Redwood City El Camino Real Corridor Plan

Existing Conditions Report:
Executive Summary

November 2016

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Introduction

What follows is a summary of conditions that currently exist in the El Camino Real Corridor (Corridor) and key choices that will need to be considered as a plan is crafted. For a complete discussion and mapping of the issues discussed below, please refer to the following reports:

- **The Existing Conditions Memorandum #1: Land Use, Streetscape, and Public Realm** documents building types, scale and massing, parking placement public realm and streetscape, and land use and development opportunities.

- **The Existing Conditions Memorandum #2: Real Estate Market** documents real estate conditions and trends, profiles recent development projects, and considers future real estate development potential.

- **The Existing Conditions Memorandum #3: Transportation** documents current transit conditions and considers vehicular traffic, public transit, pedestrian and bicycle facilities, parking, and collisions and safety.

The Study Area for the El Camino Real Corridor Plan includes the length of El Camino Real between the City’s north and south borders. The Study Area comprises between one and three parcel depths to the west of El Camino Real and, largely, follows the Caltrain tracks to the east of El Camino Real, as shown in Figure 1.

1.1 Why is a plan for the El Camino Real Corridor needed?

Redwood City has seen a lot of development recently. Much of it has been Downtown, where the 2011 Downtown Precise Plan set the stage for significant real estate development investments and public improvements. While El Camino Real crosses the edge of Downtown, the Corridor has generally not experienced the same level of economic growth and success. And, while there are plenty of aspects of the Corridor that are successful, many require improvement. For instance, the Corridor is not particularly pleasant for those traversing El Camino Real on foot or by bike. Preparation of the El Camino Real Corridor Plan is an opportunity to encourage investment along the Corridor that is responsive to the needs of all those who frequent the area, via a comprehensive, easy-to-navigate plan.

1.2 What are the objectives of the Plan?

The Plan has numerous objectives. They include:

- Create a friendlier place for the people who live and work here: parents, kids, commuters, homeowners, renters, and local businesses;
• Improve the streetscape for a complete street design to promote walking, transit, bicycling, and economic development;

• Improve the Corridor’s relationship with the Caltrain station, Downtown, and surrounding neighborhoods;

• Develop strategies to address development challenges, such as small, narrow, and shallow lots with different ownership;

• Incorporate community benefits, such as strategies for affordable housing;

• Provide a comprehensive business retention and development strategy, focusing on small businesses; and

• Identify financing mechanisms and phasing recommendations to implement public improvements.
2 **Key Choices**

A number of key choices and trade-offs will be considered as a part of the planning process, in order to best assess how the El Camino Real Corridor Plan can best meet the needs of the public.

2.1 **How should the El Camino Real roadway be shared among cars, bicyclists, and public transit?**

El Camino Real has twin functions on its roughly 2.5-mile stretch through Redwood City. First, it is a regional thoroughfare. It is a State highway that people drive to travel up and down the Peninsula, often without stopping in Redwood City, and as an alternative to Highways 101 and 280. Second, it is a road that people use locally in order to access one-quarter of Redwood City’s retail space, as well as a significant number of offices and homes. In sum, it has two different, and often conflicting, uses.

One of the key choices that the planning process will consider is how to redesign the roadway, keeping in mind these two different ways that El Camino Real is used. This is made more challenging by the fact that there is a finite amount of space to accommodate these different uses and priorities. The roadway itself, from curb to curb, will not be expanded. In addition, the needs of personal vehicles are not the only needs that must to be considered. The General Plan’s blueprint for Redwood City includes transforming El Camino Real into a vibrant, mixed-use, pedestrian-friendly, grand boulevard. This is quite different from the suburban, commercial highway that El Camino Real is today.

What follows is a brief discussion of the existing conditions in the El Camino Real roadway, as well as policy questions that will be considered in the next stages of the planning process.

**CARS**

**Traffic**

Traffic and congestion along the Corridor is a significant concern. The Corridor includes 37 intersections, 13 of which are signalized (i.e. outfitted with a stoplight) and 24 of which are not. As a part of this planning process, 10 critical intersections were analyzed.\(^1\) This analysis found that, in general, southbound traffic is highest during the morning peak (rush hour) period, while northbound traffic is highest during the evening peak period. It also found that all study intersections are operating at Level of Service D or better overall, which is the acceptable threshold for all areas of the city except the Downtown area. What this means is that, at a signalized intersection, drivers experience a delay of 35 to 55 seconds. The influence of congestion is noticeable, and most vehicles have to stop. At an intersection with a two-way stop, drivers experience a delay of 25 to 35 seconds. Drivers seeking to enter El Camino Real from a side street may need to enter a queue of one or two vehicles, and they may find that there are few opportunities to pull into the roadway.

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\(^1\) A complete discussion of the study of Corridor’s intersections may be found in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #3: Transportation (page 5).
Although the intersection operated acceptably overall, the westbound and eastbound stop-controlled approaches at El Camino Real/Hazel Street/Laurel Street, which serve as the connection from Woodside Road to El Camino Real, operated at a Level of Service F during peak hours. The Woodside Road interchange is also where vehicle queuing is concentrated along the Corridor. Vehicle queuing spillbacks (long lines of cars waiting at intersections) generally occur in the southbound direction during the a.m. peak and in northbound direction during the p.m. peak.

Although traffic is acceptable according to Redwood City policy, the planning process can consider whether to employ certain strategies to potentially improve it. Some community members have suggested that signal timing along the Corridor could be improved. The area around El Camino Real and Woodside Road may require improvement. Land use decisions can also improve traffic, by making it easier for people to live near where they work and recreate, so they do not need to use a car as frequently for common, everyday trips. In addition, making the area more attractive to alternative modes of transportation, like walking, biking, and taking the bus, can alleviate traffic by helping people get out of their cars for short trips.

**Policy Considerations**

- What strategies should the Plan utilize to improve traffic in the Corridor?

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2 A complete discussion of the on-street occupancy survey may be found in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #3: Transportation (page 25).

**Parking**

People don’t only drive their cars; they also park them. Indeed, most of a car’s life is spent idle in a parking spot, and the parking of cars affects the use and character of the Corridor. On-street parallel parking is provided along segments of El Camino Real where the roadway width permits. On-street parking on El Camino Real is generally limited to two hours. There is sufficient space to park approximately 96 vehicles on the east side of El Camino Real and 170 vehicles on the west side. Additional on-street parking is available on side streets, and many businesses on the Corridor have off-street parking lots.

Typically, on-street parking is considered to be optimally utilized when spaces are 85 percent occupied, which typically corresponds to one or two spaces available on a block at a given time. On-street parking occupancy surveys were conducted on August 9, 2016. These surveys showed that street parking spaces are typically underutilized along El Camino Real, with occupancy ranging between 65 and 70 percent. Side streets are also slightly underutilized, with occupancy ranging between 79 and 82 percent. As on-street parking is underutilized, the planning process may consider whether this portion of the roadway could be allocated to another use, such as wider sidewalks or a bike lane. However, on-street parking is important to businesses along the Corridor and many who frequent them, and any loss of on-street parking would need to be alleviated in some fashion. In the downtown, the City has provided public parking garages, which could be one potential way of continuing to provide parking for those who shop, dine, and work at the Corridor’s businesses. Allowing and
incentivizing shared parking agreements among those businesses that need parking at different times of day could be another.

**Policy Considerations**

- Do you think on-street parking should be removed from El Camino Real, if parking could be provided in alternate locations (such as public parking lots), to make room for amenities like wider sidewalks or bike lanes?
- Are you willing to walk one block from your parking space to visit a business on El Camino Real?

**PUBLIC TRANSIT**

The Redwood City Caltrain Station is located to the east of El Camino Real and is accessible from the east via Winslow Street and from the west via James Avenue. Caltrain is the commuter rail line serving the San Francisco Peninsula. It connects Redwood City with San Francisco to the north and San Jose and Gilroy to the south, and provides a means to connect to VTA Light Rail and BART services.

SamTrans provides a fixed-route bus transit service in the Corridor via the Redwood City Transit Center (at the Caltrain station) and a total of 19 bus stops along El Camino Real. Buses are provided with greater frequency during peak hours. That being said, various community members have described bus service as infrequent and not a particularly attractive mode of moving along El Camino Real.

As the planning process progresses, potential pedestrian, bicycle, bus, and other transit-related improvement opportunities will be considered. For instance, the planning process may look to ways to make it more attractive and convenient to commute by bus and train. For instance, the process will consider ways to increase the visibility of and increase connections to the Transit Center. Several stakeholders have expressed an interest in a circulator bus to expand public transit in the Corridor; this has the potential to be explored. The planning process may also consider if any changes to the roadway should be made to accommodate transit; though at this time, this does not include dedicating a lane to bus rapid transit, which a recent study conducted by SamTrans has indicated is not currently feasible. The process will also consider how the buses that travel along El Camino Real interact with other modes of travel, and how the safety of these interactions can be improved upon. In some cases, streetscape and transit improvements may enhance real estate development opportunities that exist within the Corridor. In addition, the planning process will likely identify and evaluate the potential for land uses to leverage new investments in pedestrian, bicycle, bus, and other transit-related improvements to support desired outcomes and objectives of the Corridor Plan.

**Policy Considerations**

- What improvements should be made to make public transit a more effective and attractive means of moving through the Corridor?
- How can the Plan leverage investments in transit-related improvements?
Public transit along the Corridor is provided, in part, by SamTrans (top). As a part of the planning process, transit-related improvement opportunities may be considered, such as improvements to the streetscape to make commuting by transit more attractive (bottom).

BICYCLES

Riding a bicycle on El Camino Real takes fortitude. Bikes are not prohibited on El Camino Real. However, the only bike facilities on the El Camino Real roadway is a short Class III bike route, designated with sharrows, between Broadway and Brewster Avenue. Elsewhere in the Corridor, bike lanes and bike routes are found on streets intersecting El Camino Real.3

The data shows that, today, there is limited bicycle use along the El Camino Real. This does not necessarily indicate a lack of an interest in bicycling along El Camino Real. Rather, this may highlight the limited bicycle infrastructure on El Camino Real, coupled with heavy vehicle traffic volumes.

Furthermore, not many amenities are available to bicyclists along El Camino Real. Bike parking is provided at one location, on the east side of the street between Broadway and Brewster Avenue. Field observations noted that cyclists lock their bikes to various street sign posts in locations where bike racks are unavailable. Currently, space for bike parking is somewhat limited due to narrow sidewalks along El Camino Real.

The planning process will consider how and to what extent to accommodate bicyclists in the Corridor and along El Camino Real. Cyclists have advocated for a bike lane along El Camino Real and spoken about the challenges of navigating the Corridor on a bicycle. However, in order to provide separated bike lanes along El Camino Real, space allocated to another use must be given up. Similarly, if bike parking is to be provided along El Camino Real, space must be provided. Tradeoffs are inherent. Another

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3 More detailed information about bike facilities in the Corridor can be found in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #3: Transportation (page 14).
consideration is whether an alternate, equally attractive bicycle 
route, that roughly parallels El Camino Real, could be provided.

Policy Considerations

- Do you think bike facilities should be provided on El 
  Camino Real? What kind (separated bike lanes, sharrows 
  that indicate the lane is to be shared by bikes and cars)?
- If separated bike lanes are to be provided on El Camino 
  Real, how should space be provided for them (e.g., 
  removing off-street parking, removing a lane of vehicle 
  traffic)?
- Where should bicycle facilities be a high priority on El 
  Camino Real? What streets should they connect to?

A bicyclist rides down El Camino Real (top). The only bike facilities provided 
on El Camino Real is a Class III bike route between Broadway and Brewster, 
which is designated by sharrows, such as the one pictured above (bottom).
PEDESTRIANS

El Camino Real is not the most accommodating roadway to pedestrians. As shown in Figure 2, sidewalks are relatively narrow, commonly about eight feet wide. Many of the shortcomings of the Corridor’s streetscape are due to the narrowness of its sidewalks. They not only make walking a less attractive means of moving along the Corridor, particularly for people with mobility issues, they also limit the potential for street trees, pedestrian-oriented lighting, bus shelters, seating, bike parking, and other streetscape amenities, which are discussed in detail in the next section. One issue the planning process will consider is whether to widen sidewalks, and if so, how. One approach is to commit excess roadway – meaning areas with unnecessarily wide travel lanes, right-turn lanes that are not needed given the amount of traffic on the adjacent side street, and areas devoted to off-street parking – to widening the sidewalk. Another approach is for new and redevelopment projects to be set back from the street, to create a wider sidewalk along the Corridor.

Policy Considerations

- Should the sidewalk along El Camino Real be widened to create a more pleasant experience for pedestrians, make people more likely to walk along El Camino Real, and make the Corridor more accessible to people with disabilities?
- What space, if any, should be allocated to widening sidewalks along El Camino Real?
- Where are the highest priority areas for creating wider sidewalks?

In general, sidewalks are narrow along El Camino Real (top). It may be possible to commit excess roadway, such as right-turn lanes that are not needed given the amount of traffic on the adjacent side street (bottom), to sidewalk widening.
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**Existing Frontage and Median Conditions**

**Street Frontage and Median Conditions**

- **Sidewalks**:
  - no sidewalk
  - under 8 feet wide
  - 8-12 feet wide
  - 12-18 feet wide
  - 18 feet and wider
  - Driveway

- **Bike Lane**

- **Street Trees**

- **Bus Stop**

- **Bus Shelter (including bench and garbage can)**

- **Trash Receptacle**

- **Excess Roadway**:
  - Landscape Area/Open Space
  - Parking Lot Frontage
  - Curb Parking
  - Excess Lane Width
  - Right Turn Lane

**Legend**

- City Boundary
- City Gateway Area
- Proposed Downtown Gateway (DTPP)
- Existing City Welcome Sign
- Railroad
2.2 How can El Camino Real become a safer and more pleasant street, particularly to walk along and across?

Currently, El Camino Real restricts people’s movement through Redwood City. It is not particularly easy to cross, even for the able-bodied. Safety is a legitimate concern for many. In addition, while El Camino Real is major transportation and commercial corridor for the City, the region, and its adjacent neighborhoods, it is not particularly attractive to walk along. Meanwhile, visitors to the Corridor, whether they arrive by bus, train, car, or bike, experience it, at least in a small part, on foot. Thus, improving the streetscape will improve the experience of El Camino Real for all who visit it. Making El Camino Real a more pleasant and attractive street may also encourage people to get out of their cars and spend more time along the Corridor, supporting local businesses. El Camino Real is the “face” of Redwood City for those passing through by car or bus, and improving its aesthetics may also foster community pride and promote economic development.

One of the key choices that the planning process will consider is how to make El Camino Real a safer and more pleasant street, particularly for pedestrians. Improving the experience of moving along and across the Corridor will require tradeoffs. For example, making it safer to cross the street may require improvements that slow vehicular traffic. Making space for amenities that improve the look and feel of El Camino Real – such as landscaping, benches, and attractive lighting – may require wider sidewalks. And, as discussed above, widening sidewalks requires space currently occupied by other uses.

What follows is a brief discussion of the existing crossing conditions, streetscape conditions, and collision data, as well as some policy questions that will be considered in the next stages of the planning process.

CROSSING CONDITIONS

It is challenging to cross El Camino Real for two major reasons. First, the distances between striped and signalized pedestrian crosswalks vary across El Camino Real, from a reasonable 385 feet to a very long 1,700 feet (See Figure 3). To provide a sense of scale, the block where Courthouse Square is located measures roughly 300 feet by 400 feet. The takeaway is that pedestrians may have to walk a substantial distance in order to get to a protected crossing. Furthermore, at some intersections, marked crossings are not provided on one leg of the intersection. Guard rails prohibit crossings at other locations.

Second, El Camino Real is a wide street, and as result, it can take a long time to cross. The curb-to-curb width of El Camino Real ranges from 75 feet to 90 feet wide north of Woodside Road, including left and right turn lanes at intersections. The curb-to-curb width is 80 feet to 90 feet south of Woodside Road. If pedestrians cross the street at the average pace of 3.5 feet per second, crossing at the wider intersections takes approximately 26 seconds for the average pedestrian. Crossing times are longer for children, seniors, and those with disabilities. However, the design of El Camino Real does not make it easier to cross the street or shorten its crossing distance. Large corner curb radii, meaning the radii defined by two sidewalks on perpendicular streets that come together at a corner, make the roadway crossing distances greater and enable faster vehicle turns (which are also more dangerous to pedestrians). So do slip lanes, which are pictured below.
Moreover, only one crossing provides a refuge in the middle of the street for pedestrians who cannot cross the street within the allotted signal time.

The planning process will consider means of improving the crossing conditions. This may include adding new pedestrian crosswalks along El Camino Real. The planning process will also consider improvements to existing pedestrian crossings that can be implemented to enhance safety and the pedestrian experience. These include adding high-visibility crosswalks to increase awareness of pedestrians crossing at intersections. The addition of curb extensions at each intersection corner to reduce pedestrian crossing distances and improve pedestrian visibility may also be considered, as may pedestrian median refuges at each signalized crossing to provide pedestrians a safe waiting space if they are unable to cross the entire length of the roadway in one signal cycle. Lastly, traffic signal upgrades with pedestrian countdown signals, which provide more certainty for pedestrians when crossing the road, may be an improvement to consider.4

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4 A complete discussion of the existing crossing conditions, opportunities, and constraints may be found in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #1: Land Use, Streetscape, and Public Realm, Chapter 3, and in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #3: Transportation (page 11).
Policy Considerations

- What improvements should be made to make it easier and safer to cross El Camino Real?
- What locations are the highest priorities for crossing improvements?
- Should a portion of the roadway be allocated to improvements that reduce pedestrian crossing distances, improve pedestrian visibility, and enhance pedestrian safety? This could include curb extensions or “bulb-outs,” or median “islands.”

The planning process will consider means of improving crossing conditions, including: curb extensions (left), median refuges (top), high-visibility crosswalks, and pedestrian countdown timers (bottom).
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Figure 3

Legend

City Boundary
City Gateway Area
Proposed Downtown Gateway (DTPP)
Existing City Welcome Sign
Railroad

Street Crossing Conditions
- Pedestrian Crossings
- Signalized Intersections w/ Pedestrian Crossing
- Stop Sign
- Pedestrian Refuge

12 ft Corner Curb Radius
Slip Lanes
Bulb out
Distance between Pedestrian Crossings

Existing Street Crossing Conditions

EL CAMINO REAL CORRIDOR PLAN
CITY OF REDWOOD CITY
STREETSCAPE CONDITIONS

Currently, the Corridor is oriented more towards people driving by in their cars than people leisurely strolling along the sidewalk. Sidewalk street trees are few in number and generally minimal in size. There is an average of one tree every 333 linear feet along its easterly frontage, and one tree every 192 feet along its westerly frontage. The street trees within the Corridor are concentrated near Downtown, with very long stretches of the Corridor south of Woodside Road having no street trees at all.

Highway-type street lights are located along the majority of the frontage. The effect is generally unattractive and a deterrent to pedestrians. There are also minimal street furnishings, like benches, along the Corridor. Driveways and curb cuts interrupt approximately 15 percent of El Camino Real’s sidewalks, and on some blocks it is up to 50 percent. Potential conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians presents a safety concern. In some instances, the driveways can present balance issues for mobility-challenged pedestrians.

The planning process will consider ways of improving the streetscape experience, and how to make space for desirable streetscape amenities. Potential amenities to improve the streetscape include providing pedestrian-oriented lighting throughout the Corridor, either as part of new frontage development or City-sponsored capital improvement projects. Lighting could generally be provided in existing sidewalk areas, though there are stretches where sidewalks are too narrow to provide lighting with the clearance required by the Americans with Disabilities Act. Widened sidewalks would also allow for street trees planted consistently throughout the Corridor, to provide shade, buffer traffic, and help capture and infiltrate water. Sidewalks would need to be a minimum eight feet in width to accommodate street trees; approximately 40 percent of El Camino Real’s sidewalks are narrower than that today. Significant portions of the Corridor include excess roadway that could potentially be dedicated to wider sidewalks, facilitating the planting of street trees and the installation of pedestrian-scaled lighting.

Policy Considerations

- What amenities would be desirable additions to the El Camino Real streetscape?
- Are there particular areas along El Camino Real should be more oriented towards pedestrians, and thus provide more amenities like street furniture and landscaping?
- What space, if any, should be allocated to sidewalk widening, in order to make room for streetscape amenities?

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5 A complete discussion of the existing streetscape conditions, opportunities, and constraints may be found in the Existing Conditions Report, Chapter 3.
The El Camino Real sidewalk offers few amenities and is frequently interrupted by driveways and curb cuts (l). Highway-type street lights are located along the majority of the frontage (r).

WOODSIDE ROAD INTERCHANGE

The Woodside Road overpass creates a barrier between the northern and southern segments of the Corridor. The undercrossing and its surroundings are unsightly and a barrier to both pedestrian and bicycle circulation. Sidewalks under the overpass are narrow, lanes are overly wide without designated bicycle accommodation, and sidewalk lighting is minimal. Together, these features encourage higher vehicle speeds that deter those on foot and bikes from traveling along the Corridor. In addition, it is unattractive, feels unsafe, and reflects poorly on the character of the Corridor.

The planning process will consider ways of improving the Woodside Road interchange. The General Plan calls for removing the overpass, which would be a major project for the long term. Other opportunities include elimination of the slip lanes and traffic islands, and replacement with more typical intersection configurations. Surplus land areas could be improved by the City and/or dedicated to adjacent property owners as feasible. Short of these major efforts and capital expenditure, existing crosswalks and island areas could be improved with landscaping, hardscaping and lighting that supports pedestrian and bicycle movement and creates a more attractive visual impression. In addition, lighting and public art can transform unsightly underpasses and concrete walls and present opportunities to enhance public safety and the community’s identity.6

Policy Considerations

- In what way should the Woodside Road interchange be improved?

Art and lighting could make the Woodside Road interchange more attractive and enhance public safety. (Source: Google Maps)

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6 A complete discussion of the Woodside Road interchange may be found in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #1: Land Use, Streetscape, and Public Realm, Chapters 2.5 and 3.1.
COLLISIONS

A review of the City’s records for collisions along El Camino Real showed that the calculated intersection collision rates were higher than the statewide average for similar facilities at many of the intersections studied for this project. One of the objectives of the planning process is improving safety along the Corridor in areas where collisions and injuries have occurred and are higher than average. The planning process may also consider safety improvements in other key locations, such as intersections with significant interaction between different user groups. For instance, the consultant team found El Camino Real is most frequently crossed by pedestrians at the intersection with James Avenue, with over 200 crossings during the a.m. peak hour. This intersection is adjacent to both Sequoia High School and the Caltrain Station/Redwood City Transit Center. In addition, the only entrance point for buses to the Redwood City Transit Center is at James Avenue; this results in a significant amount of bus turning movements at this intersection. Thus, this could be a potential area to target potential improvements.

Policy Considerations

- How should the Plan enhance safety along the Corridor?

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7 A full discussion of pedestrian crossing volumes can be found in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #1: Land Use, Streetscape, and Public Realm (page 13).

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2.3 What types of new development should be built along El Camino Real, and what should it look like?

The planning process is also an opportunity to consider what sorts of uses the buildings along the Corridor can be put to, and what they should look like. This will have implications for how easy it is to navigate the area without a car; for instance, areas where housing, jobs, and shopping areas are located near each other are more sustainable and pedestrian-friendly. It can also affect the ease of finding housing in the area, the amount of vehicular traffic in the area, and whether one leaves the city in order to purchase an item or go out to eat.

What follows is a brief discussion of the Corridor’s existing market conditions and building form and design, as well as some policy questions that will be considered in the next stages of the planning process.

8 A full discussion of collisions and safety can be found in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #3: Transportation (page 29).
LAND USES

Approximately two-thirds of the Corridor is occupied by commercial land uses; these include large retail establishments like Target, grocery stores, motels, car dealerships and service shops, and small shops and restaurants. Notably, El Camino Real contains more than 1.0 million square feet of retail space, one-quarter of the citywide total, with an extraordinarily low 2015 vacancy rate of less than three percent. While stretches of the Corridor include retail establishments that look somewhat tired or out of date, the Corridor offers relatively low priced retail space for small, cost-sensitive and value-oriented businesses. Future retail-related investments in the Corridor could include reinvestment in existing buildings, including renovations and adaptive reuses, as well as development of larger mixed-use projects with ground-level retail space, and stand-alone retail in some cases. Existing retail supply and demand trade flow suggests that additional clothing/apparel and restaurant spaces may be segments that could be further cultivated through improved place-making and access (e.g. walkability and shared parking). Figure 4 shows a breakdown of the existing land uses within the Corridor.

Figure 4: Existing Land Use in the Study Area

![Pie chart showing land use distribution](image)

Note: Excludes Railroad Right of Way, Road Right of Way, and Utilities.

Although housing currently does not currently comprise a large portion of the Corridor, it appears to have the greatest market potential to drive redevelopment in the Corridor in the near term, with immediate opportunities for residential mixed-use projects on larger parcels and assembled sites. The Bay Area and Peninsula, in particular, have seen a dramatic run-up in residential real estate prices in recent years, and Redwood City has seen a multitude of new multifamily projects, including within the Corridor. Constrained regional housing stock in Silicon Valley as well as the greater Bay Area has made multifamily residential a highly attractive product for developers. Of the nearly 190,000 square feet of new built space that developers have delivered within the
Corridor in the last five years, approximately 70 percent (135,000 square feet) of it was residential. Furthermore, five of the six pipeline projects identified in the Corridor are multifamily residential projects, almost doubling the existing supply when fully built-out.

While market conditions along El Camino Real are generally strong, existing income-producing properties and a land use pattern dominated by small parcels with disparate ownership present economic obstacles to new development. Redevelopment of an improved, occupied site requires significant market strength, as the developer’s willingness to pay for land must be equal to or greater than what another investor would pay for the income-generating asset. In markets with real estate values that are strong enough to support the cost of high-density construction (e.g., projects with structured parking and structures built from steel and/or concrete), such as Redwood City, high density zoning can enable projects with market value that is sufficient to overcome the high cost of redevelopment. In the Corridor, large parcels and assembled sites with depreciated buildings or low value uses may be positioned for redevelopment during strong market cycles by allowing higher density development. In addition, redevelopment might be incentivized through parcel assembly, density bonus programs, shared parking, and other efforts to address the challenge associated with the existing small lot ownership patterns.

The planning process will consider how minimize obstacles to the revitalization of the Corridor in order to best position the area for growth and reinvestment.9

### Policy Considerations

- What types of land uses are desirable in, or in certain areas of, the Corridor?
- How should the Plan incentivize development?
- Should the Plan facilitate the assemblage of smaller parcels into larger parcels, shared parking agreements, density bonus programs, etc., in order to minimize obstacles to the revitalization of the Corridor?

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9 A complete discussion of market conditions can be found in the Redwood City El Camino Real Corridor Plan Existing Conditions memorandum #2: Real Estate Market. For a complete discussion of existing land use within the Corridor, see the Existing Conditions Memorandum #1: Land Use, Streetscape, and Public Realm, Chapter 4.1.
URBAN FORM AND DESIGN

The Corridor contains several features that lend itself to further development. Applicable regulations allow for substantially greater building height, as well as residential density and nonresidential intensity, than what currently exists in most locations. As an example, over 90 percent of buildings within the Study Area are one or two stories, with the majority of buildings that are three stories or higher located Downtown. The tallest buildings are permitted in the downtown portion of the Corridor; there are areas downtown where heights of up to 136 feet are permitted. Outside the Downtown Precise Plan area, maximum permitted building heights range from 40 to 75 feet.10

The El Camino Real Corridor Plan provides an opportunity to improve the character of the Corridor and to better align it with the vision expressed in the General Plan, the Downtown Precise Plan, and the Grand Boulevard Initiative. In general, the Corridor’s buildings are separated from each other, set back on each side, and oftentimes set back from the street. Surface parking lots front approximately 30 percent of El Camino Real. This creates an environment that is not conducive to walking, and does not provide the density to support a robust transit system. It also indicates that there is space for infill development, and that a potential strategy to catalyze development is to allow and, perhaps incentivize, the consolidation of parking to shared lots for multiple businesses, thus allowing redevelopment of surface parking lots into buildings and public spaces.

The planning process will consider how to remove obstacles to the revitalization of the Corridor. This may include considering a more flexible approach to parking requirements. The planning process may also consider detailed design standards for new development and explore building prototypes that are consistent with the community’s character while also being financially feasible for developers. The small, shallow, and narrow parcel sizes and fragmented ownerships poses a challenge for new development and reinvestment in existing properties as well, and strategies that the City can use to overcome these obstacles will be explored.

Policy Considerations

- How can the Plan facilitate more development that is in line with existing regulations?
- Should consistent design standards be provided along the Corridor?
- How should parking be managed along El Camino Real?

10 A full discussion of existing building heights can be found in the Existing Conditions Memorandum #1: Land Use, Streetscape, and Public Realm, Chapter 4.3.
2.4 How do we ensure these changes to the El Camino Real Corridor positively impact the entire community?

A rising tide should lift all boats. And so, the Plan should enhance the Corridor for the benefit of the entire community. One of the key choices that the planning process will consider is what community benefits can and should the Plan provide, and how should those benefits be provided without overburdening new development. The planning process will consider how to preserve El Camino Real as a place that small businesses can keep calling home. The process will also seek to enhance opportunities for people, at all income levels, to live in Redwood City. The process will also consider how additional parks and public spaces can be provided for the area.

SMALL BUSINESSES

Many small, independent businesses call El Camino Real home. The planning process will identify and advance programs and initiatives to sustain small businesses as the area redevelops over time. Some Bay Area localities, such as Berkeley, have made it a priority to retain existing small and locally owned business. For example, the Berkeley Downtown Area Plan calls for “the retention and creation of small businesses and locally owned businesses” through a number of steps, including a policy to “seek to avoid arbitrary or capricious displacement of business tenants, and mitigate the negative effects of temporary or permanent relocation on businesses.” In addition, the City of Mountain View’s El Camino Real Precise Plan views subsidies for small
businesses as a “community benefit.” Consistent with this plan, the multifamily developer Greystar has agreed to pay for the temporary relocation of existing businesses at 801 El Camino Real at Castro Street, a site that has 22,000 square feet of commercial buildings housing mostly local businesses, private parking spaces and a city-owned lot. Greystar has agreed to offer these businesses long-term lease rates at below-market rents at the site, which will be redeveloped into a four-story mixed use building, after construction is completed.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Due to the lack of State and federal money to fund affordable housing now, affordable housing is often made available as a result of housing developers being incentivized by their local municipality to rent or sell a percentage of their units at below-market rates. In exchange, the developer gets to build their new housing development with extra building height or more density. Affordable housing may also be funded through fees that cities can require of new residential and commercial development. Redwood City already requires new development to pay affordable housing impact fees and provides incentives for the provision of affordable housing. The planning process will consider how the Plan can otherwise help individuals of a wide range of incomes be able to live in the area.

PUBLIC SPACES

There is only about one acre of parkland in the Corridor. Little River Park, located adjacent to the Caltrain Station parking lot, is a small park for passive recreation, with turf, trees, and two benches. Main Street Dog Agility Park, located on Main Street, adjacent to the Caltrain tracks, provides an off-leash agility course for dogs. The planning process will consider locations and funding strategies for new public spaces in the Corridor. New public spaces can capitalize on existing assets such as Redwood Creek, provide important connections to the Caltrain Station, and create welcoming places along El Camino Real. The City can work with property owners and other stakeholders to determine strategic locations for these improvements. The designs, qualities, and amenities of the new spaces should be considered systematically and tailored to meet the goals and needs of any potential location. One potential strategy is to consolidate parking to shared lots for multiple businesses, thus allowing redevelopment of the surface parking lots into buildings and public spaces. Another is to consider the addition of parklets in strategic locations. This could transform the Corridor’s identity and character into an inviting environment for the community to shop, gather, and play, and provide a means to add park and open space in the area, more generally.

Policy Considerations

- What community benefits should the Plan provide?
3 Next Steps

The existing conditions analysis is the first major step in the planning process for the El Camino Real Corridor Plan. It will serve as the foundation for the next phase of the planning process, which is the drafting of recommended preliminary land use policies and regulatory objectives, development standards, and conceptual urban design and streetscape options for the community’s consideration.

In total, the planning process is expected to be completed within 12-18 months, resulting in an El Camino Corridor Plan and a set of implementation strategies. Public outreach will occur throughout the planning process, giving the community ample opportunity to learn about proposals and provide input.

3.1 Upcoming Meetings

CITIZENS ADVISORY GROUP (CAG)

The existing conditions analysis will be presented to the Citizens Advisory Group (CAG) on November 10, at 7 p.m. in City Hall. All CAG meetings are open to the public.

COMMUNITY WORKSHOP

A community workshop will be held on November 16. The existing conditions analysis will be reviewed. Participants will be asked to provide input about their experiences in the Corridor and their thoughts about improving it.

3.2 Project Website

Information about the project, including full versions of all reports and information about upcoming meetings, are posted on the project website. Please visit it to stay informed and to keep in touch!

http://www.redwoodcity.org/elcaminoplan