



# City of Palo Alto

## City Council Staff Report

(ID # 10831)

---

**Report Type: Study Session**

**Meeting Date: 12/2/2019**

**Summary Title: Joint ARB / City Council Meeting**

**Title: Joint Study Session With the Architectural Review Board**

**From: City Manager**

**Lead Department: Planning and Development Services**

### **Recommendation**

Staff recommends that the City Council and the Architectural Review Board (ARB) hold a joint meeting to discuss a variety of topics, including but not limited to (a) a review of the annual report of the ARB's activities and accomplishments, (2) potential discussion topics related to multi-family housing, curbside traffic management, the ARB process and City Council priorities for the ARB.

### **Discussion**

Staff and representatives from the ARB met with the Mayor and Vice Mayor to identify discussion topics for the Study Session (Attachment A). Previously, ARB Chair Peter Baltay transmitted the Board's annual report, which was included on the October 21, 2019 Council packet (Attachment B).

Consistent with prior joint study sessions, the ARB welcomes the opportunity to receive feedback from the City Council and learn about any Council priorities for the Board and to share board-member perspectives on the review process and types of issues it encounters during project review.

### **Attachments:**

**Attachment A: List of Potential Topics for Discussion**

**Attachment B: ARB's 2018-19 Annual Report**

**Joint Meeting  
City Council and Architectural Review Board**

Potential Topics for Discussion

- Multi-family Housing
  - Design Review/Objective Review Standards
- Curb Traffic Management
- Interrelation of trees and underground parking
- ARB Review Process
  - Demonstration of project improvement
  - Success of revised ARB Findings

Additional Topics (should time permit)

- Need for San Antonio Road Design Guidelines
- Displacement of small local businesses by larger commercial uses
- Parking requirements (i.e El Camino developments, restaurants)

To: City Council of the City of Palo Alto  
Planning and Transportation Commission of the City of Palo Alto  
From: Architectural Review Board of the City of Palo Alto  
Re: Annual Report from the ARB  
Date: July 29, 2019

PAMC Section 2.21.030 directs the Architectural Review Board to report annually our “concerns... with respect to the city’s plans, policies, ordinances and procedures as these affect the projects which the board reviews.” Our reviews are site specific – we look at individual development proposals, not broad policies. At the same time, we are directed to look at each project in both its physical and regulatory context – how it will enhance its neighborhood (or not) and how it will implement the City’s policies, from the Comprehensive Plan to the various design guidelines the City uses. Because we look at many projects each year, and because many board members have years of experience in Palo Alto, patterns emerge and specific areas of concern have been identified.

- A. **Trees.** City policy calls for and the Board whole-heartedly supports the inclusion of appropriate, robust, and ample landscaping in all development projects. However, recent development trends towards underground parking and the replacement of single-story structures with multiple story buildings, which the board also generally supports, can cause conflict. We have observed the following:
- Small commercial buildings surrounded by parking lots are being replaced with larger commercial/mixed use buildings with underground parking garages that extend beyond the building footprint. While the reduction of surface parking is generally a positive change, less space is available on-site for larger trees to grow and mature.
  - Replacement of single-story buildings with multiple story buildings can reduce the size of street trees as canopies are constrained by the upper stories. (A look down Lytton Avenue from Alma Street provides examples.) We understand that multiple story buildings are a positive response to urban growth, but strive to also maintain a vibrant and robust urban street canopy.
  - Higher density zoning for hotels discourages extensive landscaping. The setback of upper floors and use of roof gardens can help mitigate the impact of larger buildings.

***These issues can be addressed in part through design review but more explicit landscaping standards would be beneficial.***

- B. **Curb Management.** Curbside traffic management is increasingly important, especially commercial areas.
- Underground parking has many advantages over surface parking. However, the elimination of easily accessible surface parking shifts the demand for space for commercial deliveries and ride sharing services to the curb. New buildings need to be designed to accommodate these uses. This is especially true for buildings fronting on streets with no parking permitted and no possibility of temporary double parking for commercial and passenger loading and unloading.
  - A number of “smart curb” programs have been put in place in other Bay Area cities. Fehr and Peers prepared a Curb Study for Uber for San Francisco in 2018. Mountain View has provided ride service loading zones off Castro Street.

***Updated standards for commercial delivery areas and more explicit standards for ride sharing pick-up and drop-off zones would be beneficial.***

- C. **Displacement of Small Businesses.** The redevelopment of commercial sites often eliminates small business spaces in favor of larger sites that appeal to tech companies. (The replacement of many small office spaces at 2600 El Camino Real is an example. This is also occurring in the Downtown and California Avenue business districts.) The displaced businesses typically provide personal and professional services to individuals – barber shops, therapists’ offices, accountancy firms, etc. The City’s current ordinances do not protect these uses. San Francisco’s [Neighborhood Commercial zone](#) requires new, large commercial

ground floors to carve out street facing spaces (approximately 500 square feet minimum) for smaller tenants. The City of Palo Alto ought to consider the same—small businesses are an important part of the urban landscape and Palo Alto culture.

- D. Parking.** Parking at the Stanford Shopping Center is increasingly congested. Transportation Demand Management programs allow parking requirements to be more carefully tailored to specific needs, but require careful monitoring.
- The Stanford Shopping Center's parking requirements allow the required parking to be provided anywhere on the site. The standard does not distinguish among uses. As a variety of uses (exercise studios, restaurants, etc.) replaces more conventional retail spaces, more users are drawn to the site. This may require new approaches to planning for and managing parking, whether through increased parking requirements, more proximate underground parking or employee parking management programs.
  - Transportation Demand Management (TDM) agreements are increasingly used by applicants who wish to meet their projects parking needs with fewer spaces than the code would otherwise require. The Board supports providing only the number of parking spaces actually needed. However, TDMs required regular and complaint-based monitoring to be effective. While aerial photos can be used to monitor parking lots, the City needs future access to underground garages to monitor their use. Board members have received comments that internal parking intended for customer or employee use is in fact not available at some sites.

***The Stanford Shopping Center parking requirements should be reviewed in light of the changing nature of shopping center uses. TDM program enforcement should be monitored and more strongly supported.***

- E. Pedestrian Mobility.** For people to move freely in our commercial districts and along El Camino Real, we need more seating available to pedestrians. The City should set and implement street furniture standards that combine public and private seating to make walking possible for those who need to rest. Specific standards, such as the VTA 2003 Pedestrian Technical Guidelines, which call for 13'-18' wide sidewalks in order to have a furnishing zone, or the 2012 Rail Corridor Study, which recommends 15' min sidewalks in Main Street areas for cafe seating and retail merchandising, may be helpful references.
- F. El Camino Real.** There is a continuing loss of places to go along El Camino Real.
- Zoning encouraging new hotels includes parking standards that discourage the addition of potential neighborhood social spaces such as coffee shops, restaurants, and bars.
  - Parking standard for El Camino Real development that make it difficult to add restaurant uses on small parcels.

***Revised parking standards for development along El Camino Real would promote the development of neighborhood retail and restaurant businesses.***

- G. Architectural Review Board-required findings.** The City Council modified the required findings for the Architectural Review process in 2017, resulting in six findings which must be made to recommend Architectural Review approval. The revised findings have resulted in an improved review process, as board members, staff and the public are more easily able to reference which finding is applicable and appropriate for any given project or situation. The result has been an increased focus on ensuring compliance with the findings.