NORTH VENTURA COORDINATED AREA PLAN
WORKING GROUP MEETING
DRAFT MINUTES
Tuesday, June 30, 2020
Virtual Meeting
5:30 PM

Call to Order:

Roll Call:

Present: Kirsten Flynn, Terry Holzmer, Yunan Song, Alex Lew, Keith Reckdahl, Lakiba Pittman (Angela Dellaporta, Gail Price)

Absent: Lund Smith

Welcome:

Rachael Tanner Assistant Director of Planning Development Services explained the procedure that will be used for this meeting.

Angela Dellaporta shared how she helped develop this handbook.

Oral Communications:

None.

Discussion Items:

Discussion of topics in the NVCAP Handbook

Question 2. Which office space policy option do you support?

Ms. Pittman preferred A or B because she feels the area shouldn’t be overtaken by office space. She is not hard and fast on her choices and could be motivated to consider a different option.
Ms. Flynn opted for a combination of B and D because she believes this is adjacent to an area that already has a great deal of enterprise scale office buildings so more are not needed in this area. She preferred small business space and believed the office space should provide or contribute to housing units such as combined retail on the ground floor, office space on the second floor, housing above.

Mr. Reckdahl primarily preferred G. The Council’s highest priority this year is housing. This is zoned for housing and housing should be built where it is zoned for that. With the current jobs/housing imbalance, putting anything but housing there will be a lost opportunity. The caveat is that he would not mind having some community-service retail or offices, as long as it is a small fraction and fits with the neighborhood.

Mr. Lew was leaning between A and B. He considered C because he has seen some new projects in Palo Alto that used the office to subsidize residential but he is cautious about it because some projects used office space to subsidize grocery stores and there were issues. He reviewed the SOFA Plans and looked at those limits. They were trying to cap the new amount of office space per parcel at about 5,000 square feet and that seems to be working. They did grandfather in much of the existing office space. The Cloudera site has been Hewlett-Packard offices for many years. That may be an historic use that is working well. Regarding the Fry’s site, he believes the Council has made it clear in the past that they wanted housing and grandfather out the commercial.

Mr. Holzmer preferred a combination of F and G. There is already a glut of office space in Palo Alto. In Palo Alto there is nearly a 6 to 1 ration of jobs to housing. The focus needs to be on housing and especially below market rate housing. (broken up)

Ms. Song voted for A or B. She did not want more office buildings in this area but it is okay for existing. She assumed office included all the retail small business, everything except residents.

Ms. Tanner explained this was just specifically office uses, including research and development offices. It did not include retail.

Ms. Song felt there should be no more offices, option A.

Ms. Tanner summarized that three were open to option A, either grandfathering or allowing what is there to exist or the same amount that exists. There was a lot of support for B, four people, supporting certain types of office uses in a small scale. Possibly one for option C with some questions and one for option D, if you build office you have to balance that with housing. One for F and G and one for G. She explained a number of these strategies could be employed at any time.
Ms. Flynn commented that the jobs/housing imbalance would be improved if an area was designed that had much more housing than jobs. She suggested amending B to say “must create in excess of the number of housing units.” She recognized the points of options F and G.

Mr. Reckdahl noted this is zoned for residential and just across the street in the industrial park there will be a lot of building, adding more offices that will not be balanced.

Ms. Tanner did not believe every parcel was zoned for residential. Some may be zoned for non-residential uses, commercial services such as retail. She did not believe Cloudera was zoned RN-30.

Ms. Pittman asked for clarification between A and F. They seemed to mean the same thing.

Mr. Holzmer agreed with Mr. Reckdahl. There is a huge deficit in housing, especially in below market-rate housing and for the very low below market-rate housing. Not enough is being done to emphasize to the City that that is where the greatest need is.

Ms. Tanner thought the difference was A expressed right now there is existing office and if, for example, someone wanted to redevelop their office building to new office or new housing and office, they could keep the same amount they have. F expressed once you take it out, it is gone. She again noted there were four who supported option B, smaller offices and for certain types of offices that typically would be more neighborhood serving. She asked if anyone changed their minds on their support for option B. No one objected.

Ms. Dellaporta clarified B is saying in addition to what’s there already.

Ms. Tanner advised the caveat would be that it would be in addition to what is there already, but the existing office could eventually go away. F indicated over time the existing office might go away and the only new ones allowed would be the smaller offices with certain types.

Mr. Holzmer asked if it could be added that these businesses would only be neighborhood serving (screen went black for several seconds)

Ms. Tanner explained it is office versus retail.

Mr. Holzmer would not support any additional offices at all.

Ms. Flynn advocated, as a small business owner, for how challenging it is to start a business and find small space. That is why she chose option B.

Mr. Reckdahl remarked he understood Ms. Flynn’s concerns. He is worried about losing the opportunity for this big residentially zoned area. He would prefer to try to find the spots for
small business elsewhere in the City when other redevelopments are done, such as the research park.

Ms. Flynn didn’t think that would be enough. It is often low-income people running the small businesses.

Ms. Tanner asked if new offices of a certain size were not allowed, how would the small offices, such as dentist to be allowed in the NVCAp area.

Mr. Reckdahl explained the zoning would allow a small amount of retail like business. It would not be entirely residential. Along El Camino it is commercial where there could be retail or residential. He would be supportive of a small amount of space for offices such as dentist, etc. He clarified these are neighborhood serving offices.

Ms. Tanner indicated there are four members who supported this idea, two who are opposed to it, but maybe open to some type of compromise. For option A there are three who wanted to retain the same amount of space. Ms. Flynn encouraged balancing housing and office. Mr. Holzmer proposed no new office but there was not a lot of support for this. Two supported converting the office to housing.

Question 3. Location of office space.

Mr. Lew did not have a strong preference, but was leaning towards C or A and then D, Park.

Ms. Pittman chose B, C and E. In general, she did not want to add anything to the Cloudera site. It already has a big building on it. She likes walking and biking down Park Boulevard and didn’t want additional office space there.

Mr. Reckdahl replied if there was some type of retail-like offices he would prefer them along El Camino and Page Mill because the traffic would then not be going into the neighborhood. If it was at 340 Portage, cars would be driving to the offices there. Cloudera would be okay too but not preferable.

Ms. Song preferred the Cloudera site because that is close to the station and is the most cost-saving option. She did not want the Cloudera office building changed to another office building. It is already there and she did not want to add more offices.

Ms. Flynn felt the most logical place was Cloudera because transportation in the future might be more transit oriented. Her second choice would be El Camino and Page Mill because office buildings will probably be taller and she would like to keep a 1 to 1 ratio from the width of the street to the height of the building next to the street.
Mr. Holzmer was not for adding new office space but from the choices listed he preferred C. It is a little farther away from the neighborhood so it wouldn’t impact them as much as if was along El Camino and Page Mill. His was concerned about the amount of traffic at Page Mill at 5:00.

Ms. Tanner noted there was a lot of agreement around C with the caveat that it would not be large business offices, but more retail-like office spaces along Page Mill and El Camino, things that would draw people to the neighborhood or neighborhood serving. Mr. Holzmer did not support offices.

Ms. Pittman commented when she read this, she thought it meant new office space being added. If A meant keeping the Cloudera site as it is, then she would be for that.

Ms. Flynn remarked she would like it located as close to functional transit as possible, such as Caltrain.

Mr. Reckdahl stated what he liked about Cloudera for retail was if someone was coming on the train, it would be very convenient. That intersection at Park is so tight. Cloudera was not his favorite.

Ms. Pittman advised she would be willing to take her name off of Portage and Lambert. She did not feel strong about them.

Mr. Lew reported he would add on Park Boulevard was that Caltrain was looking to upgrade with electric trains very frequently, so that would be noisier. Looking at the new housing project at 195 Page Mill Road, there is about a 300-foot wall because the property owner was worried about noise transmitting into the building. That is a very ugly façade. He noted when he designs neighborhoods, he tries to put residential facing residential and avoid residential facing office.

Ms. Flynn found Mr. Lew’s argument compelling. That might be a valid use of the east side of Park. That might contribute to poor bike commute quality and that is a higher priority.

Ms. Tanner advised she had received information that the zoom link was broken and they would try to send an email with the correct zoom link so anyone who is trying to participate will have that link.

Question 4. Where should the tallest buildings be located in the NVCAP area?

Mr. Holzmer indicated he would put the tallest buildings along El Camino and Page Mill, F. A combination of F.
Ms. Song would put them in the center of the plan. When she looks at this area, the existing residents are mostly on Olive, Pepper, Lambert. The center is a fair place for all the existing residents to be as far from the tallest building. If it was at El Camino Real it would be too close to some of the existing residents. There is not a lot of space along El Camino Real for a tall building. The taller building on the other side of El Camino Real is in the research park. There is a big parking log along with the tall building.

Ms. Flynn responded that a tall building should not be put next to a narrow street without overpowering the street. She would prefer A and B, which is basically F, with the added note that along El Camino Real might be more for residential with locally serving office or commercial because that is more constant traffic while along Page Mill Road it is a commute corridor so that might be office and commercial and less tall residential.

Mr. Reckdahl agreed with A and B. The other spots would overpower the streets.

Ms. Pittman chose F as well.

Mr. Lew noted his preference is F, but with some cautions about Page Mill Road. Some of the projects that have been improved there recently had issues because the County won’t allow trees along the frontage. This is an expressway and the trees block the sightlines or the motorists. All the parking on Page Mill has been removed also.

Ms. Tanner indicated there seemed to be agreement on F. Ms. Song made some interesting points on E.

Ms. Flynn’s issue with putting anything tall in the center meant a tall building holds more human beings which means more transportation trying to get in and out. It might be that would be the only logical place to put a tall building if the only way to get affordable housing was a taller building along Park where they might be encouraged to walk to Caltrain or take bikes.

Ms. Song also commented that one reason she felt along with El Camino Real and Page Mill might be realistic is because currently the City already has some ongoing projects or new projects finished. There really isn’t a place on Page Mill for a new tall building except for the Cloudera lot. El Camino Real has already had a lot of projects ongoing and there isn’t space for a tall building there.

Ms. Pittman is not opposed to the center of the plan.

Ms. Flynn noted height creates visual lack of connection unless it is handled very carefully. She would like to connect Olive and Pepper to the other residential parts of Ventura.
Mr. Holzmer referenced the neighbors on Olive and Pepper and the impact of putting a large building in the center with the effects of shadows, lack of sunlight.

Question 5. What should be the maximum height for the tallest buildings in the NVCAP area?

Mr. Lew had asked for F, the five stories, to be added. As an architect, five stories can mostly be built out of wood. Higher than that would have to be steel or concrete construction. With five stories things can be added to make it look like a smaller building. He thought most of the buildings in Mountain View are going to be seven stories, in San Francisco it is seven to ten stories out of concrete and they look different.

Ms. Pittman asked what the height of the current buildings are on Page Mill, Cloudera.

Mr. Lew answered the Cloudera is three stories. The new mixed-use building under construction is also three stories. Height is usually thirty-five feet if you’re near residential.

Ms. Pittman noted she was leaning toward the three stories unless it is on El Camino where she could see four stories.

Ms. Flynn advised she likes the idea of affordable housing. If there would be no buildings taller than three stories, then affordable housing cannot be achieved. She, therefore, says six stories, but she is intrigued about five stories being more buildable with architectural variety. The caveat is that she would strongly advocate that the added height would lead to more green space. If the six-story plan has no green space, she would not be in favor of that.

Mr. Reckdahl agreed with Ms. Flynn’s opinion. She is comfortable with four stories along El Camino, but to get more housing or open space, he would be open to five stories. He noted the bigger buildings along El Camino have a step down behind them to not impact the other residents.

Ms. Song remarked she checked the stories of the buildings along El Camino and Page Mill and Cloudera and they are three stories. She wondered if for residents they could be four stories. She chose three stories but is open to four stories. She understands for affordable housing, higher buildings are needed, so the question is where. As a building becomes higher, more open space is needed around the outside of this.

Mr. Holzmer thought when talking about height, neighborhood character also needed to be thought about. It is important the neighborhood character of Ventura and Mayfield be in this process. He believed there was a reason behind the City’s fifty-foot height limits and it is important to maintain and support that. Three stories for housing makes the best sense, but there may be some exceptions along El Camino where for stories might work, but they would be exceptions to the rule.
Ms. Tanner summarized that three members said three stories, four said some version of four stories, one was okay with six stories with the caveat that it leads directly to more open space. Two voted for five stories, especially if there was more open space.

Ms. Flynn said she would be okay with five stories.

Mr. Lew noted in Berkley there is a fifty-foot height limit in the general downtown area, but they do allow affordable housing projects to do up to fifty-five feet.

Ms. Tanner asked of those who favored four stories think about either five stories with the fifth story as a bonus for affordable housing or even six stories? This wouldn’t be everywhere, just the tallest buildings allowed in the NVAP area.

Mr. Reckdahl remarked to encourage below-market housing, an extra floor seems reasonable. He was okay with going from four to five stories, but not five to six. This would have to fit with the character of the neighborhood.

Ms. Flynn noted with good architecture and good setbacks, she was okay with six stories for BMR.

Mr. Holzmer did not support five or six stories. He thought BMR housing can be built without violating the fifty-foot height requirement.

Ms. Song remarked BMR housing was already included in her plan in which the new buildings were all for BMR housing.

Mr. Reckdahl left the meeting at this point to attend another meeting.

The Group skipped to Question 9. What type of housing should be considered for the Cloudera site?

Ms. Flynn liked the comment of mostly three to four stories with one or so five to six story building which would create a good overall housing density. She liked the idea of extending the berm area to the cross street and create some bicycle/pedestrian continuity between the rest of the NVCAP site and Birch, then the park would be along a route that people would use.

Mr. Lew did not have a strong opinion on this. He thought it could be a combination of A and C, four-story housing plus a park, but he is flexible and this. He would like to see a park at the corner of Ash and Olive. There are a lot of big trees on the berm around the Cloudera site and that would be a desirable place for a park.
Ms. Song voted for A, which is consistent with her previous answers about no new office building and keep Cloudera as it is. Existing residents walk to the Cloudera parking lot. There is a small dried creek with stones and small bushes where children can play. This could be enlarged to a park.

Ms. Pittman liked A because neighbors use that corner as a park, so making it more of a park would be great. She already said she did not want additional housing on that lot.

Mr. Holzmer chose option B, if you’re trying to maintain somewhat the neighborhood character along Olive and Pepper. Office might work along the edge where the Cloudera building is right now.

Ms. Tanner noted Ms. Song and Ms. Pittman are residents there. She asked if they saw the Cloudera building staying the same with the park there?

Ms. Pittman replied she could be talked into housing on the Page Mill side, because that is far from Olive and a little far from Pepper. Her ideal is no housing with a park there but she does understand the need for housing. If housing was not available in other areas, she could potentially agree to housing towards Page Mill.

Ms. Tanner explained part of the premise of the area plan process is changing the underlying zoning and what is allowed, hopefully to lead to something new being there.

Ms. Pittman related that because currently there is housing across the street from Cloudera on Park and Page Mill, she is used to that being in the neighborhood she could see a future where the corner where Cloudera is could be housing, maybe a combination of business and housing.

Ms. Song was okay for the current building if it became residential or a larger one. She would want it to be placed on that corner so the rest of the area could become a park.

Ms. Pittman noted that the building across the street seemed a little taller.

Mr. Lew advised it is three stories, two floors or residential over R&D space. The Cloudera building is taller because it is an office building and they have an auditorium on the ground floor that required a higher ceiling.

Ms. Pittman asked if that building would be torn down, or could that be converted to residential.

Ms. Tanner answered they would probably tear the building down to put up housing.
Ms. Pittman noted she could potentially support housing if it was a mixture like the building across the street that has a restaurant and housing above.

Ms. Flynn suggested putting in the notes, monolithic five stories would be less preferable than a broken mass five-story building.

Ms. Song felt this office building is taller than the other residential buildings. With this height, it could maybe be a five-story residential.

Ms. Price asked if the product up to this process may result in a range of heights and densities on different sites, rather than prescriptive of a specific height or stories, since this is a long-range plan.

Ms. Tanner answered the NVCAP is sixty acres with quite a diversity. It would not be unusual for plans such as this to have different parcels with different height limits. The Cloudera site, because of its size, may have different heights.

Ms. Price explained she was asking about a range within some parcels or assembly of parcels, rather than being absolutely prescriptive.

Ms. Tanner answered there could be a range but within limits.

Mr. Lew commented in Mountain View’s San Antonio master plan they have a base amount of zoning allowance for height, which is about three stories. They say you can go up an additional story or two, if you build a plaza or park or some sort of amenity. Sometimes the developer will pay for a park on a different piece of land. That gives the variety. The taller the building, the more is required to get approval.

Ms. Flynn’s concern with allowing zoning overages to get public benefit is that it has to have teeth.

Mr. Holzmer advised when studying the height variations, something that is not understood by the Group is traffic patterns and how the size of a building could impact traffic.

Ms. Tanner agreed but noted the budget is not big enough to get that information. Regarding this question, two members developed a different thought pattern around housing and thought maybe housing located in that site in a particular way would be feasible. One member felt three stories would maintain the neighborhood character. One person thought mostly three to four stories, with maybe five to six with the park idea. One favored pushing some of the larger massing of housing towards the Page Mill and Park area. Everyone mentioned open space on that parcel.
The Group took a five-minute break at this point.

Question 6. The current NVCAP/California Avenue area has a population density of 6.5 thousand people per square mile. Looking at areas of inspiration from Working Group members, what population density would you support in the plan area?

Mr. Holzmer remarked this goes back to keeping neighborhood character in mind. This is important to the people in Ventura that the area not be surrounded by things that don’t look like the neighborhood. He supported A because the Comp Plan was developed over many years, and was done with the Ventura neighborhood in mind.

Ms. Pittman also supported A. She shared she is familiar with Emeryville, Downtown Palo Alto and the Pearl District and there is something in each that attracts here.

Ms. Song preferred option A. This is recommended by the Comp Plan because there was much research done for this plan.

Mr. Lew preferred something between B and C. His family lived in an area that was about 13,000 per square mile and he liked that. There is a variety of building types, mansions and apartment buildings and they all fit together.

Ms. Flynn indicated she chose up to the low side of B. She agreed with the idea of mixed proportion buildings. Good design can make things go together. Zoning can be done to allow certain designs. Following the Comp Plan was how Palo Alto got to the current jobs/housing imbalance. She believed there was a direct connection between allowing some higher density and affordability.

Ms. Tanner noted three members chose A, two preferred between A and B.

Ms. Flynn suggested if smaller scale development is encouraged, smaller lots developed at one time, it is more likely to get a diverse architectural style. A single building several blocks long is more boring and less diverse across the same length of distance.

Mr. Holzmer indicated the issue of how the Comprehensive Plan was put together should not be diminished by this group. It involved approximately 35 community members and over about two years. There were compromises and good decision in terms of housing and supporting the City.

Ms. Tanner indicated in some ways this question is an overview. The zoning will not necessarily dictate the number of people in an area.

Question 7. What should be the overall housing density for the NVCAP area?

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Ms. Flynn chose B. It would have to be exceptional projects for her to accept forty dwelling units per acre. She could accept further density if it allowed open space and affordable housing because those are her primary goals in this area.

Ms. Pittman related ideally she chose A, however, she also leans toward B. She would like to give opportunity to satisfy the needs of lower income people who would want to live in the area.

Ms. Flynn added that the phrase “hometown”. In order for there to be a hometown, there has to be a continuity between generations, and that is broken.

Mr. Lew advised he looked up some projects he liked and calculated the density for those individual projects. He is okay with C but agrees with everyone with trying to preserve the existing single-family residential which would bring overall density down. The projects he noted were Madera in Mountain View which is sixty-two units per acre. Crescent Village in San Jose is fifty-six units per acre. In Palo Alto 800 High Street is sixty-three units per acre.

Ms. Song she preferred A but asked if this was the overall density including the offices?

Ms. Tanner explained in the plan there is a certain amount of office, residential, park land, parking, etc. The number of units would be divided by sixty acres.

Ms. Song indicated she could then stretch to B but it would depend on the design.

Ms. Dellaporta reiterated it is overall housing units.

Mr. Holzmer remarked he found this question difficult to answer. He is not an expert in land use or how units look on an acre. He recommended a further discussion and a better understanding of what this actually looks like is needed. In general, this is currently zoned as RM-30 and he would support something similar to that. He shared that this current pandemic should give everyone some pause and deep concern about increasing housing densities. The denser the housing, the easier it is for transmission so densities should be kept as low as possible.

Ms. Dellaporta shared that all of the proposals shared last month, G through M, all put in an approximate density for the whole NVCAP.

Ms. Song also commented she was okay with density of thirty to forth dwelling units per acre, but these buildings will not be put on the whole area, so when thinking of average, it would be lower.
Ms. Tanner answered yes. This process is trying to figure out the rate of the units.

Mr. Lew advised he sent note of recommended reading, The Death and Live of Great American Cities by Jane Jacobs. It is a classic textbook for urban planners. The density varies depending on whether you’re doing studio apartments or luxury three-bedroom apartments.

Ms. Tanner advised three members stretched into the twenty-one to forty range, one leaned more towards the thirty dwelling units per acre and one chose C.

Mr. Lew changed his preference from C to B, but he was willing to stretch to C.

Question 8. Looking at the feasible building typologies, which type and associated housing density do you prefer?

Mr. Lew noted Jane Jacobs in her book, was adamant about having a variety of housing building types in all ages. The one closest to that would be F which is all of the above, so you have a diversity of incomes, building types, housing types, ages, races.

Ms. Pittman also chose F. It seemed almost intuitively that different building types and sizes would work best.

Ms. Flynn felt strongly that F was the best solution. She commented that many people did not like tall buildings because they blocked the flow, but F could work with good design. Each approved project becomes a contributing structure to the vision for the neighborhood.

Ms. Song felt it should be a mix of buildings but the block building is not open enough.

Mr. Holzmer supported A, but alternative M was put together to think about how the site, particularly the Fry’s Building, could be used in adaptive reuse for housing. Below market-rate housing has not been mentioned much and that is something that really needs to be considered and talked about.

Public Comments:

Jared Bernstein commented if Palo Alto cares about poor people in general, this is a great opportunity to develop housing as dense as possible towards the northwest end so people can live here. Density itself is not a problem, but a way forward socially and economically.

Cedric de La Beaujardiere noted he sent an email. He believed every housing unit should have access to open space so his building concept is pyramidal in shape. Each unit would have access to rooftop garden space.
Rebecca Eisenberg remarked she fell in love with the vision of Ventura she saw in a survey. She and her husband are lawyers and cannot afford to buy a home in Palo Alto so they rent and they live across the street from Ventura. She sees the beauty of North Ventura when she walks there. She also sees hundreds of vehicles parked on the street, especially Park, filled with residents who lack homes due to the City’s unwillingness to invest in affordable housing. She feels Palo Alto is being destroyed by commercial developers and large businesses should be taxed.

Barry Katz thought one thing that has been overlooked is the most spectacular aspect of this area which is the geographic location. The Cloudera Building is blocking the view of the foothills and anything that can preserve views and vistas would contribute massively to the quality of life here.

**Future Meetings and Agendas:**

Ms. Tanner indicated the next meetings would probably be at the end of July and they will try to keep the groups as is to pick up where they left off.

**Adjournment 8:27 PM**

Note: Copies of meeting materials will be posted on the City’s project website: [https://bit.ly/2OtGFJG](https://bit.ly/2OtGFJG).