



PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION DIVISION

STAFF REPORT

TO: PLANNING & TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

FROM: Chitra Moitra **DEPARTMENT:** Planning &
Planner Community Environment

DATE: October 21, 2009

SUBJECT: **Comprehensive Plan Update:** Discussion on the Comprehensive Plan vision, themes and goals.

RECOMMENDATION

This meeting is intended to provide information and discussion. No recommendation for action by the City Council may be made by the Commission at this meeting.

BACKGROUND

At the study session on August 26, 2009, the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) discussed the overall process of examining the existing Comprehensive Plan's vision, goals, policies and programs. The study session provided background information to the PTC prior to beginning its actual review of the Comprehensive Plan document. The PTC requested a second session to discuss in detail the seven major themes and vision statements of individual elements of the Comprehensive Plan and their interrelationship.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss with the PTC the existing vision of the City's Comprehensive Plan by reviewing the seven major themes on which the Comprehensive Plan is based and the broad vision statements of the different chapters of the Comprehensive Plan. This discussion is to provide a context for the PTC in its subsequent review of the goals, policies and programs of the six individual Comprehensive Plan chapters and to enable the PTC to begin to assess the relevance of the current vision of the plan. As described in the Introduction to the Comprehensive Plan (see Attachment A), the vision of the plan is the shared dream of Palo Alto in the future and the plan recognizes it may not be achievable during our lifetime; however, the long-term idealistic thinking embodied in each vision statement was the foundation of development of the plan. Although the vision of the plan is not legally binding; the goals and

policies of the plan guide development, and the zoning ordinance is the primary regulatory tool for implementing those goals and policies.

Seven Major Themes of the Comprehensive Plan

Palo Alto's Comprehensive Plan is based on seven major themes (see Attachment B) which act as building blocks to achieve a comprehensive, long range, internally consistent vision for the City. These themes are briefly described below.

- ***Building Community and Neighborhoods:*** Build safe, attractive and distinctive neighborhoods with quality community services to all residents.
- ***Maintaining and Enhancing Community Character:*** Maintain the best physical attributes of Palo Alto, such as historic buildings, tree lined streetscapes, parks and quality architecture; and improve areas where these features are lacking.
- ***Reducing Reliance on the Automobile:*** Limit the impacts of automobile on the environment by creating a development pattern where people can walk, bicycle or take public transit rather than drive.
- ***Meeting Housing Supply Challenges:*** Increase housing supply and housing stock diversity while protecting the existing single family neighborhoods and encouraging appropriate higher density development at designated locations.
- ***Protecting and Repairing Natural Features:*** Protect permanent open spaces and maintain the ecosystem balance by promoting urban forest growth and street trees throughout the City, and protect and restore creeks.
- ***Meeting Residential and Commercial Needs:*** Maintain a balance of both residential and commercial development ensuring compatibility between the uses, retain existing businesses, maintain vital commercial areas and attract new businesses.
- ***Providing Responsive Governance and Regional Leadership:*** Encourage strong community participation involving citizens, business and local officials and affirm Palo Alto's role as a leader in addressing regional issues.

Vision, Goals, Policies and Programs

Each Comprehensive Plan chapter is intended to provide a policy and program framework for realizing the City's overall vision articulated in the seven major themes and includes its own vision statement and supporting goals, policies and programs that are to be consulted to guide decisions on a wide range of issues. The vision statements for each Comprehensive Plan chapter are included in Attachment C.

During the first phase of review of the Comprehensive Plan scheduled to begin in October, the PTC will review the vision statements for each chapter currently in the plan along with the individual goals, policies and programs. In preparation of those discussions, the meeting on

September 23rd is intended to assist the PTC understand the overall context of the plan and the interrelationship of the themes and vision statements. The Commission may also identify text in the major themes or vision statements that are considered no longer relevant or applicable; those can be targeted when evaluating the individual chapters. It should also be noted that as the PTC undertakes its evaluation of the Comprehensive Plan, there will be additional opportunities to revisit the major themes and vision statements.

The PTC will also be meeting in a joint study session with the City Council early next year to discuss the relevance and applicability of the overall vision of the existing Comprehensive Plan as well as the individual chapter vision statements. The joint study session should provide further guidance to the PTC for the second phase of the update process which will focus on developing new policies and programs to support the Comprehensive Plan work program.

TIMELINE

The following is a tentative schedule for PTC review of Comprehensive Plan items through the end of this year.

- Housing Element discussion on vision, goals and other issues October 21
- Comprehensive Plan Land Use Policies October 28
- Comprehensive Plan Business & Economics Policies November 18
- Housing Needs Discussion December 9
- Draft Concept Plan for East Meadow Circle December 16

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment A: Introduction to *Embracing the New Century Palo Alto 1998 – 2010 Comprehensive Plan*
- Attachment B: Major Themes of the Comprehensive Plan
- Attachment C: Vision statements of each Comprehensive Plan chapter

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DEPARTMENT/DIVISION HEAD APPROVAL: _____

Julie Caporgno
Chief Planning and Transportation Official

ATTACHMENT B

Major Themes of the Comprehensive Plan

City of Palo Alto's Comprehensive Plan is based on seven major themes:

Building Community and Neighborhoods

Palo Alto's diverse neighborhoods are the building blocks of the community. Schools, libraries, parks, public facilities and small businesses are an essential part of neighborhood life and help build the bridge between neighborhood and community. The City is committed to building upon the strengths of its neighborhoods, keeping them safe and attractive, maintaining a distinct identity for each, and delivering top-quality community services to all residents.

Maintaining and Enhancing Community Character

The community treasures the special qualities of the City, including its historic buildings, pedestrian scale, high-quality architecture, and beautiful streets and parks. Maintaining the physical qualities of the City is an overarching consideration, incorporated in all parts of the Plan. The Land Use and Community Design Element include specific provisions to maintain Palo Alto's best features and enhance and improve those areas where these features are lacking.

Reducing Reliance on the Automobile

The Plan provides new policies and specific actions for reducing the impacts of cars on the environment and improving options for pedestrians, bicyclists, and transit-users. In the future, a greater emphasis will be placed on improving the City's multi-modal transit stations. New light rail, shuttle bus, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities are envisioned. The City will strive to create a development pattern where people can walk, bicycle or take public transit rather than drive.

Meeting Housing Supply Challenges

Palo Alto is perceived as a built-out city. Increasing the housing supply and maintaining the diversity and quality of Palo Alto's housing stock are challenges. This Comprehensive Plan seeks to meet these challenges by increasing the supply of housing at all price levels. The plan safeguards existing single family neighborhoods and rental housing. It proposes new map designations where higher densities are allowed in appropriate locations and new policies to ensure that the remaining housing sites are used efficiently.

Protecting and Repairing Natural Features

With most of the baylands and foothills already protected as permanent open space, the Comprehensive Plan's focus turns inward to the fragile ecosystems within developed portions of the City. The City's creeks, many of which have been altered by flood control projects, are envisioned as greenbelts and community gateways. A pilot project in urban creek restoration is identified. The Plan also emphasizes the benefits of street trees and promotes an urban forest throughout the City.

Meeting Residential and Commercial Needs

Palo Alto is well known as a desirable residential community and a City with a healthy, competitive business community. Meeting the demands of each community is a major theme of the Plan. The Plan establishes the physical boundaries of residential and commercial areas and sets limits where necessary to ensure that business and housing remain compatible. It encourages commercial enterprise, but not at the expense of the City's residential neighborhoods. The City is committed to retaining existing businesses, maintaining vital commercial areas, and attracting quality new businesses.

Providing Responsive Governance and Regional Leadership

The Plan emphasizes the City's commitment to strong community participation. It encourages collaboration among citizens, businesses, and local officials. It affirms Palo Alto's role as a leader in addressing regional issues.

Vision Statements for the Elements of the Comprehensive Plan

LANDUSE AND COMMUNITY DESIGN ELEMENT

Palo Alto will be a vital, attractive place to live, work, and visit. The elements that make Palo Alto a great community—its neighborhoods, shopping and employment centers, civic uses, open spaces, and natural resources—will be strengthened and enhanced. The diverse range of housing and work environments will be sustained and expanded to create more choices for all income levels. All Palo Alto neighborhoods will be improved, each to have public gathering spaces, essential services and pedestrian amenities, to encourage less reliance on the automobile.

HOUSING ELEMENT

Palo Alto will aggressively pursue a variety of housing opportunities that enhance the character, diversity and vitality of the City. The City is committed to increasing the development of affordable and market-rate housing, including converting non-residential lands to residential or mixed use. Existing housing, particularly rental units will be conserved and rehabilitated or replaced. Palo Alto will continue its strong commitment to supporting agencies that assist households with special needs. The City will foster an environment free of discrimination and the barriers that prevent choice in housing. It will place special emphasis on family housing and housing that addresses the health care, child care, transit, recreation and social service needs of all Palo Alto residents.

TRANSPORTATION ELEMENT

Palo Alto will provide accessible, attractive, economically viable and environmentally sound transportation options that meet the needs of residents, employers, employees and visitors for safe, convenient and efficient travel by a variety of methods. Streets will be safe and attractive, and designed to enhance the quality and aesthetics of Palo Alto neighborhoods. Emphasis will be placed on alternatives to the automobile, including walking, bicycling, public transit, and car and van pooling. The adverse impacts of automobile traffic on the environment in general, and residential streets in particular, will be reduced. Solutions that reduce the growth in the number of automobiles on City streets, calm or slow traffic, and save energy will be supported. It is hoped that individuals will reduce their automobile trips by 10 percent by 2010, as alternative transportation methods are implemented. The City will seek out innovative funding sources and approaches to construct and maintain needed transportation systems. Palo Alto recognizes the regional nature of our transportation system, and will be a leader in seeking regional transportation solutions through long-term planning.

BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS ELEMENT

Palo Alto's business environment will be exciting, dynamic and vital. Businesses will have

access to a wide array of support services and will enjoy positive relationships with Palo Alto residents, officials, and City staff. The competing needs of residents and businesses will be balanced so that neighborhoods are protected and enhanced while business districts are competitive and attractive. The local economy will thrive, and a diverse array of goods and services will be provided to Palo Alto consumers. Most development will occur within Palo Alto's employment areas, and will be consistent with the role and character designated for each area by this plan.

NATURAL ENVIRONMENT ELEMENT

Palo Alto will meet today's needs without compromising the needs of future generations. Palo Alto will respect and manage natural resources in a way that sustains the natural environment and protects our foothills, baylands, creeks, parks, wildlife and open space legacy. Elements of the natural environment will be conserved where they remain intact and restored where they have been degraded by past development. A substantial portion of the City will remain as open space. Even in built-up areas, a network of parks will provide access to nature and an urban forest will provide ecological benefits and a source of beauty for residents. Palo Alto will strive for cleaner air and cleaner water. Its policies and programs will foster energy and water conservation, reduced solid waste generation, and cleanup of contaminated sites. The City will be well prepared for natural disasters and will grow and change in a way that minimizes public exposure to hazards like fire, flood, and earthquake.

COMMUNITY SERVICES AND FACILITIES ELEMENT

Palo Alto will provide high quality community services to its residents, businesses, and visitors. Its schools, libraries, parks, community facilities, and performing arts and cultural centers are treasured and will be enhanced to serve current and future generations. Its police and fire services will be managed to provide consistently high levels of public safety. The City will continue to provide services and programs that meet the needs of special populations—including children, seniors, and people with disabilities—as well as programs in recreation, lifelong learning, and the arts that benefit all populations. Palo Alto's success in providing these services will be expressed and measured by the satisfaction of its customers, the public at large. The City will pursue new ways to deliver community services in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible. It will coordinate its efforts with other public agencies, nonprofits, and the private sector to reduce overlap and maximize the use of resources.
