

# COMMUNITY DESIGN + ARCHITECTURE

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## El Camino Technical Advisory Committee (TAC)

### Workshop (Meeting #2)

March 26, 2002,

at All Saints Church, Palo Alto

#### MEETING SUMMARY

1. At the outset of the meeting Reid Ewing, the Consultant Team's expert on 'Context Sensitive Design' (CSD) from Rutgers University, gave an overview of how CSD principles and flexible highway design have been applied to transportation projects in other states around the country, including Vermont, Maryland, North Carolina, New York, and New Jersey. Although each state used a somewhat different approach to CSD, all of them considered using minimums suggested by the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials (ASSHTO) for particular street design elements. In some cases states approved the future use of sub-ASSHTO standards for new projects.

Reid Ewing encouraged the participants and decision makers for the El Camino Master Schematic Design Plan to "use Design Exceptions liberally." Using examples from his experience with CSD, he also addressed how a more pedestrian-friendly and multi-modal street can be achieved by applying flexible design to streetscape design elements such as curb Extensions, Medians/Refuge Islands, Sidewalks, Curb Radii, Crosswalks, Bike Lanes, and Travel Lanes.

*Copies of 'Flexible Design of New Jersey's Main Streets' a recently published report by Reid Ewing and Michael King are available upon request from Virginia Warheit at the Palo Alto Planning Department.*

2. Phil Erickson, of Community Design + Architecture (CD+A), then discussed a set of Draft Objectives, Strategies, and Performance Criteria that are to be used in the evaluation of different design alternatives for El Camino Real. These were presented in form of a matrix that linked draft objectives with strategies that may be employed in order to meet one or more of the objectives. The matrix furthermore included performance criteria and design criteria that established a link between objectives, strategies and particular design elements and functional aspects of the street, that will allow the Consultant Team to measure or otherwise evaluate the pros and cons of a given design alternative.
3. Chris Gray, of Fehr and Peers Associates (FPA) and Thomas Kronmeyer (CD+A) then gave a brief overview of the Existing Conditions Assessment with respect to transportation, land use and urban design issues. This presentation included the discussion of existing Traffic Volumes, Level of Service (LOS) at intersections, Accident Data, Land Use and Neighborhood Context, Street and Block Patterns, Character of Street Frontage, Pedestrian and Bicycle Crossings, and On-street Parking. This was followed by a discussion of which areas constitute Segments and Nodes on El Camino, which may inform where a change in streetscape character should occur.
4. Prof. Joe McBride, the Consultant Team's Urban Forestry expert, summarized the findings of his analysis of street and median trees along El Camino Real. This analysis included factors such as

tree size (trunk and crown), health condition, size of tree well openings, and environmental factors such as soil conditions and climate. Among his key findings was the fact that many of the sidewalk trees planted in the 1980s had only grown to a trunk diameter of less than 3”, which indicates that many of the trees along El Camino have to contend with less than suitable growing conditions.

5. An extensive and open discussion between Consultant Team, Caltrans representatives, members of the TAC and the citizen’s Advisory Group centered around possible cross section alternatives for El Camino Real and associated design standards, such as width of travel lanes, bike accommodation, shoulders, pedestrian crossings, travel time, design speed, curb extensions, pedestrian refuges at medians, and tree plantings in medians. This discussion prompted the following key statements:

- Flexibility is important and has to be decided upon on a case-by-case basis.
- Bikes should be accommodated within the roadway throughout corridor.
- “There is no evidence that 10’ wide lanes in an urban context are less safe than 11’ wide lanes.” (Reid Ewing)
- Caltrans would need to see research stating that this is indeed the case. (Caltrans)
- Caltrans regularly grants Design Exceptions on a case-by-case basis. There can be no granting of blanket exceptions for this project. (Caltrans)
- Concept approval process would not be applicable to this type of project. (Caltrans)
- Trade Parking for Trees (in parking lane) not Bikes for Trees.
- Create overall concepts for El Camino and explore whether the California Avenue area has the potential for becoming something like a Main Street. Overall, the street currently has the character of a strip commercial area.

6. Summary of Key Results:

- ❖ 4 lane segments (2 thru lanes each way) should be created where this appears possible.
- ❖ Within necessary 6 lane segments (3 thru lanes each way):
  - Don’t apply ‘shy distance’ to width of lane next to the median.
  - Explore feasibility of accommodating trees in the parking lane/shoulder.
  - There is need for additional pedestrian space.
  - Accommodate bicycles within the roadway throughout the corridor. The width of the bicycle accommodation should be 5 ‘ (6’ optimum).

- Eliminate left turn channels where this is feasible, to allow for more consistent presence of medians.
  - Engage in ‘creative metrics’ when converting feet/inches into metric dimensions required by Caltrans.
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- ❖ Where possible, medians should have a minimum width of 16’ (and 6’ where they narrow for left-hand turning pockets).
  - ❖ Consider locations for mid-block crossings.
  - ❖ Look for opportunities to eliminate left turn pockets.
  - ❖ Eliminate “pork chops” at right turns.
  - ❖ Provide tree canopy over the street.
  - ❖ Caltrans representatives, City Staff, and the Consultant Team agreed to further their discussion of design standards and project process during a subsequent meeting. The question of what appropriate process to use for this project is pertinent as it is a schematic design project that will not incorporate a full design engineering component. Caltrans, however, typically reviews plan details and grants design exceptions only based on projects at design engineering level and based on design exception fact sheets.

#### POSTSCRIPT

City Staff and consultants met with Caltrans Headquarters and District 4 representatives on April 24, 2002 to continue the discussion of design standards and project process. Caltrans identified many design elements where alternatives to current standards can be considered and encouraged the City to explore these alternatives and present the case for exceptions. Caltrans also agreed to enter into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the City that will provide conceptual approval of mutually agreed upon alternatives to current standards for particular design elements included in the final Schematic Master Design Plan produced in this process. City staff, Caltrans, and the consultants will continue to collaborate on the identifying of mutually acceptable designs for street elements and preparation of the MOU.