

Communities By Design, a
nonprofit 501c(3) training and education
organization, in cooperation with the
City of Redwood City,
is pleased to present:

The Forum *at Redwood City*

A CONTINUING CONVERSATION ON CITY DESIGN



El Camino Real:
Can a Declining
Main Street
Become a Grand
Boulevard?

FORUM #5
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 7, 2004
LITTLE FOX THEATER
2209 BROADWAY
REDWOOD CITY
6:00 P.M. - 7:45 P.M.

On April 7, 2004, the City of Redwood City and the not-for-profit "Communities by Design" held the fifth in an on-going series of discussion forums. The presentation featured **Terry Bottomley**, principal of the Oakland, California firm Bottomley Associates Urban Design & City Planning. Mr. Bottomley has over twenty years of planning experience, ranging from development master plans to construction drawings for streets public spaces. He drew on this experience and recent planning work with Joint Venture: Silicon Valley Network on the "Main Street Silicon Valley" study to address the future of El Camino Real.

To begin the discussion, Mr. Bottomley described the Joint Venture study area: the El Camino Real/Monterey Highway corridor in San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, including twenty cities and five transit agencies. He noted that the corridor's character varies greatly as it stretches along the peninsula. Some areas abut high-density downtowns, much is strip commercial, and areas in South Santa Clara County are agricultural. Despite these differences, most communities have policies to improve the appearance of the corridor in Many properties along the corridor are underutilized relative to surrounding land values, and given the fact that the corridor parallels a major fixed rail transit line a focus on transit oriented development (TOD) is a logical policy. However, the definition for TOD needs to be refined to reflect the following:

- 1 – *Higher density development does not necessarily guarantee transit use.*
- 2 – *TOD should focus primarily on reducing auto use, by increasing walking and bicycling, as well as transit use.*

3 – *“Walkability” is the basic ingredient for successful TOD, and should be used to shape land use, building design, and streetscape improvement policies.*

4 – *Demographic groups that are most likely to reduce auto use should be targeted by TOD efforts.*

One of the goals of TOD should be reducing local trips – to the store, school, etc. – in addition to reducing commute trips. TOD-oriented policies should be crafted to reflect two basic types of subareas: 1) “nodes,” typically within walking distance of a fixed rail transit center and/or downtown commercial district, and; 2) “segments,” located between the nodes, where a linear, boulevard type of environment could be created. The segments pose more of a challenge for TOD in terms of context and developability.

A major constraint is the large number of small properties. Developers often look for sites that are at least 1.5 acres to build higher-density housing or office above retail uses. The linear nature of properties also makes it difficult to develop resident-oriented open space or recreation facilities. A related issue is the location of locally-oriented commercial space. Communities often require first floor commercial space whether it is “walkable” or not; walkable commercial space needs to be located where appropriate geographically.

Jurisdictions along El Camino Real should coordinate their policy approaches to the corridor. Three broad actions that jurisdictions can take include:

1 – *Revise existing general plans, zoning ordinances, and other policy documents to address TOD issues and opportunities on El Camino Real. At the local level, jurisdictions should employ a full-time staff person to promote TOD opportunities along and around El Camino Real.*

2 – *Coordinate inter-city efforts to improve the corridor, by pooling resources, linking transportation and land use plans, securing multi-jurisdictional grants, and other cooperative efforts.*

3 – *Establish mechanisms to assemble parcels along El Camino Real that can attract high-density development.*

Focusing TOD on El Camino Real would help address the regional housing shortage, encourage economic development, and improve the appearance of frontage properties, while helping to reduce traffic congestion, introducing locally-useful retail, and increasing pedestrian activity.



After reviewing these last recommendations, Mr. Bottomley facilitated a question and answer session with the audience. During the exchange, Kristen Pickus of Moore Iacofano Goltsman, Inc recorded participants’ comments on a flip chart. The audience feedback helped reinforce points from the presentation. Participants observed that the El Camino Real’s highway designation and wide right-of-way make the road an obstacle to pedestrian activity, though relatively small improvements like crosswalks and curb bulb-outs can begin to mitigate these issues. Some audience members sought strategies to attract a Bus Rapid Transit system (BRT) to El Camino Real; others expressed a need for dedicated bicycle lanes, further emphasizing the need for TOD that serves a variety of transit options. The crowd seemed split on attracting new mixed-use development to El Camino Real; while the market would likely support new retail and housing developments, no one wants local downtown districts to suffer. El Camino Real has many opportunities for improvement, but it should not come at the expense of successful public spaces off the corridor.