



CITY OF  
**PALO  
ALTO**

# Planning & Transportation Commission Action Agenda: April 26, 2023

Council Chambers & Virtual  
6:00 PM

## Call to Order / Roll Call

6:02 pm

Chair Summa called the meeting to order.

Ms. Veronica Dao, Administrative Assistant, conducted the roll call and announced all Commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Hechtman and Commissioner Reckdahl who were absent.

Chair Summa noted Commissioner Reckdahl was running late. She welcomed Commissioner Akin and Commissioner Lu to the Commission and congratulated Commissioner Templeton on her reappointment.

## Oral Communications

The public may speak to any item not on the agenda. Three (3) minutes per speaker.<sup>1,2</sup>

Chair Summa invited members of the public to provide their comments to the Commission on items not on the Agenda.

Ms. Veronica Dao, Administrative Assistant, announced there were no speakers.

## Agenda Changes, Additions and Deletions

The Chair or Commission majority may modify the agenda order to improve meeting management.

Ms. Amy French, Chief Planning Official, announced there were no changes from Staff.

## City Official Reports

### 1. Directors Report, Meeting Schedule and Assignments

Ms. Amy French, Chief Planning Official, reminded there would be a joint session with the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) and City Council on May 8, 2023 to discuss the adoption of the Housing Element. She shared that adjustments were made to the PTC liaisons for Council for the remaining portion of the year.

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1 Mr. Ripon Bhatia, Senior Engineer from the Office of Transportation, reported the Department  
2 of Public Works continued to make progress on the Charleston/Arastradero Corridor.

3 Commissioner Templeton inquired about the maintenance work happening on El Camino Real.

4 Mr. Bhatia confirmed the City continued to work with Caltrans on their major Capital  
5 Improvement Project but the City was not involved in Caltran’s maintenance work.

6 Commissioner Templeton requested further details be shared with the Commission offline on  
7 the maintenance work.

8 Chair Summa announced Commissioner Reckdahl had joined the meeting in person.

9 Ms. French announced on May 10, 2023, the Commission would discuss the Capital  
10 Improvement Plan (CIP) Report and discuss adjusting the By-Laws. She noted there would be a  
11 re-election of the Chair and Vice-Chair at that time.

## 12 **Study Session**

13 Public Comment is Permitted. Three (3) minutes per speaker.

14 2. Study Session to Review Quiet Zone Study and Conceptual Plan for Caltrain Corridor  
15 at Palo Alto Avenue.

16 Mr. Ripon Bhatia, Senior Engineer from the Office of Transportation, reported the Quiet Zone  
17 Study was done in collaboration with the City of Menlo Park. The study analyzed four crossings  
18 in Menlo Park and one crossing, the Palo Alto Avenue/Alma Street crossing, in the City of Palo  
19 Alto. He introduced Peter Meyerhofer and Brent Ogden from Kimley-Horn and Associates who  
20 were procured to conduct the study.

21 Mr. Peter Meyerhofer, Kimley-Horn and Associates, explained the Federal Railroad  
22 Administration (FRA) regulated the railroads and they required trains to sound their horn 20  
23 seconds before entering a crossing. The horns are designed to reach a designated decibel level  
24 to catch the attention of folks crossing the railroad crossing. A Quiet Zone is a section of the  
25 railroad where the train was not required to sound its horn. Per FRA requirements, crossings  
26 must reach specified safety thresholds in order to be certified as a Quiet Zone. Those safety  
27 thresholds were reached by adding Supplemental Safety Measures (SSM) at every crossing; or  
28 through proposed designs in the Quiet Zone Risk Index (QRZ) that qualified the crossings as a  
29 Quiet Zone. Phase 1 of the study included agency coordination, conceptual design/ safety  
30 analyses, public outreach and the production of a final report. Phase 2 included permitting with  
31 the various regulatory agencies, final design, procuring funding, construction and FRA  
32 certification. Many stakeholders had been consulted during the study including Caltrain, the  
33 City of Menlo Park, the City of Palo Alto, FRA, and several others. The study analyzed a 1.5 mile

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1 stretch of railroad between the City of Menlo Park and the City of Palo Alto. The four crossings  
2 considered for the City of Menlo Park included Encinal Avenue, Glenwood Avenue, Oak Grove  
3 Avenue, and Ravenswood Avenue. He shared photos of the conceptual designs for each of the  
4 crossings. The proposed safety improvements for the City of Menlo Park's crossings were a  
5 Four-Quadrant Gate System and sidewalk realignments. For Palo Alto Avenue, a raised median  
6 was required to meet FRA Quiet Zone safety thresholds. All crossings were subject to receiving  
7 new roadway striping and updated signage. He explained at Palo Alto Avenue an elongated, 8  
8 inch or higher raised median was proposed to discourage folks from driving on the wrong side  
9 of the road and going around the down gates. The proposed median improvement was less  
10 expensive than a Four-Quadrant Gate System. Public outreach was conducted and he  
11 encouraged folks to share their thoughts with the City as the project moves to Phase 2. The  
12 next step was to draft the final report before moving to Phase 2. The final report would include  
13 summarized the process of Phase 1 and provide formal recommendations for each city.

14 Mr. Bhatia noted the final report was anticipated to be completed in the fall of 2023. Then the  
15 report would be presented to City Council for final approval. He said the construction cost of  
16 the project was \$150,000. Though Staff was exploring various funding opportunities, funding  
17 would not delay the project and the project would move forward to design and construction  
18 without further delay. Staff predicted it would take 18 to 24 months to receive permits and bids  
19 for the project. Based on the lessons learned from the Palo Alto Avenue crossing, Staff would  
20 begin another Quiet Zone Study for the other three crossings in Palo Alto.

21 Chair Summa invited Commissioners to ask clarifying questions of Staff.

22 Commissioner Templeton found the report interesting and appreciated the City was going to  
23 consider the lessons learned before pursuing Quiet Zones on the other three crossings. She  
24 asked if warning bells would still be used if a Quiet Zone was installed.

25 Mr. Bhatia confirmed that is correct.

26 Mr. Meyerhofer agreed but noted the horns are louder than the bells on the gate assemblies.

27 Commissioner Templeton encouraged Staff to make that point clear to the public.

28 Mr. Bhatia added that engineers were not prohibited from sounding the horn but routine horns  
29 would not be required.

30 Vice-Chair Chang understood the Palo Alto Avenue crossing was included in the study because  
31 of its proximity to the City of Menlo Park's crossings.

32 Mr. Bhatia confirmed that was correct.

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1 Mr. Meyerhofer mentioned the City of Palo Alto could implement its Quiet Zone in advance of  
2 the crossings in the City of Menlo Park.

3 Mr. Brent Ogden, Kimley-Horn and Associate, noted the whistle post, which indicated when an  
4 engineer should sound their horn, is placed a quarter of a mile ahead of a crossing. The nearest  
5 Menlo Park crossing was over a quarter of a mile from the City of Palo Alto and that added  
6 distance allowed the City to move forward on its Quiet Zone project ahead of the City of Menlo  
7 Park.

8 Commissioner Reckdahl asked what agencies had to approve the project and what was the  
9 timeline.

10 Mr. Meyerhofer answered approval was needed from the California Public Utilities Commission  
11 (CPUC) in the form of a GO 88-B Grade Modification Permit. That process took four to six  
12 months but that could be done concurrently to design. Another approval came from the FRA  
13 and Caltrain. He stated that because a field diagnostic meeting was done, the conceptual  
14 designs presented to the Commission already received tentative approval from CPUC and the  
15 FRA. He noted often the process was delayed due to agencies not reaching a consensus on  
16 design but consensus was reached already via the field diagnostic meeting.

17 Commissioner Reckdahl understood the City will be funding the project unless external funding  
18 was found.

19 Mr. Bhatia confirmed that was correct. Quiet Zones were considered to be in the interest of the  
20 community and it was to be paid for by local agencies.

21 Commissioner Lu summarized the City would wait 18 to 24 months to complete the Palo Alto  
22 Avenue Quiet Zone and then begin exploring the other crossings.

23 Mr. Bhatia clarified the City was not waiting 18 to 24 months to start a Quiet Zone Study on the  
24 other crossings. After City Council approves the concept and the design of Palo Alto Avenue,  
25 Staff will begin work for the other crossings.

26 Chair Summa inquired if there was an advantage of Palo Alto moving forward with its Quiet  
27 Zone ahead of the City of Menlo Park.

28 Mr. Bhatia restated the advantage was having the opportunity to implement a Quiet Zone at  
29 Palo Alto Avenue ahead of Menlo Park's crossings. He noted the City of Menlo Park's crossings  
30 were a more complex and expensive project than Palo Altos. Each crossing in Menlo Park was  
31 estimated to be \$2 million and that delayed their project while they sought out funding.

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1 Chair Summa understood coupling the City's project with the City of Menlo Park's project was  
2 an advantage.

3 Mr. Bhatia answered no, coupling the project together would delay Palo Alto's project.

4 Chair Summa was interested in discussing if the City should separate its project from Menlo  
5 Park's project.

6 Mr. Bhatia asked if Chair Summa was commenting on all the crossings in the City.

7 Chair Summa answered yes.

8 Mr. Bhatia shared the other three railroad crossings in the city are close to signalized  
9 intersections and would be more complex than Palo Alto Avenue. Staff believed there was no  
10 significant cost savings if the Palo Alto Avenue/Alma Street crossing was coupled with the other  
11 crossings in the city.

12 Commissioner Templeton reiterated once the Quiet Zone at Palo Alto Avenue was approved,  
13 Staff would move forward with the installation of the Quiet Zone at Palo Alto Avenue and kick  
14 off a new Quiet Zone Study for the other three crossings.

15 Mr. Bhatia confirmed that was correct.

16 Chair Summa invited members of the public to share their comments with the Commission.

17 Ms. Veronica Dao, Administrative Assistant, called the public speakers.

18 Mr. Josh Orenberg, the representative for the 101 Alma Community, shared he submitted a  
19 petition with over 200 signatures in support of the Quiet Zone and the community was  
20 anxiously waiting for the completion of the project.

21 Mr. Neilson Buchanan mentioned he lived two blocks away from the crossing and thanked City  
22 Staff for pursuing a Quiet Zone at the crossing. He stated he was optimistic the City would  
23 receive approval from the various agencies and this was a great opportunity for model planning  
24 on tough issues.

25 Mr. Adrian Brandt encouraged the City to move forward with Palo Alto Avenue and found there  
26 was no advantage to coupling the crossing with the other crossings in the City. The City was  
27 extremely fortunate the proposed improvements were considerably less expensive than the  
28 City of Menlo Park's. He encouraged the City to solicit funding from the High Speed Rail  
29 Authority because they are required to have four-quadrant gates when they bring High Speed  
30 Rail to the peninsula. He predicted a Four-Quadrant Gate System would be needed for the  
31 other three crossings in the city. He mentioned the bells are significantly less than the horns

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1 and Caltrain did not have a drive-around problem. He encouraged the City to reach out to the  
2 City of Petaluma and other cities in California that had been able to implement their Quiet  
3 Zones very quickly.

4 Chair Summa closed public comment and brought the item back to the Commission for  
5 discussion.

6 Commissioner Reckdahl stated this was a really good idea but asked what additional risk was  
7 there. Also, he wanted to know how many accidents were caused by gate malfunctions.

8 Mr. Bhatia answered if a gate malfunctioned, the train is required to reduce its speed and blow  
9 its horn.

10 Mr. Ogden concurred the engineer would blow the horn if the gates malfunctioned.

11 Commissioner Reckdahl pressed if the engineers are informed that the gates were  
12 malfunctioning.

13 Mr. Ogden explained there was a signal that the engineer could see that indicated the crossing  
14 signal had been activated. The gates are designed to drop down in a power failure and remain  
15 down until power returns.

16 Commissioner Reckdahl asked how many car/train accidents there were in Palo Alto in general.

17 Mr. Bhatia noted the FRA website had those statistics.

18 Mr. Meyerhofer added that statistics directly impacted the QRZ and what improvements are  
19 needed to implement a Quiet Zone.

20 Commissioner Reckdahl inquired how Palo Alto Avenue differed from the other three crossings  
21 in the City.

22 Mr. Bhatia restated the other crossings are close to a signalized intersection. Other factors  
23 considered were the volume of traffic, pedestrian volume and collision history.

24 Mr. Ogden remarked he had not analyzed the other crossings in the city and concurred with  
25 Mr. Bhatia's explanation.

26 Commissioner Reckdahl asked if the approval rate for a Quiet Zone at the other crossings was  
27 high or did the additional factors impact the approval.

28 Mr. Ogden restated that if the approved SSMs are implemented then a Quiet Zone will be  
29 approved.

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1 Commissioner Templeton found Commissioner Reckdahl’s question to be informative. She  
2 asked if the risk of the safety features failing was included in the study.

3 Mr. Ogden remarked once a median is built, it is not subject to failure and that SSM only  
4 applied to Palo Alto Avenue.

5 Vice-Chair Chang inquired how the improvement would be impacted by the City’s grade  
6 separation project.

7 Mr. Bhatia answered Palo Alto Avenue crossing was currently on hold. Once the other three  
8 crossings complete the conceptual design phase, Palo Alto Avenue will be moved into the  
9 review of alternatives and development.

10 Vice-Chair Chang supported moving the project forward due to the low cost and its significant  
11 benefit to the City.

12 Mr. Ogden mentioned with respect to the collision history at Palo Alto Avenue, there were two  
13 collisions within the past decade and there were no recorded injuries in those accidents.

14 Commissioner Lu mentioned cycling along Palo Alto Avenue was reasonably awkward and the  
15 left turn where the median was being extended into cause the bicycle lane to be exposed.

16 Chair Summa also wondered if the improvements would affect bicycles. She agreed the project  
17 should move forward and folks nearby have been requesting relief from the horns for a while.  
18 She encouraged Staff to consider any and all improvements that would increase bicycle safety.

19 Commissioner Akin stated the benefits of the project far outweighed the cost and he could  
20 support it.

21 Commissioner Templeton echoed Commissioner Akin’s comment.

22 Chair Summa closed the item and moved to Action Item 3.

23 **Action Items**

24 Public Comment is Permitted. Applicants/Appellant Teams: Fifteen (15) minutes, plus three (3) minutes rebuttal.  
25 All others: Five (5) minutes per speaker.<sup>1,3</sup>

26 3. Review and Adopt 2023-24 PTC Work Plan

27 Ms. Amy French, Chief Planning Official, reported on March 29, 2023 the PTC discussed its  
28 2023-2024 Work Plan. PTC provided direction to Staff to return with an updated Work Plan that  
29 reflected the March 29, 2023 discussion. In the Work Plan, Goals A, G, H, I and J were goals for  
30 the Office of Transportation. With respect to goals related to the Planning and Development

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1 Services Department, the Housing Element’s implementation continued to be a large amount of  
2 work for the City. Goal F was split into Goals F1 and F2, and they were related to State  
3 legislation passed in 2021/2022 and future legislation. Goals K, L and M were added to the  
4 Work Plan and they addressed the Rental Registry Ordinance, Bird Safe Glass and Dark Skies,  
5 and Comprehensive Plan Implementation.

6 Commissioner Akin asked if there was any work in the pipeline for San Francisquito Creek.

7 Ms. French noted any current planning projects would come before the Commission whether  
8 they were anticipated or not.

9 Commissioner Reckdahl inquired if the work on the creek was Council directed or Staff driven  
10 with respect to the replacement of the bridges. He acknowledged that the Joint Powers  
11 Authority (JPA) was driving the work on the bridge located in the City of Menlo Park.

12 Ms. French answered the Public Works Department was in charge of public improvements  
13 located within the public right of way but said she’d follow up with the Director of the Public  
14 Works Department.

15 Commissioner Reckdahl requested Staff provide an answer on the next steps for the bridges  
16 and who were the decision-makers who were driving the schedule.

17 Commissioner Templeton suggested Commissioner Reckdahl clarify which bridges he was  
18 asking about.

19 Commissioner Reckdahl answered the bridge at Newell Street and Chaucer Street.

20 Commissioner Akin asked if the Lincoln Avenue/Middlefield Road safety improvements should  
21 be included in the PTC’s Work Plan under Goal A.

22 Ms. Sylvia Star-Lack, Transportation Planning Manager, thought that Work Plan was on the  
23 PTC’s Work Plan and noted she’d check with Staff to see if the plan could be added.

24 Vice-Chair Chang recalled Mr. Rius, at a prior PTC meeting, had mentioned the Commission  
25 would be considering that safety work at a future meeting in 2023-2024.

26 Commissioner Templeton believed that was an oversight and emphasized there must be a  
27 discussion about collision areas in Palo Alto. The community needed to understand why certain  
28 areas were being prioritized over other areas.

29 Chair Summa commented on Goal L and suggested the language read “Bird Safe Construction”.  
30 She emphasized both Goals L and M were a high priority for her.

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1 Commissioner Akin asked for Goal G, did the commercial parking improvements include an  
2 update on parking capacity signage?

3 Ms. Star-Lack believed that was correct.

4 Commissioner Templeton endorsed Chair Summa's suggestion regarding Goal L.

5 Commissioner Lu strongly believed the Work Plan should be prioritized and asked if there was  
6 interest in that.

7 Vice-Chair Chang noted the majority of the Commission's work was reactionary and not of the  
8 Commission's choosing. As a group, the Commission did not want to create an artificial  
9 prioritization because the Commission cannot control the work. However, the Commission  
10 agreed that road safety was a high priority but acknowledged the majority of its time would be  
11 focused on implementing the Housing Element.

12 Ms. French believed there was some leeway in some of the goals with respect to priority.

13 Commissioner Templeton believed prioritizing the Work Plan would not be a productive use of  
14 the Commission's time. She predicted it would take hours for the Commission to discuss and  
15 come to a consensus on what was the highest priority. She noted each Commissioner  
16 individually expressed what their priority was for the coming year and she encouraged the new  
17 Commissioners to do the same.

18 Commissioner Lu agreed with Commissioner Templeton. With respect to Goal C, he asked if the  
19 Coordinated Area Plans (CAP) should be prioritized in the Work Plan.

20 Chair Summa believed that required Council direction but encouraged Commissioner Lu to  
21 share his preferred prioritization.

22 Commissioner Lu commented he did not have a strong preference and would consider what  
23 options were available with respect to prioritization.

24 Vice-Chair Chang stated Commissioners should voice their opinion but agreed it would take a  
25 long time for the Commission to reach a consensus on what should be prioritized.

26 Commissioner Akin saw value in the observation that prioritization was a separate task from  
27 the generation of the list of goals.

28 Commissioner Templeton stated her highest priority is to decrease the amount of bicycle,  
29 pedestrian and car collisions. That priority was reflected in several of the goals and she  
30 supported the Work Plan.

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1 Commissioner Reckdahl agreed prioritizing the Work Plan would not be a good use of time. He  
2 considered the Work Plan to be a broad to-do list and encouraged Commissioners to consider  
3 periodically how they could move each goal forward.

4 Ms. Star-Lack remarked the Transportation Element prioritized safety as its highest priority and  
5 that was called out in the Comprehensive Plan.

6 Commissioner Lu appreciated having the priorities baked into the Comprehensive Plan.

7 MOTION

8 Vice-Chair Chang moved the Planning Commission approve the Work Plan with the suggested  
9 modifications. First to add to Project Goal A the Lincoln Avenue and Middlefield project. Second  
10 to add a study of collision issues and third, modify Project Goal L to read Bird Safe  
11 Glass/Construction.

12 SECOND

13 Commissioner Templeton seconded.

14 Chair Summa invited public comment; seeing none she asked for a roll call vote.

15 VOTE

16 Ms. Veronica Dao, Administrative Assistant, conducted a roll call vote and announced the  
17 motion passed 6-0-1.

18 MOTION PASSED 6(Akin, Chang, Lu, Reckdahl, Summa, Templeton) -0 -1(Hechtman absent)

19 **Commission Action:** Motion by Chang, seconded by Templeton. Pass 6-0 (Hechtman absent)

## 20 **Approval of Minutes**

21 Public Comment is Permitted. Five (5) minutes per speaker.<sup>1,3</sup>

22 4. Approval of Planning & Transportation Commission Draft Verbatim and Summary  
23 minutes of March 8, 2023

24 MOTION

25 Commissioner Reckdahl moved to approve the minutes.

26 SECOND

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1 Vice-Chair Chang seconded.

2 VOTE

3 Ms. Veronica Dao, Administrative Assistant, conducted a roll call vote and announced the  
4 motion passed 4-0-2-1.

5 MOTION PASSED 4(Chang, Reckdahl, Summa, Templeton) -0 -2(Akin, Lu abstain) -1(Hechtman  
6 absent)

7 **Commission Action:** Motion by Reckdahl, seconded by Chang. Pass 4-0-2-1 (Akin and Lu  
8 abstain)(Hechtman absent)

9 5. Approval of Planning & Transportation Commission Draft Summary Minutes of March  
10 29, 2023.

11 MOTION

12 Commissioner Reckdahl moved to approve the draft summary minutes of March 29, 2023.

13 SECOND

14 Vice-Chair Chang seconded.

15 VOTE

16 Ms. Veronica Dao, Administrative Assistant, conducted a roll call vote and announced the  
17 motion passed 4-0-2-1.

18 MOTION PASSED 4(Chang, Reckdahl, Summa, Templeton) -0 -2(Akin, Lu abstain) -1(Hechtman  
19 absent)

20 **Commission Action:** Motion by Reckdahl, seconded by Chang. Passed 4-0-2-1 (Akin and Lu  
21 abstain)(Hechtman absent)

## 22 **Committee Items**

23 None

## 24 **Commissioner Questions, Comments or Announcements**

25 Vice-Chair Chang announced the May Fete Parade would take place on Saturday, May 6, 2023  
26 and Commissioners should RSVP by April 28, 2023.

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1 Commissioner Templeton asked if the City was working with Caltrans on bicycle paths for El  
2 Camino Real.

3 Ms. Sylvia Star-Lack, Transportation Planning Manager, stated the City Manager would be  
4 briefing City Council soon on the matter.

5 Chair Summa adjourned the meeting.

6 **Adjournment**

7 7:27 pm

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