council’s direction, staff will be preparing a draft ordinance for discussion by the Planning and Transportation Commission this summer. The City Council will receive the Commission’s recommendation after their summer break, and make final decisions about the program’s process and criteria, which is expected to be adopted on a trial basis while the Comprehensive Plan Update is in process.

If adopted as currently envisioned, the annual limit would mean that projects proposing net increases in office space greater than 2,000 square feet could only be approved late in the fiscal year, when it would be clear whether they could collectively exceed the annual limit. Projects that exceed the limit, would be evaluated individually by the City Council based on a number of criteria. This process will determine which projects would be approved, and which would be denied or deferred to future years.

Parking Management Strategies Presentation



On Tuesday, June 23 from 6 to 7:30 p.m. at the downtown library, Richard Wilson, a respected expert on parking strategies for cities and author of a new book on parking management for smart growth, will speak on how these might be applied in Palo Alto and elsewhere. His talk will focus on how can we use limited space in more efficient ways, new and emerging technologies affecting the way cities are managing parking and how does regulation of parking impact transportation use and habits. Click here for more details.

The event coincides with the City moving forward to implement the first Downtown Residential Preferential Parking (RPP) program, with a two-phase trial beginning in late August/September. See here for more information. The City is also pursuing improved signage ("wayfinding") for downtown parking, including changeable messages about where spaces are available (called "parking guidance systems") and related garage improvements. The City will also be conducting a study of paid parking beginning this summer.

Council Reviews Design Enhancement Exceptions

Two recent projects involving Design Enhancement Exceptions (or "DEE's") demonstrate heightened focus about when such exceptions should be granted. The first project, at 2555 Park Street, was approved on June 8, 2015, but only after the City Council denied the applicant's request for a roof-top deck that necessitated a DEE. The Council pointed out that the requested exception did not address any unique circumstances, and benefited no one other than the building owner and (future) occupants. On June 15, 2015, the City Council narrowly approved a second project at 441 Page Mill Road without questioning the basis for the DEEs it included. In this instance, the exceptions were required to provide for a larger setback and wider sidewalk along Page Mill Road than would have otherwise been permitted.

Bike and Pedestrian Plan Update

Staff is continuing to move several projects forward as part of the 2012 Bike and Pedestrian Transportation Plan. Current priorities include the completion of final concept plan lines for Park Blvd and Wilkie Way Bike Boulevards; implementation of the Churchill Avenue enhanced bikeway, Maybell Avenue Bike Boulevard approved by Council in January, and the start of concept planning for Churchill Avenue Phase 2. Staff conducted several community meetings in Spring 2015 to solicit input. Striping of the southbound El Camino Way bicycle lane segment of the Maybell Avenue Bike Boulevard will take place this summer. On Churchill Avenue Phase 1, staff anticipates completion of environmental review by fall. Coordination with PAUSD and Caltrans is in progress to secure right-of-way and permits. Staff expects to bring forward a comprehensive update of the bike program to Council later this year.

Click here to review the June 10 Staff Report.

Zoning Code Cleanup Ideas Welcome

Assistant Planning Director Jonathan Lait will lead the department's first annual code "clean-up" effort this fall to develop a proposed ordinance that will make administrative changes and clarifications to language of the zoning ordinance. The goal is to clarify commonly used code provisions and update regulations to reflect current policy. The Planning Department would like to hear from the community about ideas for changes that would clarify but not change the intended meaning of zoning code provisions. If you have suggested changes to the code or if you have questions please click here to contact Jonathan Lait.

Upcoming Projects

With the City Council's approval of the budget for Fiscal Year 2016, which starts on July 1, the Department of Planning and Community Environment has funding to undertake a review of the Individual Review (IR) process, and to begin work on updating the transportation impact fees charged to new development. Other projects on the horizon include updates to the housing impact fees charged to new development and applications pending for projects at 1050 Page Mill Road in the Stanford Research Park, and a proposal for 23 homes on the Maybell site. Please visit BuildingEye to get more information on these projects.