

21 Condos Proposed for 4161 El Camino $\frac{3}{4}$ acre Property Adjacent to Barron Square

A proposed condominium project at 4146 El Camino Real, on the $\frac{3}{4}$ acre vacant lot adjacent to the cul-de-sac at the end of Thain Way has significant implications for the residents of the Barron Square community. It's comprised of two 3-story buildings [**totaling 21 units**] with underground parking [some in tandem] with ingress/egress from El Camino at the south end of the property next to the Zen Motel. There could be separate pedestrian access from El Camino.

It is **URGENT** for new and ongoing Barron Square residents to understand the situation.

Take actions: Write a letter. DEFINITELY attend the Palo Alto City Council Feb. 13, meeting.

- 1- Support maintaining the current RM15 zoning to insure that lower density housing will be built on the lot.
- 2- Strongly oppose up-zoning to RM30 so an overly dense project won't be built.
- 3- Make a statement supporting the above.
- 4-Just show up – Be Seen to support keeping the $\frac{3}{4}$ acre at RM15 zoning. Urge the council to block RM 30 zoning.

Definitions:

RM15 zoning= *Low Density Multi-family Residents' allows 8–15 dwelling units per acre.*

RM-30= *'Medium Density Multi-family Residents District' allows for 16 – 30 dwelling units per acre. It "is intended for larger land parcels that will enable developments to provide sufficient parking spaces and meet open space needs...."*

The Issues

1. Ingress/Egress

A major concern for residents of Barron Square has been the possible use of Thain Way for ingress and egress from any new project built on that adjacent property. Thain Way is a public street, granted to the City of Palo Alto in 1979 extending to the fence line of the adjacent property. This is indicated in the general description and on the Barron Square property map.

Given the size of the proposed project or any project on 4161 ECR, any thought that Thain Way could handle an increase in vehicular or bicycle traffic is ludicrous, and especially since Thain Way exits onto Maybell Avenue, which is a "safe route to school" for hundreds of children on bicycles. Also, the Thain/Maybell intersection is very congested during rush hour. Traffic trying to get onto Maybell backs up on Thain Way. The architect clearly recognizes this and therefore proposed that vehicular ingress/egress be on El Camino Real.

2- Safety-

Thain Way is a 'sub-standard' narrow street in width. In some places the roadway is only 24' wide, with a 90-degree curve at the street's mid-point and several garages exiting directly into the street and onto the blind curve. This is a hazard for drivers, bicyclists and pedestrians. Due to this configuration, a second access from El Camino Real to Thain Way was required for emergency vehicles, which is on Barron Square property; that entrance is secured by a gate and a chain. Therefore Thain Way ends in the cul-de-sac.

There is a narrow sidewalk along a portion of one side of Thain Way. Most residents have to walk and bike in the roadway to get to their homes, the pool and spa, community building and tennis court. Over the past 37 years, since Barron Square was built, there has been an increase in children, infants in baby carriages, students and our senior adult population. Added vehicle traffic from another development will make this roadway more dangerous and increase safety risks for our residents.

Maybell –was recently designated as a ‘**class 3 bike lane route**’ thoroughfare to serve pedestrian and students biking to and from four neighboring schools. Since the Arastradero traffic modification, more students bike on Maybell and more cars cut through on Maybell to avoid Arastradero congestion. Increased traffic from a large development through Thain Way will create additional safety risks to the students biking on Maybell.

Demographic changes and traffic patterns near Barron Square makes ANY additional traffic through Thain Way onto Maybell unacceptable and hazardous.

3- Security and Privacy

In 2015, the ARB Chair and other members suggested there be “continuity” between the new project and Barron Square for pedestrians and bicycles. He suggested ...It would be nice for the new neighbors ‘to ride on our sidewalks and explore our area’. We do not have sidewalks to meander along and if one were to step off Thain Way, they’d be on our private property.

Looking at a map of Thain Way, that idea would ADD 17% to a bike trip from the center of the project to the Maybell Ave/Thain Way intersection, compared to using the El Camino Real and Maybell Avenue route. Using Thain Way would not be safer; bicyclists can ride on the El Camino Real sidewalk to the designated bike lane on Maybell Ave. as do residents of Driscoll Place.

Security for residents- Creating a connection between the proposed project and Thain Way could give easy access to anyone from El Camino Real into Barron Square. Such a result would cause the loss of privacy, create a sense of insecurity and negatively impact our property values. The owners and residents of Barron Square pay for and maintain the grounds, extensive landscaping, recreational facilities and other aspects of the complex. Large numbers of persons, bicycles and cars using Thain Way to access the adjacent development has the potential for misuse, damage to our facilities and could exhaust our already scarce parking.

We emphasized to the ARB, that when the fire lane entrance on El Camino was not secured, Barron Square experienced a considerable amount of vandalism and petty crime. We don’t want to expose our residents to that again. The architect advised the ARB the current 4146 proposal has the corner abutting the Thain Way cul-de-sac 10’ BELOW street level and that area will be the filtration point for rain water.

3- Parking

Barron Square has 65 residential units with woefully inadequate visitor parking; 18 units have no designated visitor parking spaces and have to use Thain Way. Since the construction of Walgreen’s and the installation of bike lanes, parking was eliminated along Maybell Avenue near the intersection of Thain Way. Our Interdale Court neighbors now use Thain Way for their visitors’ parking and employees from

some of the nearby businesses do as well. Opening Thain Way to the adjacent property would eliminate four or five existing parking spaces from the already fully occupied Thain Way cul-de-sac and would use up spaces down the rest of Thain Way.

4- 'Daylight plane study' -At the ARB meeting, one Barron Square owner requested that a 'daylight plane study' be required. While Barron Square has a mature canopy of trees, any additional blockage of sunlight by the proposed project would have a detrimental impact on the residents in the immediate surrounding buildings.

5- Zoning

This project represents yet another step in the 'densification' of Palo Alto with high density housing on both sides of El Camino Real, concepts which are supported by non-governmental interest groups such as the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG), the Metropolitan Transit Council (MTC), and, of course, by the real estate developers.

Over the last 30 years Palo Alto has created its own problem by focusing on the development of more jobs and office space. It is logical to provide more housing; however, it's causing more traffic congestion, auto emissions and parking spillover into adjacent communities. An important concern is 'parking creep' experienced all over Palo Alto. The plan for this large scale project shows some of the 21-units will have tandem parking. Some residents will look for street parking and soon our neighborhood will need to petition for Permit parking plans as in other parts of the city. The South Palo Alto area has had a disproportionate amount of high density development and a consequential loss of building set backs from the streets.

This statement was made to the Planning Commission and City Council in prior years with updates for 2017:

We, the people and families of the Barron Square HOA oppose increasing the zoning at 4161 El Camino Real because of the irreversible harm it will cause to our safe, quiet, calm way of life. If a large development is built, there will be no turning back. We want the Planning Commission and City Council to understand, we people are not drawings on paper. Your decisions will impact our lives and our family's lives for the next 50 years.

In 1989, sixteen articulate letters from Barron Square residents were sent to the Planning Commission and City Council, opposing access through Thain Way from this parcel. Some of those people also spoke before the City Council. Our residents on several occasions have continued to write opposing an increase in the zoning and access via Thain Way.

Community Concerns:

The concern then and now is to maintain the character and beauty of the residential neighborhood we live in. The project on 4161 ECR should complement the neighborhood and not create a visual barrier or negatively impact the light to our homes. The intrusion, disruption and invasion of our close knit community established 37 years ago, by a densely populated adjacent complex where people, bicycles and cars might be traversing Barron Square's un-gated property is utterly unacceptable and unfair to our residents. It would negatively impact our real and perceived sense of safety and community.

The owners of 4146 El Camino and the developers will profit at the expense and sacrifice of the people living in Barron Square.

Additional history:

In 1988, architect Tony Carrasco wrote to the planning department to say "access via El Camino Real was a possibility with a slight shift of the existing curb cut".

In a 1989 letter to Tony Carrasco from City Planner James Gilliland, Gilliland wrote,

- Treatment of the El Camino Real frontage should be the front door of the project
- Use El Camino Real address
- Encourage visitors to the 4146 property to arrive and park on El Camino Real
- Keep Thain Way access for residents only
- Sufficient and useable play and common areas must be provided on the property so as to discourage the residents from attempting to use the Barron Square facilities
- These facilities should be fully designed and constructed
- Guest parking should be provided in excess of the current zoning ordinance requirements, such as one guest parking space per unit or by providing useable parking aprons for each of the garages

Ms de Rosa, Planning Department in 1989 stated, 'if the project was low density residential, then Thain Way seemed appropriate for access, but if the project was denser apartments or condos, then perhaps El Camino Real access would be appropriate'.

In the same report, Ms Shirley Wilson, Planning Dept. was concerned about the amount of paving in the courtyard and the amount of heat it would create. She felt the courtyard needed grass, vegetation and cool colors, particularly tall trees.

An April 1990 ARB report noted the offer of the property owner to make land available on the parcel for the development of the five additional parking spaces, adjoining the fire lane would be lost. In this same report, there were concern about side yard and rear yard landscaping.

In 1989, Barron Square submitted a petition opposing the project's access through Thain Way to Maybell.

Delores Feldman [4124 Thain Way] spoke to the City Council in 1989 and sited a letter she found in the planning department files, written by Bob Brown, an administrator, which stated 'that it would be unlikely that access to the new development would be from Thain Way'.

A 1989 Thain Way traffic study [prior to Walgreens, Terman School reopening, the International School, Driscoll Place, Ricky's complex] indicated that 10% (43 cars) of the total traffic on Thain Way occurred between 8-9AM. It was estimated that a 9-unit development at 4146 El Camino being accessed via Thain Way would increase the traffic volume by 25%. By doing the calculations, we estimate the traffic impact of 23 units would result in a 75% 80% increase of traffic on our substandard roadway. A recent survey we conducted showed a traffic count of 190 bicycles and 440 automobiles on Maybell Avenue at Thain Way between 7:45 and 9:00 AM. At 3pm there are similar numbers of students biking home from all the schools.

In 1989, the City Planners when considering the building of eight two-story units for this property and specifically stated they were concerned about the issues raised by the Barron Square residents in the letters.

Additional information:

Proposed Project Approval Process

On May 15, 2014 the proposal was presented to the Palo Alto Architectural Review Board for preliminary review. [A report was published in [Palo Alto Online](#); a video transcript of the proceedings, including remarks by several Barron Square residents is also available.] The property is currently zoned RM-15 (Multiple residential, 15 units/acre); a ¾ acre parcel would accommodate 12 units under current zoning. The Planning & Transportation Commission will soon be asked to rezone the parcel to RM-30 before returning to ARB for architectural approval. The final project would need approval by the City Council.

Palo Alto Code, chapter 18.13.060 establishes "Multiple Family Context-Based Design Criteria" It states that "development in a multiple-family residential district shall be responsible to its context and compatible with adjacent development." "**Context**" used in this section is intended to indicate relationships between the site's development to adjacent street types, surrounding land uses, and on-site or nearby natural features, such as creeks or trees. Effective transitions to these adjacent uses and features are strongly reinforced by Comprehensive Plan policies..." "**Compatibility**" is achieved when the apparent scale and mass of new buildings share general characteristics and establishes design linkages with the overall buildings to maintain visual unity of the neighborhood or street.