REGULAR MEETING –7:00 PM
City Council Conference Room
Civic Center, 1st Floor
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, California  94301

ROLL CALL: 7:05 PM

Commissioners:

Annette Bialson, Chair
Michael Griffin, Vice-Chair
Karen Holman
Patrick Burt
Bonnie Packer
Phyllis Cassel

Staff:

Steve Emslie, Planning Director
Joseph Kott, Chief Transportation Official
Carl Stoffel, Transportation Engineer
Zariah Betten, Executive Secretary

Chair Bialson: I’d like to call the meeting of the Planning and Transportation Commission. Please have the roll taken. Thank you.

First item on the agenda is Oral Communications.

ORAL COMMUNICATIONS. Members of the public may speak to any item not on the agenda with a limitation of three (3) minutes per speaker. Those who desire to speak must complete a speaker request card available from the secretary of the Commission. The Planning and Transportation Commission reserves the right to limit the oral communications period to 15 minutes.

Chair Bialson: I have a Maryanne Welton. You have three minutes, thank you.

Maryanne Welton, 660 Kendall Avenue, Palo Alto: Good evening. I wanted to invite you to a tour of Alma Place in preparation for the presentation at the Opportunity Center which will be shown to you on the evening of October 30th. I’m the project manager with Rob [Quiggley] Architects and the Opportunity Center is a homeless services center and affordable housing project proposed for [Encina] Avenue will come before you for the first time as a PC process on October 30th and I just wanted to invite you all on a tour of Alma Place, so you have an idea on
the type of housing that we’re looking at. Zariah, I think has given you possible times and dates
for the tour so if you can get back to her, then I will coordinate getting you all there and give you
a tour. Thank you.

CONSENT CALENDAR. Items will be voted on in one motion unless removed from the
calendar by a Commission Member.

Chair Bialson: Thank you. We do not have any Consent Calendar items.

AGENDA CHANGES, ADDITIONS AND DELETIONS. The agenda may have additional
items added to it up until 72 hours prior to meeting time.

Chair Bialson: There are no Agenda Changes.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS.

Public Hearings: None.

Other Items: None.

Chair Bialson: There are no unfinished business.

NEW BUSINESS.

Public Hearings:

1. Churchill Avenue Traffic Calming Project: The Transportation Division will report
on the Churchill Avenue Traffic Calming Project, with a recommendation to place the
“South of Embarcadero” area (exact boundaries currently undefined) on a list of future
neighborhood traffic studies; and to nominate Churchill Avenue for a future list of
“school commute corridors.”

Chair Bialson: I have some speaker cards. Are there any others? No. I think we’ll start with
perhaps the Staff in making the presentation first.

Joseph Kott, Chief Transportation Official: Good evening, Chair Bialson and members of the
Commission. You have before you a Staff Report on the Churchill Avenue Traffic Calming
Project which concluded in June of this year after about a year of work that was undertaken by
our Staff in conjunction with and in collaboration with residents of Churchill and environs. The
Churchill Project was a very difficult environment due to the nature of the street being a collector
street. It’s really a street whose catchman area is wider than just the residences on it. The street
that has experienced a rise in traffic and does experience many of these associated problems with
traffic, in terms of its impact on residential life. So micro-chasm of the difficulties that residents
face in dealing with traffic management on collector streets. This was the first project
undertaken under the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program, which was adopted by Council on
April 2001. This street was petitioned for Traffic Calming actually before the Neighborhood
Traffic Calming Program began in November, that is November 2000. We began working with
the neighborhood in earnest to have the Council adopt the Traffic Calming Program guidelines.
And we have a report for you on the results of that work with recommendations that have come
out of our work with the Churchill neighborhood, not only pertaining to Churchill itself but to
the Traffic Calming Program particularly notification of wider area residence as we pursue our
work in the future.

Carl Stoffel has that short discussion, had on this specific recommendations and the process that
he undertook in working with residents. I’ll be glad to answer questions now or if the
Commission would prefer, we would be glad to after Carl’s presentation is finished.

Carl Stoffel, Transportation Engineer: This would be a very brief presentation. We don’t have
as many complex technical issues as we did last week. As Joe said, this is the first project started
under our program. It’s a focus problem area even though the project area extended from Alma
 up to Embarcadero. A lot of the more intense part of the problem really is in the first block or
two, east of Alma so the problem tended to drop off quite a bit in the remainder of the project
area. As Joe said, it was a very long public process. This was the first project started, but at this
point, there’s been several other projects that have started later that have moved quite a bit ahead
in the process.

In our working group, there really was very minimal consensus. There was just enough to
produce a Traffic Calming plan that we took to the neighborhood, but even that was quite
difficult. And one of the main reasons was that residents really wanted a lot more than what we
could offer them under the Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program. As pointed out in your
Staff Report, there was a lot of concern about cut-through traffic, about major circulation issues
in the neighborhood. And our program as you know, is very limited. It’s purposely meant to be
limited and streamlined in trying to deal with small project areas, small street segments. It is
difficult on collector streets to stick to the small scale because more people use those streets than
a typical local street.

The project basically got stuck or ended at Step #5 which is where we presented the Traffic
Calming plan to the neighborhood. We actually deviated a little bit from our procedure. There
were so many residents from adjacent streets that were not directly affected by the project that
really felt that they should have a voice in the project, that we included them in our
determination of consensus about whether the plan should even go forward for a vote. Normally,
we could hear what they had to say but we would not let them actually formally participate in
that way. Normally, those people would be coming to the Planning Commission meetings to
argue their point. We’ll be following that procedure for the Lewis Road Project in a few weeks.

So this project was the origin of this now famous quotation, it was in the paper on Sunday about
the Palo Alto process that we’re not voting on the plan, we’re voting on whether to give the
residents a chance to vote on the plan. So, maybe that will go down in history now as part of our
Palo Alto process. I think that was me, I said that.

Mr. Kott: I’d like to hasten to add that that was Carl Stoffel’s quote.

Mr. Stoffel: Basically what we were determining at that point, which was our last project area
meeting was to see if there was consensus, not so much on the plan itself but consensus to even
send the plan out to the neighborhood for one of our surveys, which is where we have in our
procedures certain percentages required of the residence who are on the affected streets to vote
as to whether the plan should go in for a trial. And then, of course, it comes to you to make that
final determination. We did that for the Lewis Road Project. So we actually did not get to the

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survey step, which was a Step #6. We basically stopped at the point where there was lack of 
consensus to go that far.

So the outcomes of this study, as Joe mentioned, when we came to about a couple of months ago 
about recommended changes in our Neighborhood Traffic Calming procedure, which by the way 
have still not gone to the Council. We recommended and you did approve to remove street 
closure and volume reduction measures from the Traffic Calming program and the reason we 
brought that recommendation to you was because it was obvious from the Churchill Project that 
those kinds of projects quickly get too big and too complicated for our spot treatment program.
So you’ve already made a recommendation on that one. Council hasn’t bought off on that one 
yet but that will be soon.

Another which we’re bringing you tonight, which has become apparent both on this project and 
the Lewis Road project is that with collector streets, there really are a lot of people that are quite 
interested in the way those streets function. And what we’ve decided to do is explain in your 
Report is to develop what we call a Notification Area which we define for each project to at least 
let the people know what’s going on because I think that was part of the problem in both projects 
is people were caught by surprise and understandably they were upset and they didn’t know 
about it beforehand, so we think it would be best to at least notify people that a project is going 
on. And then we would do some type of what we call Advisory Survey that we’re doing this for 
the Lewis Road Project now for people to get a chance to say what they think about the project, 
but it would still not be part of our more formal part of the process where the residents on the 
affected street actually, we need a 50% or 60% indication that the project should go forward for a 
trial. So this wider area would be information that we would be presenting to you when the 
decision time comes but our decision about whether the recommendation should go forward for a 
trial, we’d be looking at the more focused project street survey results.

And finally, the two recommendations specifically for this study, which came about early in the 
study process, not at the end. This came about during the Working Group meetings where it 
became apparent that many residents wanted something bigger changes in the neighborhood. So 
that’s where we want to recommend to you to place this project on a list of future neighborhood 
studies, that as of yet we don’t necessarily have a means to do that but at least we can make this 
statement, and we gave you some details as to what that might entail, if and when that goes 
forward.

And finally, on what we were recommending that this be nominated or to be placed on a future 
list, which I think will be next year of school commute corridors which would entitle those 
streets to special Traffic Calming treatment and to enhance pedestrian and bicycle travel. So we 
thought both of these would be good recommendations for the future looking at what we can do 
on Churchill and the surrounding area. So that concludes the presentation and, of course, there’s 
more detail on your Report. We can answer any questions that you have.

Chair Bialson: Do the Commissioners have any questions? Bonnie.

Commissioner Packer: I have a question about how the decisions about identifying a street as a 
school commute corridor, or identifying a neighborhood for a wider study. How do those 
decisions would relate to that citywide traffic study that it’s being done now? And how that study 
will help inform the process of making these decisions?
Mr. Kott: This Commission asks awfully good questions. The two are probably only indirectly related. The citywide traffic study is an upgrade of future projections. We’re going to look at what’s likely to come about on our street and work in terms of congestion and traffic volumes between intersections, the Levels of Service changes at intersections. These obviously do affect nearby residential areas and residential streets. For example, the more congested an intersection becomes in a major intersection, the more likely it becomes that some drivers will choose to cut through a shorter route along the local residential street or a collector residential street. So there’s a connection there but it isn’t really a direct connection.

The school commute work. The development of objective criteria by which a list of streets will be formally designated by Council as school commute corridors. It will be a change in our street classification scheme. We will add a classification called collector streets. This Commission has already discussed some of the implications of that. For example, in the last Commission meeting, discussion on study session on CEQA traffic thresholds. Other possible implications would be in Transportation Investment policies. For example, focusing pedestrian and bicycle facilities, investment of monies of City. The City may get through grants or through general fund or street improvement funds to make improvements first on the school commute corridors. A note on the school commute corridor work. We’re asking this Commission to nominate Churchill, obviously we have to first develop this list of criteria, bring the list of criteria and the candidates that qualify into the criteria to this Commission and then the Council. So we’re saying here that Churchill will be next to Charleston, it’s the second street on the candidates list. We’re not saying that because we don’t have the criteria, we’re not saying that asking you to forward the designation of school commute corridor on Churchill to Council. We’re not quite at that point yet. But this gives Churchill the kind of pride and place as being the second street that will be considered. And we have every reason to think that at the end of any objective criteria setting process, Churchill will be on that list, given to you later and then to Council.

Chair Bialson: Any other questions? Pat.

Commissioner Burt: Just a follow up on that. I was struck by the discussion of Churchill being the school commute corridor when we have currently an excellent bike lane on Coleridge, one street east of Churchill that dumps directly into the Embarcadero and Middlefield intersection. Why are we looking at Churchill as the commute corridor rather than emphasizing bike route down Coleridge?

Mr. Kott: Commissioner Burt, we’re not presenting a complete set of proposed school commute corridors. Again, to clarify, we are asking Commission to nominate Churchill. We will get other nominations of streets through the south Palo Alto school commute study and through north Palo Alto, and through PTA’s and neighborhood associations. So we’ll have other sources of nominations. But we thought in light of the work that had been done with the Churchill area residence and the concerns expressed and information discovered, that Churchill belongs on the nomination list. But we’re not saying Churchill is a final necessarily but on the nomination list.

Chair Bialson: Any other of the Commissioners? Bonnie.

Commissioner Packer: There is a joint committee between the school district and the City on school safety. Is that another source of information for nominating school commute corridors?
And secondly, my other question is, do you need Planning Commission nominations for these things? Can’t you just come up with from all these sources? Would our nomination inadvertently give a different kind of weight to the nomination as opposed to you can just decide on your own? In other words, why do you need the Planning Commission to do this?

Mr. Kott: Well, on the first question, the City school Traffic Safety committee will be asked to nominate streets, as well as I said, the neighborhood associations and the PTA’s and so forth. On the second question, I guess partly this is a symbolic gesture in recognition of the concerns and the efforts. Concerns and the effort made by the Churchill area residents. We won’t do this process inductively. We will develop logical objective criteria and compare those to all the streets nominated. We won’t develop the criteria to fit the streets nominated, in other words. But this is partly a symbolic gesture.

Chair Bialson: Any other Commissioners before we go to the public? No. Okay. I have six speaker cards and each speaker will be given five minutes. The first card is John MacDaniels, to be followed by Karen Ewart.

John MacDaniels, 1521 Emerson, Palo Alto: I’m John MacDaniels and I live on the 1500 block of Emerson. I am not directly on Churchill but as of about 4 years ago after commuting for 33 years to San Francisco and walking out of my front door and down to the California Avenue train station, I ventured in retirement down the right two houses and so at 7:45 a.m., a cacophony of car horns and a mess of cars that were backed up from the intersection of Alma all the way to the Emerson intersection and back almost all the way up to Bryant. So in that regard, I have some traffic planning suggestions myself as of now. I thought that was an intolerable situation and after discussing it with the people who live on Churchill, I realized this has been a growing situation that has only gotten worse.

There are really two intersecting inseparable problems here. Number one, the increasing intolerable traffic problems of volume and speeding on Churchill Avenue. Number two, the confluence of imminent disasters called the intersection of Churchill, Alma and the trains. This is a problem so serious, our Chief of Police admitted it as the most unique combination of hazards in the City. This one intersection combines, and I’m just going to give you a rough off-the-cuff indication of what transpires here. This one intersection combines 86 north, southbound trains every 20 minutes, an additional third rail baby bullet to come exceeding current speeds. High schoolers biking and walking to and from school, Walter Hayes students with their parents in two frequently, walking or biking or scootering or skating or skateboarding to and from south gate, Jordan students biking and walking to and from south gate, north/southbound traffic on six narrow lanes of Alma often exceeding the speed limits and often intolerant of school kids crossing, the 100 block of Churchill residents trying to back out from driveways into impatient drivers trying to make the light. A dozen school buses crossing Alma in the track stopping, starting, stopping, aggressive Churchill drivers pushing the school bikers into the curb. Castilleja’s gym classes crossing the Paly’s oval track for running and back, mix in the emergency vehicles of fire, police and rescue pushing the envelope of safety, fighting Alma and Churchill cars and the trains. Thus, the traffic problem of Churchill’s cut-through glut, speed and driver attitude is just one of the crisis caused by the larger problem, the Alma/Churchill train track convergence.
A unique unusually hazardous situation in Palo Alto demands a unique solution. Now, not in some vague distant long-term planning tack. Otherwise, the intersection is a major fatality disaster waiting to happen and everyone can talk about near misses in the past. And despite testimony from other people to the contrary, the traffic year by year has been getting worse. The real solution to solve both interlocking problems together of the Churchill traffic glut and speed problem and this disastrous intersection.

Number one, close Churchill westbound at Alma. Close Churchill eastbound at the train tracks. Two, use radio activated retractable bollards enabling emergency vehicles to cross with little time loss. Stanford University uses this throughout. Number three, construct pedestrian bike underpass, long overdue, under Alma and the tracks. Number four, close following east/west residential streets at Alma, full closings or maybe just removable bollards. Melville, Kellogg, Coleridge, Lowell, Tennyson. If need be, seal Rinconada, Santa Rita, Washington. And the fifth one is put a traffic light at Embarcadero westbound at Alma to allow left turns on to Alma in addition to the right turns that already exists. My conclusion is, east/west traffic instead of cutting through and violating smaller residential streets must use the volume capable of major routes from El Camino, Alma and Bayshore, namely streets like Embarcadero and Oregon Avenue. In erasing the growing thread of Palo Alto’s most hazardous intersection, this now solves the major conundrum of this belabored transport project as stated by their own September memo, “The desire of Churchill Avenue residents for strong Traffic Calming measures in the NTCP procedures which do not permit strong measures.” Thank you for your forbearance.

Chair Bialson: Thank you. Karen, you are to be followed by David Fencl.

Karen Ewart, 120 Churchill Avenue, Palo Alto: I’m Karen, I live on 100 block of Churchill. I came here with one thing to say, where these gentlemen had to say, now I have something else to say. I found the process with the City was to emphasize, patronize and euthanize. I was on the original working committee. There was consensus except for one dissenter at times who came in deliberately, I guess as a robber. There were certain plans that Mr. Stoffel presented that his boss might approve of and only to hear on the next week that these could not happen, different things. As far as I’m concerned, we were looking at a bifurcated plan, a neighborhood Traffic Calming Project that would put in traffic circles and speed bumps, with a second plan that would take years and budget and the involvement of the neighborhood for the larger measures. This whole thing seems to have gotten lost and I liken it to analogy of, if I was your personal secretary and you all had something to get out, and I had something a cancer on my body. If I have to go out on sick leave and get this addressed, it would inconvenience you, however, it’s still my body and I should be able to address my situation.

The 100 block of Churchill is a nightmare. I feel the City is facing a future lawsuit on the large angry beast who is out in the middle of the street screaming, slow down at people. I have taken out the radar gun, clocked people in excess of 40 and 50 mph. Sure, they mentioned Charleston. Charleston is double the size of Churchill. Recently, we’ve had new striping put in. It’s been made larger on one side to park. We only have parking on one side. Now, people are swerving around to miss the bicyclists coming to oncoming traffic. We have a nightmare situation. You can see these pictures. This is in the morning and this doesn’t even adequately represent the people coming at you from both sides. We have the people coming eastbound on the train tracks, who basically think this is great starting point to get airbound. I have seen people fly
through the air. They seem to think it’s Streets of San Francisco. That’s one side. A lot of them
are teen-agers from the high school.

The second part is the other direction in the morning. Just yesterday, my daughter pulled into a
driveway right behind that jeep to back out and park her car. We can’t use our driveway, there’s
a house being built behind, I’m a tenant not an owner. She nearly gets creamed by a gardening
tuck who didn’t think it was a great thing to wait. She took off after him. It is risking a life but
we’ve all had it. I’ve taken off after people myself and said, “Slow down.” I’ve lost cats. I’ve
almost lost my dog. There’s many children. Everybody on the south side of street, a lot of
people are tenants. There are two properties, they cross the street to park. So you have a
constant influx of people, pedestrians, bicyclists, animals, kids, speeding BMW’s as you see
right there, people just think it’s a lot of fun to accelerate to that Emerson stop sign. It’s a living
nightmare. The noise level, the car horns tooting, the trains come, everybody is angry. I took
out my neighbor’s fence once, I didn’t try to. I was sitting twenty minutes, I angled my car and
angled to try to back down Churchill and took out two rungs of the fence. I was late for school, I
had to do something. They won’t let people in. So we’ve begged for police enforcement.
We’ve gotten very little response and now we’re hearing they’re incredibly short-handed. I’m
IT. And I swear to God someday I’m going to get blown away for yelling at the wrong person,
but the frustration is terrible. There is no peace. There is no safety. There is no intelligence
behind the planning of the street. And now, we get some sleek advertising guy who comes in
from all the surrounding streets after they come in and state this liberal opinion, “Ooh, we should
all forbear the progress and we should all deal with this.” And then he passes this out saying,
“Churchill Avenue residents are demanding the City to divert commuter traffic to its side
streets.” Will diverting help you? And he says, “3,700 vehicles a day, speeding vehicles.” It’s
okay for us to take it? At the very least, under the neighborhood Traffic Calming, the circles at
Emerson and perhaps Bryant or Waverly, and the speed bumps on the 100 block are a necessity,
they are an emergency, they should have happened months ago. And it should have nothing to
do with anybody and any other street because I don’t care about the undercarriage of their car
and I don’t care what the appearance of the street looks like to people who are worried about
their property values two blocks down, when it comes to possibly taking a life on that street.
I’ve seen more accidents. Barbara Mayhem that did a letter, she lives at 128, I lived at 128 in the
front house for the first half of my residence. I’ve been there 13 years, I moved to 120, I have
had more blood on the white chair in my front yard of bicyclists who are injured. There’s always
this chair, they’ve been helped to the chair and the paramedics are there. It’s got to stop! And
you guys have to do something. It’s a potential lawsuit. Please help us. I’d appreciate it. Thank
you.

Chair Bialson: Thank you very much. David Fencl and following you would be Margaret Lane.

David Fencl, 159 Churchill, Palo Alto: My name is David Fencl and I live at 159 Churchill and
I’ve been a resident there for about 20 years. I was on the original group that noticed of residents
that things had deteriorated and we didn’t know what to do. And we had several meetings and
we were made aware of the Traffic Calming procedures and a number of very generous
residents, I couldn’t do it, but step forward and spend a lot of time trying to understand. It was
very disappointing because we realized very quickly that the magnitude of the problem was far
greater than what this little program could address, which Carl talked about.
I have a slightly different opinion than Karen has. I see the quandary the City is in. We are frustrated and we don’t know what to do. We realize that the amount of demand being placed on our little street, which is designated a corridor, it’s a collector, but it really is a little residential street. We only have one parking on one side. There is bike traffic in both directions. We have heavy student traffic, pedestrian traffic going back and forth for all different reasons. High school, people come in the other direction. A lot of bike traffic going towards Stanford, east and west because you can get by at grade there and the train tracks, which as they’ve added trains more frequently during the rush hour, the crossing arms drop and interrupt the signaling at the light, which makes it more frustrating for people trying to get through and making turns.

You may notice that there is a very heavy left-turn traffic from Alma northbound on to Churchill going west because if you’re trying to get to the entrance by the stadium at Embarcadero Road, there is no way to make a left turn. So you really are required to make this left turn. Now in most mornings, that back up is six blocks long. It goes past Lowell. Well, it doesn’t take anybody sitting in that traffic very long to realize that it’s very easy to make a right turn on any of the street, go down to Emerson, loop around and come in to Churchill that direction. And what they’ve noticed is the police can’t be there, there is no forward traffic Churchill west between 7:30 and 8:00. So either make the loop before 7:30 or you get there and you’ll look and you see if there’s any enforcement and you go through and there is very frequently, more than half the car just going through the intersection. The police can’t be everywhere. And so there’s a great deal of non-compliance. With the students, right turns, it really is a safety issue. We don’t know what to do as the back up gets further up Emerson.

If you happen to live on north side where the parking is, backing out is difficult. You have students in both directions. You have cars that you’re trying to get in, and people that have waited two and three light cycles. I’m sure you’d be frustrated, too, if you had been waiting in traffic that long. I believe that the answers, we’re just indicative of a much bigger problem, which is more regional and we recognize that. We were very disappointed to find out that many options in the Traffic Calming process were removed from us. You just couldn’t allow that, the police and the fire, we couldn’t have this. So there were very few features that we could get with and we could use and the little committee tried to come up with a minimum little plan to try to help a little bit, realizing that the problem was much larger. Many of the residents in the neighborhood and outside of Churchill felt that it was such an imposition potentially on them. Thus, they ganged up against us and it went nowhere.

We don’t know what to do. We love our neighborhood, we love Palo Alto. We realize that things are getting worse. We’re concerned about the safety. The speeding is serious. I walk at 5:00 in the morning and it’s amazing at 5:00, how many people don’t make the stop sign at Emerson and Churchill at a slow pace, roll through it and slam it to get through the light at Alma. The amount of truck traffic on that street. This evening I came home early and between 5:00 and 6:30, 27 delivery trucks. I think that’s a little high on a residential street. It’s cut-through traffic. It’s part of the larger problem of Embarcadero Road. We recognize that we sympathize with those people because we are having the same problem. We just don’t know what to do. And we ask your help in trying to fashion a longer, much more global answer with the train being one of the most complicating factors. Thank you.

Chair Bialson: Thank you very much. Next is Margaret Lane to be followed by Kerry Yarkin.
Margaret Lane, 1500 Bryant, Palo Alto: Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight. My
name is Margaret Lane, I live at the corner of Churchill and Bryant, the southwest corner. My
address is 1500. Often times when I meet people and tell them where I live, the most common
response is, “I drive by your house all the time.” And that’s why I’m in front of you, people
drive by my house all the time. Mainly going up and down Churchill. I have four children from
the age of 5 to 12. We moved over 7 years ago into this house. We chose the house because of
its location. A lot of times, the subject came up in the few working group meetings that I was
able to make that people on Churchill chose to live there. We chose to live by a high school.
We chose to live on a bike route. And, indeed, we did choose to live there. It’s a very
convenient place, you can walk to downtown. I can get easily on to major streets like
Embarcadero and El Camino or up to 101 or out to 280.

What I did not choose to do is to live on a corner where two years ago, an accident happened in
our intersection where one of the people involved in the accident came up over the rocks in front
of our house and banged into our front gate, pulling out two metal stakes in the gate. I’m sorry I
don’t have pictures to show you. It’s in the police reports from June 2000. The other thing that
we did not expect was to hear on a regular basis the screech of tires at that intersection and with
increasing frequency obscenities yelled by bikers at people who are raising up and down
Churchill and running that stop sign.

So, yes, indeed, we have all chosen to live in this neighborhood. But we’ve not chosen to have
the kinds of complications that I’ve discussed and that other people are going to be speaking and
have spoken about this evening. I was not part of the process long-term. And I feel bad that I
wasn’t able to do that because it is a very dangerous intersection and as most of the other people
who are here to speak to you tonight, we live in fear that a child will be hurt. We’ve already had
injury accidents at that intersection, and we’ve had lots of other accidents, too. Another point
that was brought up in our working meeting as that, well, there weren’t that many police reports
from that intersection. Well, there’s a lot of near misses. And there are a lot of situations
between Paly students where no one is really hurt, the car really isn’t hurt so they won’t make a
police report, so it won’t show up on their insurance.

So, a lot of this is anecdotal and we understand that. And a lot of it is not necessarily supported
by numbers that make it the worst intersection and the worst area in Palo Alto. But we are
anecdotes. We are neighbors, we are individuals and we have seen this. We’ve chosen to live in
this neighborhood. We would live probably nowhere else but as we will all say to you tonight.
We’re looking to your leadership to help us in all of our disagreement and various experiences
and anecdotes to somehow pull this together so that the unthinkable doesn’t happen. Thank you.

Chair Bialson: Thank you very much. Next is Kerry Yarkin to be followed by Bill Powar.

Kerry Yarkin, 135 Churchill, Palo Alto: Good evening, Commissioners. I know you’ve heard
from me before and I started this process two years ago, but actually the first letter we wrote to
the City was three years ago. And our families and property is in the middle of Churchill, the
first 100 block since the 1960’s. I rented there and my cousin lived there and my sister lived
there, I know the street for over 15 years very well. And the letter I read, the packet that I sent to
you was basically pretty calm and very nice and actually things changed. I kind of changed my
perspective a few days ago when I found out some other information. But basically I’m very
concerned about the safety issues on the street. I see a near-accident every single day, I am not
exaggerating. I’ve gone out there and looking at the intersection and seeing where cars are going and how fast they’re going. And what is really becoming a major problem is just getting out of our driveway or off the curb to in the morning to get on the opposite side, going the opposite way of all the traffic that’s lined up on trying to cross the train tracks.

Well, first I have to go out of my car and ask people to move so I can get my car in between two cars because the back up is over a block long. So then I go out and they’re sitting there bored and a lot of times they’re very, very polite and they’ll move their car back so I can move my car out on to the street but then I have a blind spot because I can’t see if there’s traffic coming in the opposite direction. So every morning, I have a blind spot. I can basically be hit and I can have an accident every single morning of my life going to work. And I see that very often because my neighbors behind me have a split lot. They have to back their car out first into a line of traffic and it’s becoming impossible. And I just saw my neighbor today this morning when I was taking pictures of some intersections around [rear checks] and he said he had a near-miss the other day when someone came 60 miles an hour off the train tracks and he was almost hit. So this is a daily occurrence that we are now living with. It’s become this bad.

And one of my concerns which was brought up in our committee was we had a recommendation to one of the strongest parts of the plan was to do something about Embarcadero where you can make a left turn on to Churchill. Now, I feel that this is very unsafe and I know a lot of people use it, my husband likes to use it but I keep telling him, this is not a safe turn. This is Embarcadero going west and what happens is, you’ve got a lot of traffic on Embarcadero so they do this quick little left turn here where Churchill runs into Embarcadero. But as you can see, cars are lining up in this lane. So let’s say you’ve got 3, 4, 5 cars lined up, this car here is making a left turn. Then you’ve got all these other cars that may not be making a left turn. They have to get over into the right lane. Okay, now, this car, I wrote this up in one of my sheets that I turned into you, he’s got to pass all the eastbound Embarcadero traffic. The Embarcadero traffic sometimes backs up from Middlefield way over here all the way back to here. So, he is playing a little game just to get across the center section, then all these cars here are moving over into the number one lane with a lot of oncoming traffic that could hit them. So that is occurring all the time, especially when the Walter Hayes school traffic is going on. That I think is very, very unsafe.

This is just another shot I took of what’s going on with the bicyclists which have been mentioned here. You’ve got a bicyclist, you’ve got like a speedway going there and you’ve got a lot of cars and a lot of them are going over 35. The other area that I wanted to bring up was that the Staff, every time in our 8 meetings that we had, Staff would bring forth some study or some percentage. I submitted to you again, I already went to the Planning Commission and I submitted this to the City Council that 40% cut-through figure is not correct. Now I have gone through this. I want to go through it one more time. The license plate survey was taken from 7:00 to 9:00 a.m. in the morning and 12:00 to 5:00 in the afternoon. Some of the busiest times of the day, go up from 9:00 to 9:30 in the morning and the evening traffic is completely cut-through. I will invite you all to come to my house and we can just watch all the cars going through.

I could speak probably for 15 more minutes about this because I’m so upset about it and I feel that our traffic pain is not really being felt either Commissioners or people or just the people on Churchill. And I hope that you read this because this has really upset me. What happened with
the Palo Alto process I feel was very much usurped because if you read this, I just want to make
sure you know what happened here. A neighbor who does not live on Churchill, lives on a side
street and he distributed this to all the side streets, not Churchill residents to get them to go out to
the second consensus meeting, they all went there and they voted down the plan. So we did not
get to vote. We who have thousands of cars on our streets in unsafe condition. Thank you.

Chair Bialson: Thank you very much. Next speaker is Bill Powar.

Bill Powar, 1310 Emerson, Palo Alto: Hi, I’m Bill Powar. I live at 1310 Emerson Street and I
guess I’m one of the residents of that wider notification area. I think I’m the only one who
showed up tonight. And the reason that I did is we had been involved several years ago with
some discussions with the City regarding Castilleja’s parking and traffic patterns. And what I
would like the Commission to try to figure out a way to do if you can. I think my neighbor most
eloquentely described the quandary that we face. But there’s no question that the street layouts in
Palo Alto were not, in particular in this area were not designed to handle the type of traffic that
we’re facing today.

Embarcadero is not a proper street to carry the cross traffic coming from areas in Palo Alto and
coming from 101 that want to go south on to Alma. There’s no way to get from Embarcadero to
turn left to go south on Alma. There is also no way to get from Alma going northbound on to
Embarcadero to hit El Camino and the employment at Stanford, the shopping center. People
who want to get to areas that are west of El Camino. And if there is any way that the
Commission can put a priority on re-analyzing traffic patterns, re-designing the whole
intersection and traffic pattern between El Camino, Embarcadero and Alma, I would really
recommend it. We really don’t have time as the Churchill neighbors have indicated to wait for
the normal 10 year process to go through, a detailed long-term plan and to line up for budgets
and the rest of it.

We seem to have been able to find $350,000 to put a bike lane on Bryant. I would hope we
could find half a million or a million to re-configure the intersections at Embarcadero because
that’s where the real problem is. It’s the confluence of those streets and the fact that Churchill is
the only way to get across the traffic there for across the train tracks for a lot of the traffic
patterns that exists.

I would like to answer Commissioner Burt’s question that was posed to the Staff as a resident of
the area of why that is a bike lane and why this is a designated corridor. The reality is, Paly high
school is on Churchill. It’s not on Coleridge, you can’t get across Alma at Coleridge and no
matter what the City would like to happen, the bicyclists will use Churchill. The walkers will
use Churchill because that’s the only way to get across the train tracks. And if we try to do
something else and we spend a lot of money to do it, it’s just going to be wasted because people
are going to go where the natural patterns are going to lead them. But again, I’d just like to
reiterate, that if there is any way that the Commission can make this a priority, not bury it as part
of an overall City study that will last 5 years and it’ll be another 20 years before implementation.

Thirty years ago, Kellogg and Melville were closed to cross traffic at Embarcadero when these
problems first started to occur. I was a graduate student at Stanford in 1968-69 when this
happened. I think the problems with Churchill are much greater than those that cause that to
happen with those two streets. And I don’t think we have a lot of time. And sophisticated,
complex plans are not necessarily going to work. I think we really do need a complete re-configuration of how to configure Embarcadero and Alma. Thank you.

Chair Bialson: Thank you. I have no more speaker cards so I’ll close the public hearing on that matter and bring it back to the Commissioners. Does Staff have anything to say? No. Commissioners?

Commissioner Cassel: I had a question on the volume studies that were done and studies that were done for cut-through traffic. Why did you choose the times you chose and why didn’t you go through at least 7:00 p.m. on that count for the traffic license cut-through traffic?

Mr. Stoffel: I believe we had a problem with the license study. The first time we did it was during the time of year when it was light until late and we did go, I believe until about that time. But we had some problems with that study and the company that did it and it had to be re-done. And by the time we got to be able to re-do it, it was December and it was dark at 5:00 and the study was done by looking at license plates. So we had to end it at 5:00. But what we did was we took those percentages that we find, from 4:00 to 5:00 is a busy commute time. There’s plenty of cut-through traffic, there’s plenty of cut-through traffic in the morning. So we extrapolated those rates that we measured during those times and we applied it. We just assumed that it would take place for the whole day. So, I don’t live on Churchill. Surely, the residents know perhaps more people do cut through at 6:00 to 7:00 but I know 4:00 to 5:00 and 5:00 to 6:00 is in the middle of the commute time. It would have been better to have that data, but it would have meant waiting several more months and it was unfortunate that we did have a problem with the license study.

Chair Bialson: Any other questions? Pat.

Commissioner Burt: It’s been a few months since we had the Churchill program go through. Could you review for us a couple of aspects of it? One was the alternative plan that did not involve street closures. What caused that plan to not have overwhelming support? Was it partially people who wanted the closures objecting to something shy of closures or was it the adjacent streets or some combination?

Mr. Kott: Speaking at the so-called third public meeting, we were surprised by that, too. And I remember reading something about it’s impossible for someone who’s warm to understand someone who’s cold, in reference to a Siberian labor camp. But it seems farfetched. But empathy sometimes is very hard to achieve or to attain. I think the atmosphere was generally of a lot of apprehension about traffic shift. And that’s what happens when you have a graded street network and a lot of traffic bearing on it so that people I think were just generally very apprehensive of any change that might shift any amount of traffic.

For example, the plan of this so-called alternative plan didn’t have the turn band, the turn restriction off of Embarcadero, but it did have traffic circles. And sure, fine, we use those in Palo Alto, not everyone loves them but they seem to work very well. But there’s some apprehension that whereas I think that drivers would avoid Churchill to avoid these circles. Or we proposed speed cushions. Before we had the uproar about speed cushions in town but there’s some apprehension that any vertical device would shift traffic on to parallel streets or cause...
drivers to cut their trips short and go on to side streets. I’m only speculating. But we did have a
pretty resounding vote in the larger meeting against even the mild plan.

Mr. Stoffel: Could I just add that at that larger area meeting, when we tallied the votes for the
milder plan, I did tally them just for the Churchill corridor and the cross streets where the traffic
circles were which is our normal way of tabulating survey votes. And even in that area, it was
just 50-50. And we were at this point, to define consensus we were looking for, 60% of the
people in favor. So even looking at just that smaller area where the people really were concerned
about Traffic Calming somehow by that point of the process we still didn’t get what we were
considering to be consensus by that measure.

Chair Bialson: Any other questions? Karen.

Commissioner Holman: At what point would Staff and, in this case, I guess the Police
department also consider overriding what the survey or poll of the neighbors indicated to
increase safety on the street?

Mr. Kott: Well, as one of the speakers suggested that Police Staff resources are stretched very
thin and very difficult for them to cover all of the locations. And we have to figure out like we
have over a thousand intersections with stop signs or signals on them in Palo Alto. It’s very
hard. The accident data we have gotten was not compelling, you might say. It didn’t mean
immediate big triage effort. Maybe there are a lot of near-misses and I wouldn’t be surprised
because you’ve got all kinds of people getting frustrated waiting in long queues. And safety is
our first obligation, we didn’t feel that conditions on Churchill warranted what might one call
emergency measures.

Mr. Stoffel: Let me add that the study area did not include the intersection of Alma and
Churchill. Our Traffic Calming Program includes the street segments. It did not continue across
Alma. So when we talked about the accidents not overwhelming and so on, it did not include
what goes on at Alma and Churchill.

Chair Bialson: Okay, Karen.

Commissioner Holman: Mr. MacDaniels, I believe, said that and maybe you would need to
respond to this, I’m not sure. He said that the Churchill/Alma train convergence was a danger
point, even acknowledged by the Chief of Police. Is Staff aware of that? What could be said
about that?

Mr. Kott: Commissioner Holman, this Commission has, I think in past has discussed issues
about under crossings or at grade crossings. At grade crossings are safety problems waiting to
happen because you have the convergence of very, very dissimilar modes with different speeds
and crossing one another. You’ve got bikes, you’ve got motor vehicles and you’ve got trains. I
should say in a more perfect world, separating all of our at grade crossings, grade separating
them would be strictly from a safety perspective, would be highly desirable. But we don’t
operate strictly from a safety perspective. There are a lot of other issues that were covered in the
Comprehensive Planning process to bear on whether or not the City grade that separates works
with Caltrain, typically grade to separate these locations.
Chair Bialson: Michael.

Vice-Chair Griffin: More on that same line. Joe, you say that the amount of safety problems on that stretch of road did not justify emergency action. Would you characterize Churchill a little bit for us. Is it in the top 5% or where are we on this thing?

Mr. Kott: I will say, I don’t know whether it’s on the top 5%. We’ve recently done a report of high accident locations in Palo Alto. And I don’t believe any of them are on Churchill, any of the intersections are on Churchill. But I will say that collector streets like Churchill and I would say Lewis, too, are streets that have a lot of conflicts on them. That is you’ve got in both cases, you have residential streets which mean people will want to be walking across these streets, or want to be cycling along them. You have people wanting to get out of driveways. You have very intense use of these streets by people who don’t live on them. And these are embedded conflicts. It’s particularly difficult in Palo Alto because of our very high level of motor vehicle use which we’re all concerned about.

Vice-Chair Griffin: I understand. Carl, do you have a take on that?

Mr. Stoffel: Just an additional comment on that topic. As I said, Churchill and Alma were not part of the study area so we did not look up accidents there. I think we know that many of them do have them. I don’t think it’s the highest one in the City, by any means. We found accidents at Bryant and Churchill and I believe that was probably were the largest number of accidents was. It was worth looking at, we did try to address that during the study but it was not an emergency kind of level of accidents. Generally through the corridor, in terms of reported accidents that we can look up on paper which maybe is quite different from what residence experience especially in terms of near accidents. The level was not that much different than other places. In fact, the speed and the volume that we measured barely qualified the project under our Neighborhood Traffic Calming program for collectors. The speed actually did not, perhaps you can imagine since a lot of the time it seems to be stopped. So in terms of these indicators, again, excluding Alma/Churchill, those kind emergency things were not there.

Chair Bialson: Bonnie.

Commissioner Packer: A couple of things. One of the things we’re being asked to do tonight is to designate a wider area, what’s called a Neighborhood traffic study area and that’s on Attachment B, but it doesn’t seem to include the intersection at Alma and Churchill or whether to include that as when we study the area to be able to include that intersection.

Mr. Stoffel: I think you’re referring to the wrong Attachment. We do have a little problem in the Report. That report refers to Attachments 1, 2 and 3 but they’re labeled A, B and C. There is no exhibit to go along with the recommendation for the wider area. The wider area is described in words on page 8 which is a tentative study area bounded by Embarcadero, Alma, Middlefield and at some point to the south towards Oregon. So, it’s not Exhibit B.

Commissioner Packer: But it would include then in the intersection or would it be bounded by it?
Mr. Kott: Yes. It would need to. A good analogy would be the work that we’ve done on downtown north. That included the intersections of Litton and Alma and Litton and Middlefield.

Mr. Stoffel: In fact, it would seem logical to include the rest of Churchill though, it would sort of poke out of the area down towards El Camino but maybe the area should go down to El Camino but at this tentative stage, we haven’t gotten to that discussion yet.

Commissioner Packer: Then my other question is whether or not we have to look at our definitions of collector streets, and maybe we find them a little bit more because you have the streets that go across the tracks. And we have so few places where you can go across the tracks at grade and those were the problems are that that’s where the traffic is going to go. And also, you have because of the lack of a real grid in so many parts of Palo Alto where we have creeks and other things that create these long stretches where there isn’t a grid, like at Lewis and Ross, it’s not really cut-through traffic. It’s just people have to use, this is the only way to get from A to B. I don’t know if you call that cut-through or that’s what a street is intended to be used for. I think it’s a matter of perspective. But as something of this experience and experiences with other streets that cross the tracks, I would suggest that maybe you want to define collector streets in different ways.

Mr. Kott: I think it’s a good idea to revisit our whole street classification systems, for those reasons and others.

Mr. Stoffel: I think you’re hitting on one of the issues that we did bring up during the study is that it was Churchill does go across the tracks. And it’s one of the few places in that area in town where you can cross the tracks. And as such, we were very hesitant in this spot Traffic Calming study to do much to impede what we think is a vital link, not that it’s good for the people that live on the street. But as it stands right now, it’s there. And we were quite hesitant to really do too much with that because it would cause radical changes in circulation and problems in the area.

Mr. Kott: I’d like to add, too, that a lot of what we do is really to share it out good solutions that don’t have unbearable unintended consequences. And it just ain’t that easy. It looks easy on the surface, take our words for it, it’s not. There’s just a whole lot of potential for downside problems that we’d like to anticipate and not have to face and try to fix later.

Commissioner Cassel: I guess in a similar vein, we have three grade crossings at grade crossings that are all causing us this kind of problems that are all on school commutes, that all have cause, at least the other two have had some very critical accidents, they weren’t near misses. What are we doing to work with this train issue? Because these are all three of them bugging us. Is there some way to combine this and think about or make this a plan like what we’re doing in the downtown area? Some way of working with the Caltrain systems so that we can get better grade crossings on all of them?

Mr. Kott: Well, Caltrains Staff is very eager, indeed, to increase the number of grade separations. And they have offered to produce not quite full scale Feasibility studies which are very carefully detailed out, but at least good order of magnitude studies for us on how much land the grade separations would take and that’s a big issue and how much they would cost which is another big issue because it would be not be lying, I don’t believe to fund the entire bill. Our
Council has directed us to work with Caltrains at least exploratorily. As I say, we have to be
careful about this because the community has already gone through a Comprehensive Planning
process and has decided not to put grade separations on work program in effect.

Commissioner Cassel: I wasn’t presuming that these will be going over the train or under the
train that maybe some other thing that we need to do here. We need to take a look at that. This
is going to be an urgent problem.

Mr. Kott: There have been pretty significant improvements as much as we can get them,
particularly the small gate arms across the pedestrian walkways. The main safety benefits to be
quite blunt about it, come with separating trains from motor vehicles.

Chair Bialson: Pat.

Commissioner Burt: The question about Churchill’s role as a collector street and its historic
designation as a collector street versus the present problem is one that we briefly addressed when
this program came forward to us. And one of the observations I have had on what has occurred
in recent years as well as having been active in the review of the EIR’s for the Palo Alto Medical
Clinic moving out to El Camino and the Sand Hill EIR, was how those traffic EIR’s anticipated
the impact of increased traffic flow on to Churchill. And it’s a question I had a couple of months
ago and I don’t know if you’ve had a chance to look into that. But my memory is that those
EIR’s did not anticipate any significant impact on to Churchill. And what appears to be the case
is that we have congested traffic at the Embarcadero and El Camino junction, Churchill became a
logical cut-through. And the EIR’s anticipated that the overflow would disperse all the way
down to Oregon Expressway and the natural cut-through of Churchill was not adequately
recognized and that I believe, and I would like to see this analyzed, that much of the problem on
Churchill is resulting from that occurrence, that major impact. And that the EIR may have been
faulty in that regard. And out of that, we may come to then recognize why it’s more appropriate
to acknowledge that Churchill isn’t just stuck with its historic designation as a collector street but
a fundamental shift that’s just happened in the last few years. Have you guys had an opportunity
to look into that in a month since I raised that issue?

Mr. Stoffel: I don’t think I can comment on the aspect of the EIR’s. I would like to point out I
guess you probably know anyway that portion of Churchill between El Camino and Alma is the
one that really gets the most hit from those people trying to get from Stanford to head south.
They turn right when they’re leaving town, they go south on Alma. And that portion of
Churchill definitely is serving as an arterial. Its traffic volume levels are three times what the
other part of Churchill is. And then the other side that we’re talking about tonight has quite a
different characteristic, you still get some of the overflow but the two pieces of Churchill really
need to be looked at and they operate very differently from each other.

Commissioner Burt: Well, I’m not so sure that they’re entirely different. I acknowledge that a
portion of that traffic that turns left, southbound traffic on El Camino turns left on to Churchill, a
portion of that certainly does turn right on to Alma. And in fact, it backs up into the bike lane
and occupies the bike lane and essentially prohibits use of the bike lane on Churchill in the block
between El Camino and Alma. But a great deal of that traffic goes forward and it’s a natural cut-
through when drivers traveling south on El Camino can no longer make that left-turn lane in a
signal period, it’s logical and makes sense for those drivers to go up to Churchill and turn left.
And I believe that’s occurring and I think we need to analyze it.

Mr. Kott: Commissioner Burt, it strikes me that you’re probably right. I know there are
discouraged drivers who can’t squeeze into the turn bay at Embarcadero and El Camino to make
that left turn. And instead choose to proceed on to Churchill and that’s likely to be occurring.
We don’t really know how much of that contributes to the problem but I think you’re right that it
is a contributor. Just on the face of that, I think it’s right.

Commissioner Burt: If we could as a starting point, look back at what the EIR anticipated. And
then that would be the foundation from which to compare what we now have going on there.
And there are some perspective changes including shortening the left turn lane from El Camino
on to Churchill, left turn time, excuse me, that might have other impacts but at least it should be
evaluated in this context. And so I’m concerned that we’re only looking at the area east of Alma
in order to address this problem.

Chair Bialson: Michael.

Vice-Chair Griffin: Carl, I know that these license plate studies are not cheap. But is there a
possibility that with a couple of different cracks that this thing would perhaps have, in fact,
deranked the amount of cut-through traffic that’s taken place? Is it feasible or reasonable for
us to schedule up another license plate study to look again and try to verify? I don’t know, I’m
listening to what these folks are saying. I’m pretty empathetic whenever I go through that
intersection and I’m through there a lot, I see a ton of traffic coming up that road. And I’d be
interested in what you have to say about that.

Mr. Stoffel: Well, I’d like for Joe to add some comments. They are expensive. It will cost
$8,000 for the one we did. But what happens when let’s say that we do find 60% cut-through
traffic which means it’s overwhelming, in order to deal with that, we’d be doing more than
putting in some speed humps. We’d probably need to be looking at these measures that we can’t
work with in the spot treatment program. So that a license survey would really be part of a
bigger study, I think. I don’t think we still couldn’t work with it because the solutions are too
complicated for this particular program and that would go into the bigger study.

Mr. Kott: That’s, for example, using a downtown north analogy again. We did end up being
able to recommend closings, putting in street closures as you know, Commissioner Griffin, in
downtown north. But that was only after quite a bit of work to figure out where the resulting
traffic shift would occur and being able to work out that it could be put back on to the arterials.
It’s not anything you do lightly. In a neighborhood like Churchill you would not lightly do a
closure, after consulting with a lot of the neighborhood and doing some fairly careful analysis to
be able to answer questions like where will the traffic go. Will it go by my house?

Mr. Stoffel: And we would do another license survey if we did the bigger study. We would
want to do it again and include more entrance and exit points because we’d have a bigger area
and cover a larger time as well, of course.

Steve Emslie, Planning Director: Thank you, Carl and Joe. I just wanted to may be provide a
little bit more context for the response to the general questions and concerns raised so far.
Maybe come back and take a look at the whole premise of Traffic Calming. As our Traffic and our Transportation systems become more and more stressed, the concept of Traffic Calming is supposed to be a low key approach at influencing and not changing completely or dramatically traffic patterns as opposed to by gentle persuasion through very minor means, change drivers behavior in a way to improve situations for residential neighborhoods primarily. So that’s really our purpose for being here.

I think there is a fundamental and unimpeded consequence that essentially Staff is trying to deal with a problem with a program as it’s spelled out through this Commission’s involvement and adopted by the City Council, the spot treatment program and the spot treatment program is really the lowest level of Traffic Calming. The minor introduction of smaller types of traffic influences to change behavior in a very small way. This is not the problem with Churchill, I think all of us who use the streets in Palo Alto on a regular basis understand completely the reason for using Churchill, the grade crossing, the fact that we have very few of them, the fact that we’re all very aware of the pattern because we all as residents use that street on a regular basis. I think that’s pretty clear.

And Staff is not by any means suggesting abandoning this neighborhood in terms of its problems. I think what we’re saying is that this program is not the right fit, that there needs to be a larger study of the more macro traffic patterns out there as pointed out by several of your comments, particularly Commissioner Burt’s, about the influences that are feeding into this area. I think another strong sign is the fact that you’ve got disagreement in the neighborhood, perhaps there’s agreement on the street but that’s generally very easy to figure out because it’s about protecting that particular environment because you’ve got concerns immediately adjacent, I think they should be factored in and taken into account. But certainly on a larger basis because we all know that we’re going to have to guarantee that the changes that we recommend and we would never recommend any change that doesn’t go in place for a trial period and a period of testing. That’s one of our basic principles that we will not violate, but has to be really done so that even on a trial basis that there’s some understanding and appreciation of the larger dynamics of the traffic. And I think that’s been the problem is that we’ve been trying to fit this into a very small low level. This is intended to be a quick in and out hit and it’s clearly the problems are much larger than that.

So I think that’s really the basis of Staff’s recommendation to you is that we do include this as a much larger study that does take into account the variety of concerns. There’s no question that Churchill really from El Camino all the way to Embarcadero is a major issue. This is really even looking at one segment of that which I think does beg the issue of this as an arterial cut-through, as a residential street serving vital community institutions, as well as very deserving neighborhoods. So I think we’re really suggesting that we do need to do the broader study that does get to a resource issue. There are lots of neighborhoods downtown north, an example, it is a slow, it’s an arduous process, building consensus giving information in a way that doesn’t undermine our basic intent. We don’t want to go and do something and rush it that creates such a backlash that then you can basically forget about making any positive change because of the tremendous amount of emotion that is generated through a program that isn’t thoughtful and brings the community along. And it does take time and it is very arduous. I think the Staff is very capable of doing that but we do need to let you know that these things need to be managed in a very deliberate and proper way so that we can make sure that we make the incremental
changes that are very important to changing behaviors, preserving neighborhoods and building consensus in the community.

Mr. Kott: Steve, I’d like to just very quickly add that Palo Alto has had success. We do have a history of neighborhood Wide Traffic Calming. In fact, Carl Stoffel had a lot to do with the successes we’ve had in the past in College Terrace and Evergreen Park, in particular. We anticipate success after probably one or two more minor rouse in downtown north with that program. But it’s one, as Commissioner Griffin knows and other Commissioners I’m sure understand, does involve a lot of very careful thought and collaborative thoughtful because lots of people are potentially affected by a neighborhood wide change in traffic patterns.

Chair Bialson: I appreciate your sort of summing up the frustration that everyone involved in this has been having. And more clearly defining what you’re asking for from the Commission. Phyllis.

Commissioner Cassel: This is sort of a next lead question from where you’re at, I think. Is it possible to put in some temporary Traffic Calming items that are on a minor nature but at least might create some small amounts of relief to while we do this larger study? In other words, sometimes it takes some people just saying, well, I’m sorry but this is a problem. When we do these traffic studies, we do these as counts of cars and we aren’t doing them as counts of pedestrians and as counts of bicyclists. And in this particular corridor, this is particularly heavy because of the school and it’s particularly urgent because of that. Can temporary measures go in without all of these long-term perhaps while we study long-term?

Mr. Kott: Commissioner Cassel, we’re not really particularly bureaucratic. Our outlook as you know is fairly refreshing. Of course, compared to other traffic departments, we’re probably not very high [inaudible] in comparison. But we do have a formally adopted Council procedure and we are obligated to follow it. We try to be as ingenious as possible within the parameters that we must follow. We did not get consensus to move forward with even a vote in the neighborhood to put in a trial, even this so called alternative trial which did not involve the turn restriction. So we’re essentially stuck at the end, without violating the process which is what we’re obligated to follow.

Mr. Emslie: One thing we might suggest and I think with the suggestion of one of the speakers about the lack of enforcement through traffic restriction during the school commute hours and that is showing a great deal of flagrant violation that may be one thing certainly could be done immediately to help reinforce the traffic pattern. Traffic enforcement is like anything that it’s training a puppy, you know it needs to be sometimes whacked on the nose once in a while and that’s an important part of traffic enforcement. So it’s something that I think we could explore as a way to help provide in its own relief and some changing in traffic patterns as this is done.

Mr. Stoffel: Steve, could I add something to that? Maybe I’m just speaking a little bit in defense of the residents that the Police department, the Police Chief spent quite a bit of time on one of our meetings and Chief Dwyer, he was very often asked for more enforcement, including that corner I think. In a sense, that’s been tried. Maybe you can get them to go out there and do it again. But they’ll go out there and then they have to go elsewhere. So we can always keep asking them to go, they may go out and take care of the problem in a particular time for a little while but it really doesn’t last, to be honest.
Mr. Emslie: And perhaps the frequency and duration of that, we could explore adding more. I haven’t had the conversation with Chief Dwyer directly in something that he be willing to do, but again, as like anything you can get expect a temporary improvement and it will slip back and it needs to be done on an ongoing basis.

Chair Bialson: Michael.

MOTION

Vice-Chair Griffin: I’d like to move that we approve the Staff Recommendation as written for advising Council to first of all, add south of Embarcadero to a list of potential neighborhood traffic studies. To secondly, nominate Churchill Avenue for a potential list of school commute corridors. Thirdly, change the notification area for collector streets when conducting one of these neighborhood Traffic Calming program studies.

Chair Bialson: Do we have a second?

SECOND

Commissioner Packer: I’ll second it.

Chair Bialson: Does the maker of the motion wish to speak to it?

Vice-Chair Griffin: I think we’ve discussed a lot of the different issues that play here this evening. Personally, I’m highly empathetic to what the people that have shown up tonight they have to say about the frustrations dealing with a highly impacted neighborhood. I think that the ultimate solution is just exactly the way you’ve laid it out which is it needs more comprehensive study. And I think that we’re asking City Council to help us in that regard.

Chair Bialson: Would the seconder care to speak?

Commissioner Packer: Yes, I think Steve spoke very eloquently to what you intend to do and it has to be a thoughtful process. And just I hope that what is done in the way the study, if it goes forward will also be a model to study other neighborhoods because there are other areas in Palo Alto that have problems. It’s not the same configuration but there are other impacted areas and it will also help. I think the process should also be a way of raising the consciousness of all of us who use the streets. And as the study is going on, if there are more articles in the paper about what’s being done, it might help people be more conscious about the way they drive because we’re all part of the problem.

Chair Bialson: Go ahead.

Commissioner Cassel: Well, I was struck by looking back at the Comprehensive Plan maps that the traffic volume on the street is not that much more than the traffic volume on a number of other streets in south Palo Alto. So there had to be something different because the several of the streets that I was looking at were not clamoring in the same way. I think it has to do with the train crossing which causes a severe back up on to these intersections. So obviously the
intersection has to be included, I think we may have to look at all three intersections that have
train crossings because we want to deal with Caltrain all at once and look at some kind of dream

team kind of process with this. It’s hard and that takes time. And in the meantime, I think we
have to look at something that may be temporary that may not be in your normal process and that
may take some people making some decisions, not at your level but at some other level that may
seem a little bureaucratic.

Chair Bialson: Karen.

Commissioner Holman: I’m supporting Phyllis’ comments very much and I’m wondering if the
maker and seconder of the motion would accept a friendly amendment to include that area from
Alma to El Camino as a part of the study area.

Vice-Chair Griffin: I would.

Chair Bialson: Seconder?

Commissioner Packer: Sure, it would only help the process.

Chair Bialson: So I think the motion would include that.

Commissioner Holman: Okay, thank you. And additionally, and hopefully the passage of this
motion, I would like to go just a little bit further to follow up on my initial question and on
Phyllis’ comments as to what might be able to be done in a more immediate fashion to give some
relief.

Chair Bialson: Pat.

Commissioner Burt: Well, I’d like to concur with Phyllis and Karen about that it would be
appropriate for us to have an additional discussion about some more limited measures still being
possible preceding a more comprehensive approach. I’d also like to suggest, Phyllis, when you
refer to Comp Plan volumes, what would be useful would be to compare Comp Plan traffic
volumes which were generated six years or so ago versus current.

Commissioner Cassel: I was doing that. I was looking at the old number of 4,000 and
comparing to 4,000.

Commissioner Burt: Okay. And finally, earlier I brought up the issue of the most appropriate
school commute corridor in this area and one of the members of the public had a concern with
that but I fully recognize that, of course, Churchill is the place of which we cross the tracks. My
point had to do with what is the prospectively more appropriate school commute corridor
between the choices of Coleridge and Churchill. And whether we want to emphasize trying to
promote school bike riders on such a congested, dangerous street. While we certainly want to
retain the bike paths and make them as safe as possible on Churchill, Coleridge runs parallel as
an excellent bike lane and it intersects right at Embarcadero and Middlefield. And certainly for
parents of young children commuting to Walter Hayes, it is recognized as the safer route. They
don’t take their young kids on Churchill, they take it on Coleridge for the most part. Teen-agers
riding to Paly are border daredevil and may welcome Churchill. But I would like us to at least
examine those two streets and in that vein, I’d like to ask whether the makers of the motion
would consider a friendly amendment that might agree to effectively evaluate Churchill and
Coleridge Avenues as possible school commute corridors. And leave open the question rather
than trying to pre-determine at this time which of those is the most appropriate corridor.

Chair Bialson: Michael.

Vice-Chair Griffin: I will accept that.

Chair Bialson: Bonnie.

Commissioner Packer: I think it’s going a little bit beyond the information that I have available,
not that I disagree with the concept. I just wish that our nomination would be limited to
Churchill. I mean, I could think of a lot of streets that are good school commute corridors. I
could name a dozen of them for you right now and I think we’re going a little bit beyond if we
start taking them all. So that’s why as a seconder, I just like to stick to the focus of this Staff
Report and Churchill Avenue and have a later discussion on all the possible school commute
corridors.

Commissioner Burt: We’re not talking about the school commute corridors across the City.
We’re talking about this path. And actually by your motion, we would be restricting and
narrowing the option of what’s the most appropriate one and making a pre-determination, that
Churchill is the most appropriate. Whereas my motion would defer to Staff the evaluation of
those two alternatives and I guess I’d be open to whether Staff has any comment on their
thoughts on that subject and I’d probably be willing to defer if they don’t think that’s appropriate
direction.

Chair Bialson: The way I read this recommendation of Staff’s, it is to nominate Churchill for
future list of school commute corridors. It does not deny the possibility of including Coleridge at
some point in the future. And so I don’t want to expand this discussion this discussion beyond
the matter at hand which is the Churchill Traffic Calming project.

Commissioner Burt: Well, I certainly see the two as intrinsically interrelated. It’s an alternative
in all likelihood of Churchill and Coleridge.

Chair Bialson: Then I think at some point, both of them can be nominated and can be studied but
that’s not the purpose of this meeting. And it was not on the agenda. So I will, as Chair, take the
position that I’d like to keep the motions focused unless I have agreement of both the maker and
the seconder to amend their motion. I don’t have that at this point. So I think what we would
like to do at this time is perhaps get a sense of the Commissions’ feeling with regard to the
motion as made by Michael and seconded by Bonnie as to what the vote is and then we can have
a vote on another motion if you wish to make one at that time. So do I have any other comments
with regard to the motion that Michael made? I believe everyone have spoken but myself. And
I’m going to be supporting that motion. And I’d like to vote on that motion.

MOTION PASSED

All those in favor of Michael’s motion, please say aye.
All: Aye.

Chair Bialson: All those against? Okay. That’s 5 and 1 abstention. Now, if you’d like to make an alternate motion, an additional motion then you may do so.

Commissioner Holman: Can I get clarification first that might make a motion. I’m sympathetic to your point, Pat, but I want to get clarification from Staff. Would the nomination of Churchill as a school commute corridor preclude the consideration of Coleridge as the school commute corridor? Are we maybe well intentionally complicating perhaps our direction?

Mr. Kott: In terms of our own process, we will be coming back to the Commission to solicit nominations. This is across the board citywide, this Commission being one source of nominations and the neighborhood associations as being another and so forth. Commissioner Burt’s point was well taken. There’s no doubt though that Coleridge will be considered as one of the possibilities. The Commission will have a big say in the criteria we use and the future nominations, as well as the final list to be sent off to Council. So Commissioner Burt, you will have at least two more cracks at it.

Commissioner Holman: I think if I could follow up on one. Again, as Pat said earlier though not as a part of the citywide but as a part of this study would we by not making a separate motion...let me put it this way. Do we need to make a separate motion to include Coleridge as a possible school commute corridor in addition to Churchill being considered in this study?

Mr. Kott: I don’t believe that that is necessary, no. Our intent in offering Coleridge at this meeting is as I said earlier, to some extent symbolic. It’s a recognition that there is a very big problem facing residents on Churchill and also their children who are commuting to school. However, as Commissioner Packer has noted we all know that there are many, many school commute streets in Palo Alto that also have many dangers for school children. So there’ll be other opportunities. We did provide quite a bit of material to this Commission on conditions on Churchill. We have not provided anything like that for any other streets this evening.

Chair Bialson: Okay. Do you have another question? Go ahead.

Commissioner Burt: Yes. Joe, are you saying that Staff may consider both establishing both Churchill and Coleridge as school commute corridors? That both might become them?

Mr. Kott: Sure, Commissioner Burt. There’s no doubt we would. In practice, we would, sure. I think the intent tonight was to kind of do a Churchill recognition night you might say. Or nearly we think a recognition as being something to inspire in this case, it’s recognition of a real problem and kind of an emphasis on it. And one of the things we can do is through these school commute corridor program, we can address particular problems through investments and inhibitions on more traffic.

Mr. Emslie: I would say it’s essential and not in just this school commute corridor to consider bifurcated school routes that since we have a directional influence towards traffic, we may want a.m. commute traffic to travel on one path and have a parallel path for p.m. So it’s actually going to be a very common thread. It’s going to involve the whole discussion at school commute
corridors so it is very much in line with our thinking in terms of providing parallel routes that
goes counter commute, if you will, to provide the maximum degree of safety.

Chair Bialson: Thank you.

Commissioner Burt: On that basis, I think I’m comfortable with deferring further discussion of
that issue. I remain concerned with a perspective practice of choosing a more dangerous,
congested street to place a school commute corridor on when they’re immediately adjacent street
is inherently safer, but we can hold that discussion in greater depth in the future.

Chair Bialson: Thank you. Now, I understand that the Commissioners wish to speak to perhaps
some temporary measures that can be taken. Is that correct, with regard to what might be done
for the Churchill Avenue residents? I heard that from Karen and I believe I heard that from
Phyllis. I think we can spend a few minutes talking about that but I’d like to make sure we don’t
go too far because I think Staff has already spent a great deal of time on this and perhaps we can
float some ideas.

Commissioner Cassel: I’m not sure what Staff can do without it coming from City Council. In
other words, it may have to be a City Council direction to try to do something that would be
temporary and so perhaps several of them might have to decide whether or not they would like
that to have and rather the Staff is working under guidelines that they currently have.

Chair Bialson: Does Staff think there is anything that we can do to assist in this process?

Mr. Kott: We will definitely convey in our reports to Council the Commission’s interest in
short-term measures. When reports like the one we’re preparing for Council after this meeting
going to Council, Council has alleged can override its own procedures, you might say, in a way that
we can’t without endangering the whole program.

Chair Bialson: Well, I think it’s clear that the entire Commission empathizes a great deal with
the residents of Churchill and surrounding areas and we feel like something needs to be done. If
nothing else has been accomplished these past several years, we’ve more clearly defined the
problem and recognize that we don’t have a solution for it under the presently mandated
programs. So I think I speak for the Commissioners and I think that Karen will add to this that
we would like it strongly conveyed to Council that something needs to be done even though we
do have these wider areas that we need to study.

Commissioner Holman: Yes, I’d much appreciate it as Steve’s comments indicated about how
we’re trying to close the dam with a needle and thread kind of thing. In a way, that wasn’t what
you said, so hope you take no offense in my paraphrasing that. But I’m wondering if it would be
helpful, I think Annette did speak well that we are interested in doing something on an interim
basis and on a more immediate basis. So would it be helpful if we had a motion that we ask
Council or would it be enough just to convey in our words as opposed to a motion that we would
hope that Council would take more immediate action to be able to give some relief to the
neighborhood? Would you prefer a motion or just our comments?

Mr. Emslie: A motion I think is a good way of communicating with the Council. Clearly, if
there is an interim solution that we can do quickly and have, in fact, have them change, Staff is
100% in support of that, the caveat though is I don’t want perhaps temporary measures to be a
diversion that takes attention away from what maybe very substantial long-term solutions and
ends up being the cause to [inaudible], if you will, for attention. And really diverting Staff’s
attention away, your attention away, and the Council’s attention away from really concentrating
some of the more systematic solutions which we think are at play here. So that would be the one
kind of criteria that we want to make sure that we don’t have something that just becomes such a
lightning rod that really prevents us from looking at and concentrating on the real solutions. And
I think the Commission is getting very close to describing those in terms of some of the larger
traffic patterns and the development that has occurred in the last 5 to 10 years.

Chair Bialson: Thank you, Steve, I appreciate the warning and I think it’s very appropriate
because we have seen just that sort of dynamic occur where a fix has been, shall we say, re-
characterized by some of the community and the press in the way that takes attention from the
underlying problem. Given that, I would ask the Commissioners, do you think it is appropriate
to do anything more at this point or recognize that Staff has wrestled with this mightily for a long
time and that they have recommended their best in the Staff Report. We have moved that Staff
Report. We’ve asked for them to indicate in their report to Council that we all feel that this is an
item that needs to be addressed. I would hope that whoever is liaised on it, the time that the
Council is meeting to discuss this matter emphasize and perhaps paraphrase some of the things
that we have said and that Steve has said to get the Council’s attention. Does the Commission
feel that it’s necessary to do anything further by way of a motion at this time? Pat.

Commissioner Burt: Yes, I think as Steve who indicated, they thought that a motion would be a
clear message to Council, I think it would be appropriate. And I would just like to add that I
think a reflection on how we got to here is important. We basically had a convergence, as I see it
of two ways that we ended up with a non-solution. We had a built-up problem and a great deal
of frustration as this problem had escalated for the residents on Churchill. And when an
alternative was offered, at that time the alternative did not restrict street closures. And basically,
it was the same sort of problem we had in the downtown north traffic plan. It was inconsistent
with our Comprehensive Plan. It did not set parameters for the neighborhood identifying that
street closure is supposed to be a last resort and not a first choice.

We now have that in the neighborhood Traffic Calming program and it’s something more
comprehensive may deal with a variety of measures. But I suspect very strongly that if street
closures had not been one of the options on the table, then we wouldn’t have had all these people
come out of the neighborhood and block the whole plan all together. That we would have had
some compromise that would have occurred, shy of street closures that would not have done
everything that may need to be done eventually on Churchill, but would have given some interim
relief for now while we go forward with more comprehensive measures.

And I don’t know if we can take that step backward and restart constructively, but I think that
this issue can’t wait for a 5-year program, to give some degree of relief. And if we are very clear
like Steve emphasized, that this would be just an interim measure as a pre-cursor to something
more comprehensive for that entire neighborhood, I think I would like to support that.

Chair Bialson: Pat, do you have a motion to make at this point?

MOTION
Commissioner Burt: Yes, I’ll make a motion that the Planning and Transportation Commission recommends to the City Council that Staff be requested to undertake a re-evaluation of limited interim measures to provide some relief of or some Traffic Calming on Churchill without the risk of diversion on to neighborhood streets.

Chair Bialson: Do I have a second?

SECOND

Commissioner Cassel: I’ll second that.

Chair Bialson: Would you care to speak to it?

Commissioner Burt: I think I already have.

Commissioner Cassel: I think I already have, too.

Chair Bialson: Karen.

Commissioner Holman: I seem to be the amendment person tonight so I’ll certainly support the motion but I also was wondering if we could add to that some language that says, that we’ll take the action that’s indicated in the motion with a clear and published understanding these measures are to be considered as interim and trial basis measures only.

Commissioner Burt: I have no problem with that amendment.

Commissioner Cassel: I have no problems with that.

Chair Bialson: Great. Do we have any comments or would the Commission like to vote? Let’s vote.

MOTION PASSED

All those in favor?

All: Aye.

Chair Bialson: All those opposed? That’s 6 in favor, no opposed. And with that, I think we’ll close the hearing on this matter. Thank you very much.

Mr. Kott: Thank you, Commissioners.

Other Items: None.

Chair Bialson: I don’t think we have any reports. I think we have the representation pretty well established.
REPORTS FROM COMMITTEES. None.

REPORTS FROM OFFICIALS. None.

COMMISSION MEMBER QUESTIONS, COMMENTS, AND/OR ANNOUNCEMENTS.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES. Minutes of Special Meeting of September 5, 2002.

Chair Bialson: We do need to approve the minutes of the Special Meeting of September 5, 2002.

MOTION

Commissioner Cassel: I'll move those minutes.

SECOND

Vice-Chair Griffin: I second it.

MOTION PASSED

Chair Bialson: All those in favor, say aye?

All: Aye.

Chair Bialson: All those opposed? Karen, as I recall, yes?

Commissioner Holman: Two corrections, please. On page 23, line 39. That is “High”, not Homer. And on page 27, line 32, the fifth word from the end of the line, it’s “free”, not fee.

Chair Bialson: So that, if everyone stands by their vote, that’s 5 in favor and I’m abstaining because I was not present. And with that, I’ll close the meeting. Thank you.

NEXT MEETING: Regular Meeting of October 9, 2002.

ADJOURNED: 8:50 pm