TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER  DEPARTMENT: PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

DATE: JUNE 3, 2002  CMR:272:02

SUBJECT: INITIAL REVIEW OF FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT REPORT REGARDING CONCEPTUAL DESIGNS FOR THE MAIN LIBRARY AND THE ART CENTER EXPANSION PROJECTS

REPORT IN BRIEF

The purpose of this item is to receive preliminary Council comments on the Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) for the Newell/Embarcadero site for the Main Library and Art Center Expansion. The official public review and comment period for the Draft Environmental Impact Report has concluded. The City has prepared an FEIR, which includes the comments received during the public comment period and written responses to them. The FEIR analyzes two schemes for the Main Library, the Partial Retention scheme which keeps a significant portion of the historically significant existing library, and a Replacement scheme, which does not. It also analyzes a three-phase renovation and expansion of the Art Center, and parking, circulation, and landscaping for the entire site. The FEIR also discusses the “no project” alternative, a reduced scale project, an alternate site configuration, and other geographic locations. The Partial Retention scheme is identified as the environmentally superior alternative. There are, however, significant operational and programmatic concerns with this alternative. This discussion is in anticipation of a Council review of the project June 24, 2002. At that meeting, the Council will be asked to certify that the FEIR has been completed in compliance with state law and to select a project for further development.
BACKGROUND
The Main Library and Art Center are located on an 11.9-acre site, referred to as Newell/Embarcadero, that also includes community gardens. The City proposes to expand the existing one-story Main Library facility from 26,800 square feet to approximately 66,000 square feet. Site options include expanding the existing library building with a two-story wing and basement with under-building parking and a two-deck parking structure in the southeast quadrant of the site; or demolishing the existing library and constructing a new two-story structure with basement and under-building parking, but no parking structure. The existing 146-stall parking area would be expanded to accommodate approximately 311 shared parking stalls. The existing one-story Art Center is proposed to remain and could be expanded from 28,800 square feet to approximately 55,000 square feet in three phases. Some existing vegetation, including mature trees, would be removed and the site would be re-landscaped. Approximately 10 percent (15 plots) of the Community Garden plots would be relocated to another site. Because both the Main Library and Art Center appear eligible for the National and California Registers of Historic Resources, an Environmental Impact Report was prepared.

Mark Cavagnero Associates (MCA), with SWA Landscape Architects completed the site feasibility study phase for the Main Library/Art Center. This included community meetings and study sessions with the Site Feasibility Committee, Planning and Transportation Commission, the Architectural Review Board, the Historic Resources Board, the Library Advisory Commission, the Parks and Recreation Commission and the Public Arts Commission. The City Council reviewed the site options on February 19, 2002, and directed staff to proceed with conceptual design plans for both Scheme 2, which retains the Main Library (Partial Retention Scheme), and Scheme 3, which replaces the Main Library with a new structure (Replacement Scheme). Both schemes retain the existing Art Center and could add wings in three phases. Only the first phase of the Art Center Expansion is currently being considered for inclusion in the facilities improvement proposal.

MCA was selected to develop the conceptual design plans for the Art Center. A new architectural consulting firm, Meyer, Scherer and Rockcastle (MSR) with ELS Architecture and Urban Design, was selected to develop the conceptual design plans for the Main Library. MCA with SWA Landscape Architects will continue as the site planners and landscape designers for the entire project site.

DISCUSSION
The EIR found no significant impacts from the project on mineral resources, public services, utilities and service systems, agriculture, hydrology/water quality, air quality, geology and soils, population and housing, or energy. It found that potential significant impacts on biology, traffic and transportation, noise, aesthetics, land use, and public safety either do not exist or can be mitigated to a level of insignificance. Because, however, the Main Library is a historic building, there would be significant adverse
environmental impact from the Replacement scheme for the Main Library. No additional significant impacts were identified during the public comment period. Staff, therefore, has concluded that no recirculation of the EIR is necessary and will be presenting it to the Council for certification on June 24, 2002.

Included in the DEIR are the historic evaluation report, the traffic impact analysis and the arborist’s report. Because the Main Library and Art Center both appear eligible for the National and California Registers of Historic Resources, the potential impact to these historic resources was the primary focus of the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR). The removal of either of the existing buildings would have a significant and unavoidable impact on the environment. Insofar as the Art Center building would remain, with an addition, it is the Replacement Scheme for the Main Library that would result in a significant impact on an historic resource. In order to approve the Replacement Scheme, the Council would have to adopt a Statement of Overriding Considerations.

The existing library has historic significance because it was designed by the architect Edward Durrell Stone, and embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, region, or method of construction for which this architect is renowned. An architect of demonstrated importance, Leslie Nichols, also designed the Art Center. The building was first used as a City Hall, and demonstrated a radical shift in the design of a civic building from the Grecian or Neo-classical style to the modern, residentialist style. The building is considered significant as it represents historical and living style shifts in the middle of the 20th century.

In addition to the impact on historic resources, additional potential significant impacts were addressed in the DEIR. The additional environmental issues included biological impacts because the site contains 422 trees, a number of which are significant. The project would remove approximately 85 to 121 trees. The significant trees would be preserved, and with the expansion program includes both relocation and replacement trees. This impact, therefore, was found to be less than significant.

The current site has 146 surface parking spaces. A parking demand analysis using the City’s zoning ordinance concluded that the fully expanded buildings, including all three phases of the Art Center expansion, would require 311 parking spaces. Accordingly, both the Partial Retention and the Replacement library schemes include parking for up to 311 spaces. In the Partial Retention scheme, the parking is accommodated under the library addition, in surface lots, and in a 2-level parking structure on the northeast corner of the site off Embarcadero Road. The Replacement library scheme includes under-building and surface parking, but no parking structure. The EIR identifies the potential to reduce this parking through shared parking, which is consistent with the zoning ordinance for community facilities; and the development of a Transportation Demand Management Program (TDM). The project would have a less than significant impact on traffic.
The Council received copies of the DEIR at the time of public circulation. The DEIR was sent to the State Clearinghouse, the Palo Alto Unified School District, and the adjoining cities of Mountain View, East Palo Alto, Menlo Park and Los Altos. The public review included copies being available at all City libraries, the Lucie Stern Center, the Development Center, and available for check out at the Planning Department at the Civic Center.

The Final Environmental Impact Report (FEIR) includes the following additional information (Attachment B):

- Text revisions to the Draft Environmental Impact Report
- List of persons, organizations, and public agencies commenting on the DEIR
- Written comments and responses to both the written comments and the comments received at the hearings held by the Historic Resources Board, Architectural Review Board and Planning and Transportation Commission on the DEIR
- Verbatim minutes of the Commission meeting of May 15, 2002.

**BOARD AND COMMISSION RECOMMENDATIONS:**
The Historic Resources Board (HRB), at its meeting of May 15, 2002, unanimously recommended:

1) Support the concept of the Main Library and Art Center and that the expansion include the existing Main Library [Retention Scheme] structure conform to the Secretary’s Standards;

2) Support the adequacy of the Draft Environmental Impact Report provided that the historic preservation policies of the Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan are included in the DEIR;

3) Recommend that the Council consider the relocation or modification of the Community Gardens to ease site constraints on the expansion of the Main Library.

The Architectural Review Board (ARB), at its meeting of May 16, 2002, unanimously recommended:

1) Support the concept of the Main Library and Art Center expansion and that the expansion include the phased expansion of the Art Center and the Replacement Scheme for the Main Library;

2) Support the adequacy of the Draft Environmental Impact Report;
3) That the final schematic design consider that the east wing meeting room being moved to the north side of the new building.

The Library Advisory Commission (LAC), at its meeting of May 23, 2002 unanimously recommended:

1) Support the adequacy of the Draft Environmental Impact Report;

2) Support the concept of the Main Library expansion and that the City Council approve the Replacement Scheme as the preferred alternative;

3) That there are overriding considerations to support the Replacement Scheme including, but not limited to the following:
   - The replacement scheme offers stronger overall site utilization for expansion
   - The replacement scheme achieves the goals of sustainability and efficiency
   - Development costs of the replacement scheme are expected to be lower
   - The replacement scheme is superior in achieving the project goals for programs and library services to the community.

The Planning and Transportation Commission (Commission) held a public hearing on May 15 for public comments.

At the Commission meeting of May 15, six speakers provided public comments addressing the DEIR and proposed Main Library/Art Center Expansion. All of the six speakers submitted written comments that included their public testimony comments. All of their comments are included in the FEIR with responses to those comments.

The Planning and Transportation Commission, at its May 29, 2002 meeting, recommended (5-2) to the City Council:

1) That the Council certify the Final EIR as complete, and further that the FEIR include the architect and staff’s presentation regarding the design and operational considerations for a three-story and/or below-grade story used for programs and general library operations.

2) Support the concept of the Main Library and Art Center expansion and that the expansion include the phased expansion of the Art Center and the Replacement Scheme for the Main Library.

3) That the staff and design team evaluate the feasibility of eliminating the parking structure for full buildout; that retention of the existing trees is further evaluated by the design team to determine the optimum building design; and that the
Community Gardens be further evaluated for relocation off site in order to maximize the best overall site feasibility design for Library/Art Center expansion and parking.

ATTACHMENTS
Attachment A: Additional Comments received from the community
Attachment B: Final Environmental Impact Report (Council Members only)

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