



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 7271)

Report Type: Study Session

Meeting Date: 2/13/2017

Summary Title: 4146 El Camino Real: Prescreening for Zone Change

Title: Request for a Pre-Screening Study Session to Rezone the Vacant Property at 4146 El Camino Real (Near Thain Way) From Low Density Multiple-Family Residence District (RM-15) to Medium Density Multiple-Family Residence District (RM-30)

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Planning and Community Environment

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the City Council conduct a preliminary review of the applicant's request to rezone the property at 4146 El Camino Real from Low Density Multifamily Residential (RM-15) to Medium Density Multifamily Residential (RM-30). This is a study session intended to receive public and City Councilmember comments; no formal action is requested.

Executive Summary

The applicant seeks preliminary feedback from the City Council concerning a proposal to rezone 4146 El Camino Real from RM-15 to RM-30. No change to the site's Comprehensive Plan land use designation is necessary, as the proposal is consistent with the existing land use designation. A prescreening review is required for this type of legislative change prior to application submittal. A prescreen will allow the City Council and the public a preview of the proposed rezone and issues that may arise from the proposal. The Council could also offer comments as to any aspect of the project, including the appropriateness of the contemplated zoning district and urban design considerations if the proposal were to move forward.

The applicant has provided preliminary massing and design information, which serve to illustrate the proposal, but should not be considered final or proposed designs. Based on the City Council's comments at this evening's study session, the applicant will prepare applications with a more fully developed design proposal which will be reviewed for code compliance and will be subject to environmental and architectural review.

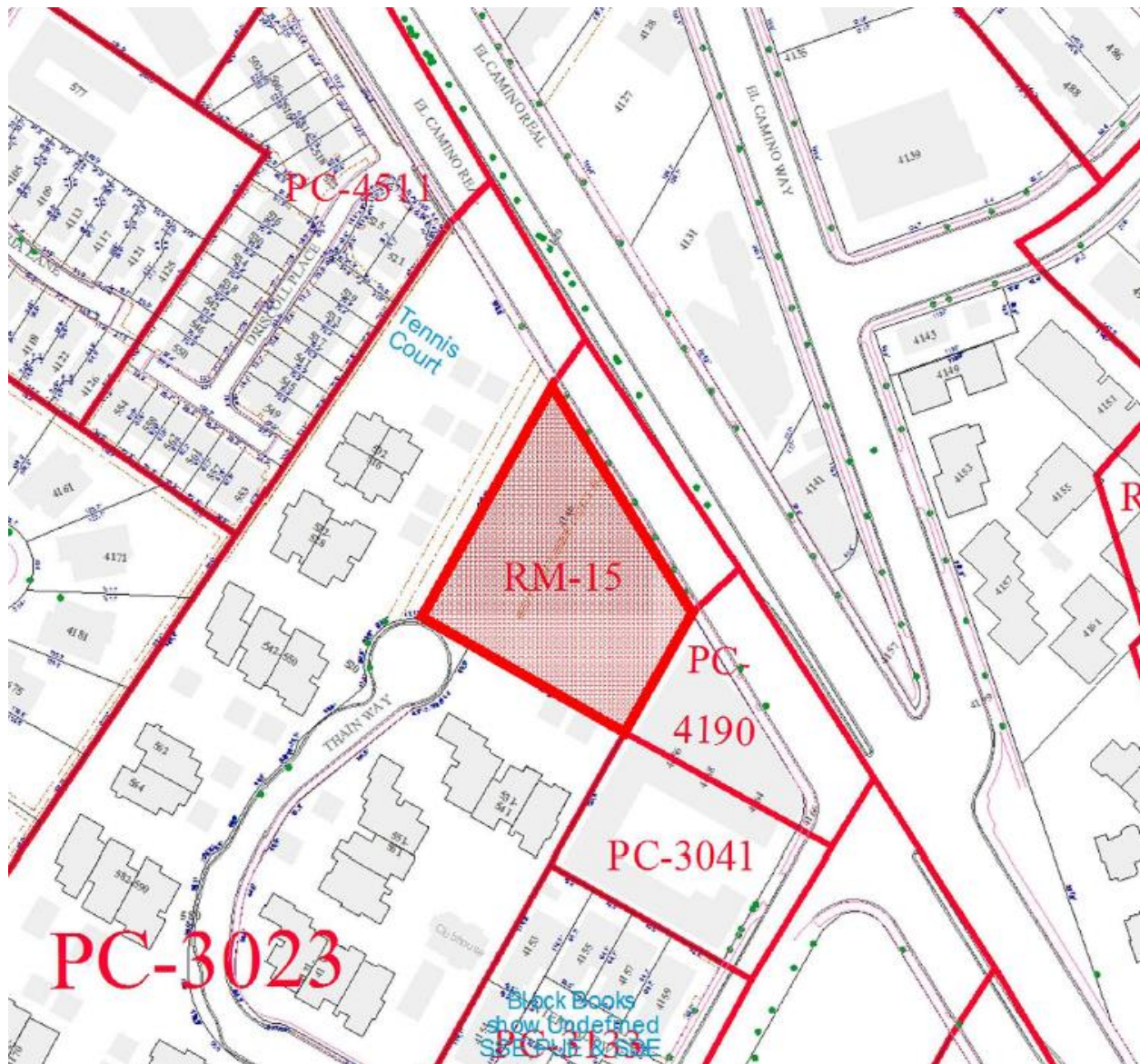
Background

The project site is comprised of a single parcel identified as 4146 El Camino Real. A location map showing the property, and surrounding properties, is attached (Attachment A). The total area of the site is 33,541 square feet. The site is currently vacant with the exception of a single billboard sign. The site was previously occupied by a single family residence that was demolished in 1997. The site is currently zoned RM-15, which allows up to 15 dwelling units per acre. Based on the lot size, that equates to a potential development yield of 11 dwelling units, with the potential for 35% more units if a State density bonus is requested.

Context

The site's Comprehensive Plan land use designation is Multi Family Residential. The project is also included in the City's Housing Element as an opportunity site. The property's primary street frontage is located on State Highway 82, otherwise known as El Camino Real an arterial roadway according to the City's Comprehensive Plan. Typical uses along El Camino Real in this area include multifamily developments, restaurants, hotels, and other commercial and retail uses. Adjacent uses to the northeast, across El Camino Real include retail (Starbucks Coffee), commercial office (WSO2), personal services (Think Tank Learning), (Opus Music Studio) and eating and drinking uses (Subway Sandwiches). Adjacent uses to the northwest and to the southwest include a multifamily condominium development known as Barron Square (PC 3023). To the southeast is a hotel use (The Zen Hotel). Multifamily residential buildings in the area are primarily between two and three stories tall. Figure 1 shows the project zoning and surrounding zoning districts.

**Figure 1:
Zoning Map Showing Subject Parcel and Surrounding Parcels**



Source: City of Palo Alto Planning & Community Environment Department, December 2016

Prior Preliminary Architectural Review

The project was the subject of a Preliminary Architectural Review by the Architectural Review Board (ARB) on May 15, 2014. The full report is available at the following link: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/40407>. The proposed concept included the development of two, three-story buildings for 21 residential condominiums. Those units would be a combination of one to two bedrooms set on a podium above parking. The request required a rezone from RM-15 to RM-30. The ARB was supportive of the increased density and asked that the project continue to study the building frontage, rhythm and connection to the street. The ARB also stressed that community pedestrian connections should be developed that connect the Barron Square neighborhood to the El Camino Real businesses and services. There were concerns from the neighbors regarding the size of the project, the

visual impacts of the project and vehicle access from the project to neighboring properties within Barron Square. The development proposal did not proceed.

Discussion

The primary focus of the request is to seek comments on the proposal to rezone from RM-15 to RM-30. While the supporting documentation for the project includes development site plans and elevations, these can only be considered as concepts at this time (Attachments B and C). The concepts help frame what could potentially be developed at the site. If there is support for the rezone by the City Council, then the applicant could apply for a Major Architectural Review, where the rigorous evaluation of development plans would occur. The proposal would also be subject to environmental review.

Summary of Key Issues

The request is to evaluate whether it is appropriate to allow additional density on the site. Based on the size of the subject property, the current zoning designation allows a maximum of 11 dwelling units, consistent with the zoning designation density range between eight and 15 dwelling units per acre. The proposed zoning designation would allow up to 23 dwelling units, which is consistent with the RM-30 density range between 16 and 30 dwelling units per acre. Up to 35% more units could be allowed if a State density bonus is requested, as described further below.

Development Standards

The table below summarizes the development standards that are different between the RM-15 and RM-30 designations and what those differences would equate to for potential development. All other applicable development standards are the same between the two districts.

Table 1:
Comparison of Development Standards between RM-15 and RM-30 where Different¹

Development Standards	RM-15	RM-30	Difference upon Rezone
Maximum Height (ft.)	30	35	+5 ft. (Three stories can be accommodated in both districts)
Maximum Site Coverage (Base)	35%	40%	+ 1,677 sf
Maximum Floor Area Ratio (FAR)	0.5:1	0.6:1	+ 3,354 sf
Maximum Dwelling Units per Acre	15	30	+ 12 units
Minimum Site Open Space (%)	35	30	-1,677 sf

Development Standards	RM-15	RM-30	Difference upon Rezone
Minimum Usable Open Space (sf per unit) ²	200	150	+3,450 sf
Minimum Common Open Space (sf per unit) ²	100	75	+625 sf

¹ Pursuant to the State density bonus law, increased density and development concessions may be available to exceed these standards if a percentage of the units are affordable. See Palo Alto Municipal Code Section 18.15.

² Based on maximum dwelling unit yield for site

Surrounding Context

This stretch of El Camino Real is not considered a “safe route to school” to the schools within the vicinity of the site. Students are directed to take El Camino Way instead.

Just north of the project (4100 El Camino Real) is a development approved in 1998 that includes three-story dwelling units (pictured below).



Source: Google, December 2016.

The photograph below depicts the site as it currently exists.



Source: Google, December 2016.

The photograph below is taken from the cul-de-sac on Thain Way looking towards the subject site.



Source: Google, December 2016.

Prescreening Considerations

Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Section 18.79.010 states that the purposes of a preliminary review are:

- a) To maximize opportunities for meaningful public discussion of development projects, at the earliest feasible time, for the guidance of the public, project proponents and city decision makers. Prescreening is intended to focus on purpose, scope, conceptual design and other similar matters and is not intended to involve review of complete drawings and documentation.
- b) To focus public and environmental review of development projects on the issues of greatest significance to the community, including, but not limited to, planning concerns, neighborhood compatibility, Comprehensive Plan consistency, economics, social costs and benefits, fiscal costs and benefits, technological factors, and legal issues. These procedures are not intended to permit or foreclose debate on the merits of approval or disapproval of any given development project.
- c) To provide members of the public with the opportunity to obtain early information about development projects in which they may have an interest.

- d) To provide project proponents with the opportunity to obtain early, non-binding preliminary comments on development projects to encourage sound and efficient private decisions about how to proceed.
- e) To encourage early communication between elected and appointed public officials and staff with respect to the implementation of city policies, standards, and regulations on particular development projects.
- f) To facilitate orderly and consistent implementation of the City's Comprehensive Plan and development regulations.

The preliminary schematic drawings communicate a concept plan as is appropriate for this stage of project consideration. It is not intended to demonstrate the actual proposal, but to demonstrate possible massing, site planning, circulation and parking for the site. As stated previously, through the review process consistency with the zoning code standards would be evaluated.

Affordable Housing

Based on the maximum allowable dwelling units, a future development project would have to provide three below market rate units, which is one more unit than if the site would remain in the RM-15 zoning district.

Based on State law, the City would be required to grant a density bonus and other incentives or concessions to the project if it contains one of the following: At least 5% of the housing units are restricted to very low income residents; at least 10% of the housing units are restricted to lower income residents; and at least 10% of the housing units in a for-sale common interest development are restricted to moderate income residents. The density bonus is based on a sliding scale based on the percentage of affordable units at each income level and the density bonus level is capped at 35%. Under the State density bonus law, reduced parking requirements and development concessions are also available to projects with affordable units, as provided in Section 18.15 of the Palo Alto Municipal Code.

Policy Implications

The subject property is located in the Multiple Family Residential Land Use Designation of the Comprehensive Plan. According to the Comprehensive Plan, the permitted number of housing units will vary by area, depending on existing land use, proximity to major streets and public transit, distance to shopping, and environmental problems. Net densities will range from eight to 40 units and eight to 90 persons per acre. Density should be on the lower end of the scale next to single family residential areas. Densities higher than what is permitted by zoning may be allowed where measurable community benefits will be derived, services and facilities are available, and the net effect will be compatible with the overall Comprehensive Plan.

The proposed rezone would be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan land use designation. Several Comprehensive Plan policies are applicable to the site and the neighborhood including, but not limited to:

Land Use Policy L-5	Maintain the scale and character of the City. Avoid land uses that are overwhelming and unacceptable due to their size and scale.
Land Use Policy L-6	Where possible, avoid abrupt changes in scale and density between residential and non-residential areas and between residential areas of different densities. To promote compatibility and gradual transitions between land uses, place zoning district boundaries at mid-block locations rather than along streets wherever possible. which indicates to avoid abrupt changes in scale and density between residential and non-residential areas and between residential areas of different densities.
Land Use Policy L-12	Preserve the character of residential neighborhoods by encouraging new or remodeled structures to be compatible with the neighborhood and adjacent structures.
Land Use Policy L-14	Design and arrange new multifamily buildings, including entries and outdoor spaces, so that each unit has a clear relationship to a public street.
Housing Policy H1.4	Ensure that new developments provide appropriate transitions from higher density development to single-family and low-density residential districts to preserve neighborhood character.
Housing Policy H2.1	Identify and implement strategies to increase housing density and diversity, including mixed-use development and a range of unit styles, near community services. Emphasize and encourage the development of affordable and mixed income housing to support the City's fair share of the regional housing needs and to ensure that the City's population remains economically diverse.
Housing Policy H3.1	Encourage, foster, and preserve diverse housing opportunities for very low-low-, and moderate income households.

Timeline

Following the prescreening review, the applicant will consider the comments received and determine how they want to proceed. Formal applications and public hearings before the Architectural Review Board, Planning Commission and City Council would be required to advance the proposed conceptual project.

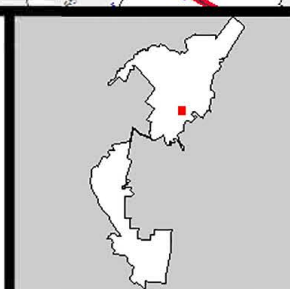
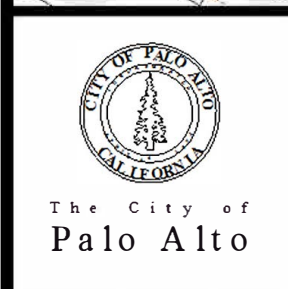
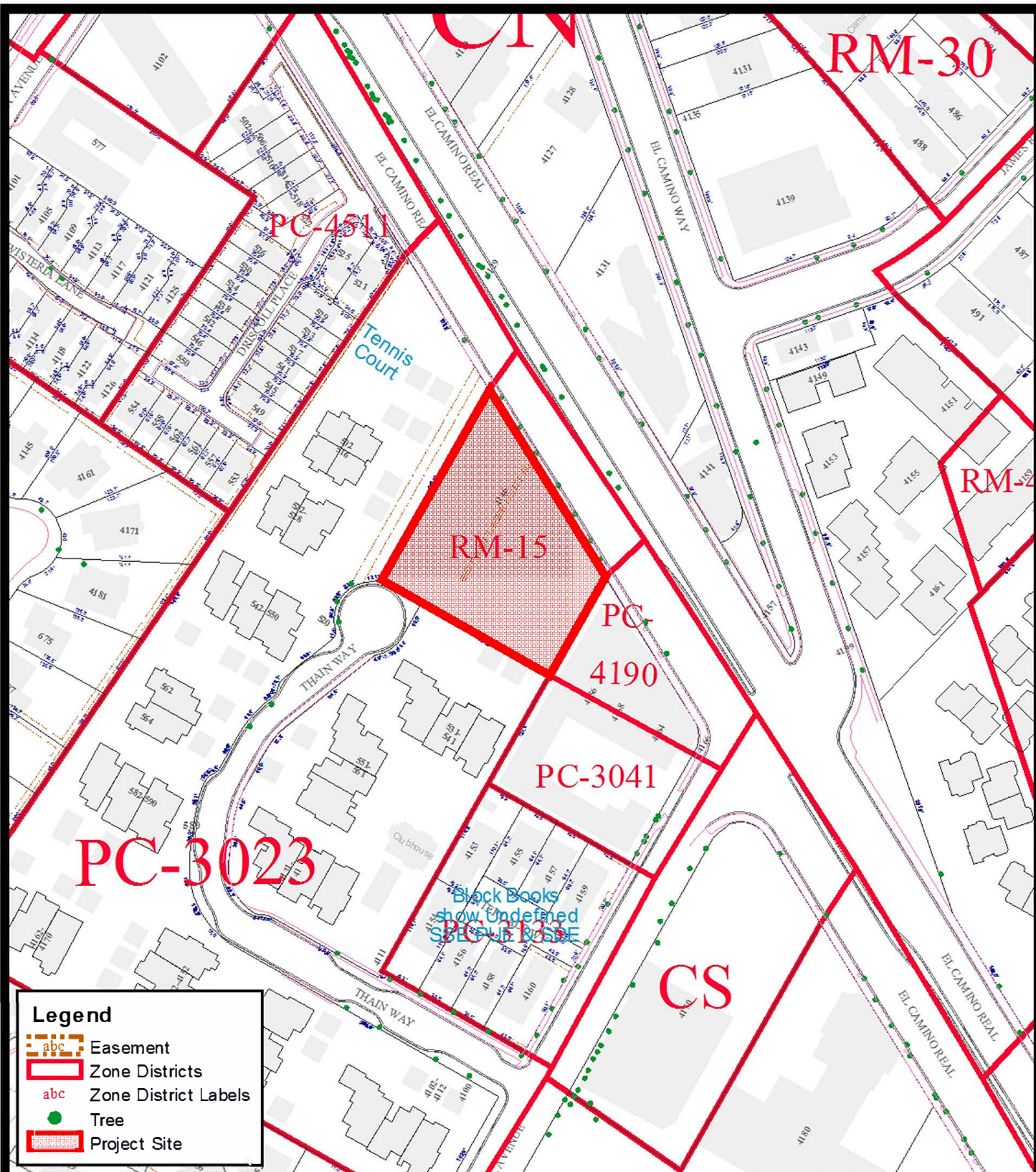
Environmental Assessment

Environmental review is not required for a prescreening, as no formal action will be taken on

the proposal. The prescreening is not considered to be a project under CEQA. If a formal rezoning application is filed, a complete environmental assessment (Initial Study) will be prepared in compliance with CEQA guidelines, prior to any formal hearing of the rezoning. The environmental review process for the project would include an evaluation of traffic and aesthetics amongst other topics.

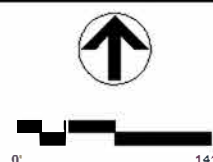
Attachments:

- Attachment A: Site Location Map
- Attachment B: Applicant Request Letter
- Attachment C Project Plans
- Attachment D: Public Comments



4146 El Camino Real Prescreening 16PLN-00239

This map is a product of the
City of Palo Alto GIS



August 26, 2016

City of Palo Alto
Department of Planning & Community Environment
250 Hamilton Avenue, 5th floor
Palo Alto, CA 94303

Re: 4146 El Camino Real – zone change prescreening

Mayor Burt and fellow Council Members:

Attached is Hayes Group Architect's submittal package for a prescreening of a zone change proposal for 4146 El Camino for your consideration. The project applicant is Hayes Group Architects on behalf of the owner, Su Juan.

SUMMARY

Ms. Juan and her family once lived in the single-family home that occupied the property until it was torn down in 1997. Since that time the site has been vacant.

In 2011 an application to rezone the property from RM15 to RM30 was filed but never advanced at the city. In 2012 Hayes Group Architects was contacted to initiate a new application on behalf of Ms. Juan to rezone the property as originally proposed. On April 16, 2013, a neighborhood meeting was held with Barron Square residents to understand their concerns and to introduce the project to them. Barron Square is a multi-family, PC development to the rear of the property, accessed from Thain Way. Six residents attended the meeting to express their concerns that mostly focused on site access, safety, density and potential shadows. The most critical concern focused on keeping the project separate from their neighborhood, accessed from El Camino Real.

Preliminary plans were submitted to the city and on May 15, 2014, a preliminary architectural review was conducted by the ARB. The ARB's comments were supportive of the increased density and asked that we continue to study the building frontage, rhythm and connection to the street. They understood the neighbor's concerns about preventing vehicle access through their neighborhood but stressed that community pedestrian connections should be developed that connect the Barron Square neighborhood to the El Camino Real businesses and services. Since the preliminary hearing the project has not advanced until now.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The site is located along El Camino Real, just north of Maybell Avenue. To the south is the Zen hotel, to the east, across El Camino Real, are commercial buildings and mixed-use buildings, and to the North and West is a townhouse subdivision, Barron Square.

The property is 33,571 square feet (.77 ac) currently zoned RM15 permitting a density yield of eleven (11) units. The property's comprehensive plan designation is Multifamily Residential. It fronts onto El Camino Real in the "Triangle Area" an area that is considered a "node" area in the South El Camino Real Guidelines. Node areas are identified as place making areas for more pedestrian oriented activities including a mixture of business services, retail shops, transit services and living opportunities.

Neighboring properties on the same side of the street are mostly zoned PC. Across Maybell, to the south, properties are CS permitting 30 du in a mixed-use project. Directly across the street are CN zoned properties allowing 15 du in a mixed-use project.

PROPOSED PROJECT

We propose to rezone the site from RM-15 to RM-30, and seek the Council's concurrence for the rezone.

The attached plans show a concept that could be developed if the rezone moves forward. We understand that any concept would need to be fully evaluated through the City's Architectural Review process. Realistically, the site could accommodate twenty-one (21), three-story multi-family residential condominiums with 1 level below-grade parking. Based on the preliminary feedback we received from the ARB and the public, the project would be designed with access to the site from El Camino Real, avoiding any disruption to the Barron Square neighborhood. The concept for the site planning is to reinforce the street edge, provide a residential scale to the massing and organize the buildings to provide outdoor yard opportunities on both the front and back of the units.

As depicted in the initial concept shown to the ARB and the public, the buildings will be located away from the Barron Square neighborhood, at the El Camino Real setback to reinforce the street. There will be a variety of one and two bedroom units totaling twenty-one (21) total units. Pursuant to the City's inclusionary housing policy, three units would be affordable units.

Higher residential densities are appropriate for this area of the El Camino Real corridor as is evidenced by the adjoining zoning of CS, allowing RM30 residential densities, to the south and RM30 and additional higher density PC projects to the north. Other than the CN commercial zoning across the street, this is the only RM15 zoned parcel on the west side for the entire section of El Camino Real.

The RM30 zone allows 35-foot height limits while the RM15 zone allows 30 feet. Along the El Camino real corridor taller buildings are desired to better define the edge and strengthen the corridor. Setbacks are identical between the two zones.

HOUSING ELEMENT

4146 El Camino Real is listed on the Housing Element Inventory of sites with a realistic unit yield consistent with the existing RM15 zoning. However, the biggest theme identified in the Housing Element is the high cost of housing in our community for all income segments due to the shortage of housing opportunities. There is limited land available. The Housing Element indicates that only 0.5% of land in the city is vacant and available for development. 4146 El Camino Real is included in this 0.5% and should be developed for housing in a responsible manner. The Housing Element promotes increased

densities along El Camino Real, a major transportation corridor. Although it is a small project, increasing the density from 15 du/a to 30 du/a through this zone change will be a step in the right direction for responsible land use.

PARKING

Parking for the project will make no request for parking concessions and would be fully parked in accordance with PAMC 18.52.

We look forward to a staff review and scheduling of a prescreening hearing so that we can determine how to proceed with the development of this property.

Sincerely,



Ken Hayes, AIA
Principal

cc: Su Juan

Attachment C

Hardcopies of project plans are provided to Planning and Transportation Commissioners. These plans are available to the public by visiting the Planning and Community Environmental Department on the 5th floor of City Hall at 250 Hamilton Avenue.

Directions to review Project plans online:

Go to: <https://palloalto.buildingeye.com/planning>

Search for “4146 El Camino Real ” and open the record by clicking on the green dot

Review the record details and open the “more details” option (make sure the details option shows Application #16PLN-00239 at the top)

Use the “Records Info” drop down menu and select “Attachments”

Open the attachment named “4146ECR_PreScreeningARB_fullSet.pdf .”

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August 31, 2016

11 3 2016
Hillary Gitelman, Director of Planning
City of Palo Alto
250 Hamilton Ave., 5th Floor
Palo Alto, CA 94301

SUBJECT: 4146 El Camino Real
APPLICATION: 16PLN-00329 -- Zoning Change Request from RM-15 to RM-30

Dear Ms. Gitelman:

I understand that the Palo Alto City Council will soon be considering a developer's request to change the zoning of 4146 El Camino Real from RM-15 to RM-30. As a neighboring property owner (I own a unit at the adjacent Barron Square condominiums) I believe that additional information is required for the Council to evaluate the request. Specifically, I feel that the applicant should prepare a detailed visual impact study, with particular reference to Barron Square. I would recommend that several view points ("receptor sites") be selected, which are near the Barron Square buildings closest to the proposed construction. The applicant should also address any potential reduction of direct sunlight on Barron Square units or common area.

I understand that the developer's proposal calls for the construction of 21 units on a very small (.76 acre) site. This is almost twice the currently allowed 11 units. As three story buildings are proposed, there could be potentially severe impacts on Barron Square (including sunlight), and on the surrounding community. Because the developer is requesting a large economic benefit (likely millions of dollars) it seems only appropriate that the Council should have complete documentation of all the impacts.

Although I am not a Barron Square board member, I have owned a unit there for 19 years. My concern is that the impacts of any zoning change be fully disclosed before any decision is made. Thank you for your review of these comments. I would be most appreciative if you could provide copies of this letter to the Council members.

Very truly yours,



Jeffrey Eustis