



Architectural Review Board

Staff Report (ID # 8073)

Report Type: Action Items **Meeting Date:** 7/13/2017

Summary Title: Charleston-Arastradero Corridor: Planting Plan

Title: PUBLIC HEARING / QUASI-JUDICIAL. Charleston-Arastradero Corridor Complete Streets and Green Infrastructure Project (17PLN-00128): Recommendation on Staff's Request for Approval of a Major Architectural Review of a Planting Plan in Conjunction With the Charleston-Arastradero Corridor Complete Streets and Green Infrastructure Project. The proposal spans 2.3 miles from Miranda Avenue to Fabian Way on Charleston Road and Arastradero Road. The Concept Plan for the Project Was Previously Approved by City Council on September 28, 2015. Environmental Assessment: An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) Was Prepared for the Project in 2004. An Addendum to the IS/MND Was Prepared in Conjunction With the Concept Plan Approval in 2015. For More Information Contact the Project Engineer Valerie Tam at valerie.tam@cityofpaloalto.org or the Project Planner Graham Owen at graham.owen@cityofpaloalto.org.

From: Hillary Gitelman

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB) take the following action(s):

1. Recommend approval of the proposed project to the Director of Planning and Community Environment based on findings and subject to conditions of approval.

Report Summary

The Public Works Department is proposing a plant palette and planting plan in conjunction with the Charleston-Arastradero Corridor Complete Streets and Green Infrastructure Project. The Concept Plan line for the Corridor project was previously approved by the City Council on September 28, 2015, and included conceptual landscaping but did not present a specific plant

palette. The current proposal includes 65% drawings which show the location of trees, shrubs, and groundcovers located in the proposed road medians, bulbouts, and bioretention facilities associated with the project, as well as a specific plant palette. The project is subject to Architectural Review findings, and staff has included draft findings for approval in this report.

Background

Project Information

Owner:	City of Palo Alto
Architect:	Mark Thomas and Company
Representative:	Valerie Tam, Public Works Engineering Division
Legal Counsel:	Office of the City Attorney

Property Information

Address:	Arastradero Road from Miranda Avenue to El Camino Real Charleston Road from El Camino Real to Fabian Way
Neighborhood:	Adobe Meadow/Meadow Park, Charleston Gardens, Fairmeadow, Greenmeadow, Walnut Grove, Charleston Meadows, Palo Alto Orchards, Barron Park, Green Acres
Lot Dimensions & Area:	2.3 miles starting at Miranda Ave and Arastradero and ending at Fabian Way and Charleston Road; width of right-of-way varies from 80 to 120 feet along corridor
Housing Inventory Site:	N/A
Located w/in a Plume:	No
Protected/Heritage Trees:	None
Historic Resource(s):	None
Existing Improvement(s):	2.3 miles of asphalt and sidewalk
Existing Land Use(s):	Residential Arterial Road
Adjacent Land Uses & Zoning:	North: various, GM, PC-4918 West: various, R-1 (8,000)(S) to RM-30 East: various, R-1 (7,000)(S) to RM-30, CS (H), and CN (GF, P) South: various, RE to RM-40
Aerial View of Property:	



Source: maps.google.com

Land Use Designation & Applicable Plans

Zoning Designation:	various
Comp. Plan Designation:	Not Applicable
Context-Based Design Criteria:	Not Applicable
Downtown Urban Design Guide:	Not Applicable
South of Forest Avenue Coordinated Area Plan:	Not Applicable
Baylands Master Plan:	Not Applicable
El Camino Real Design Guidelines (1976 / 2002):	Not Applicable
Proximity to Residential Uses or Districts (150'):	Yes
Located w/in the Airport Influence Area:	Not Applicable

Prior City Reviews & Action

City Council:	Concept Plan Line Approval – September 28, 2015 http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/49065
PTC:	Concept Plan Line Approval – April 29, 2015 https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/47044
HRB:	None
ARB:	None

Project Description

The Charleston-Arastradero Corridor is a heavily used 2.3 mile roadway that services 11 schools, several parks, shopping centers, commercial uses, a library, day care centers, non-profits, and two community centers. The existing corridor has little to no traffic calming features and lacks protection for bicyclists and pedestrians, which is particularly an issue during peak traffic hours. For years, residents and other stakeholders have expressed concerns regarding safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers, lack of integration with the surrounding community, and diminished community value due to minimal vegetation and trees in the right-of-way.

In 2003, Council directed staff to prepare a Charleston-Arastradero Corridor to address school commute and other travel safety concerns for pedestrians, bicyclists and drivers, as well as to enhance residential amenities along the corridor, without inducing traffic to shift onto nearby residential streets and maintaining the ability to handle existing and projected traffic. After two implementation phases with trial demonstrations in 2008 and 2012, Council approved the concept plan line presented by the consultant, Mark Thomas, on September 28, 2015.

The concept plan line has been further refined by Mark Thomas and landscape architect firm Gates and Associates (Gates) on behalf of the City's Public Works Department. Mark Thomas has completed the 65% plans, specifications, and estimate, and Gates included the landscaping plan. The plant palette proposed by Gates is a combination of California native species and species that adapt to the local climate with lower water use. Landscaping is included in both medians and bulb-outs to help beautify the existing corridor which currently is mostly asphalt.

In addition to landscaping, public art by Susan Zoccola will be installed in medians and bulb-outs. Public Works Engineering has been working with Public Art in order to determine viable locations for the pieces. Zoccola's vision for the corridor is to include intricate pieces that resemble wheels in motion to relate to the corridor's heavy bicycle traffic. Her design also pays tribute to diatoms, bacteria found in water, to relate to the project's green infrastructure features.

The Concept Plan line did not include specific plant species, and given the size of the Corridor plan, the plant palette is being returned to the Architectural Review Board for consideration.

Requested Entitlements, Findings and Purview:

The following discretionary applications are being requested:

- Architectural Review – Major (AR): The process for evaluating this type of application is set forth in PAMC 18.77.070. AR applications are reviewed by the ARB and recommendations are forwarded to the Planning & Community Environment Director for action within five business days of the Board’s recommendation. Action by the Director is appealable to the City Council if filed within 14 days of the decision. AR projects are evaluated against specific findings. All findings must be made in the affirmative to approve the project. Failure to make any one finding requires project redesign or denial. The findings to approve an AR application are provided in Attachment B.

Analysis¹

The landscaping for the project is consistent throughout the length of the corridor and incorporates a variety of plant material. Heights of the plants are taken into consideration in fire access zones as well as in areas that require sight distances when making turns. The plant palette includes a number of tree species, including valley and cork oak, European hornbeam, western redbud, crape myrtle, scarlet maple, and sycamore. Several sections of the corridor, in particular between Middlefield Road and San Antonio Road, contain existing underground utilities that may conflict with larger trees. In those areas, a selection of smaller trees and shrubs (“Revised Plant Palette for Underground Utilities”) are proposed including Eastern Redbud, Elegant Tristania, Marina Madrone, and Corns Housa Dogwood. Additional groundcovers and bioretention plantings are noted in the plant palette.

Public Works Engineering has been discussing these conflict areas with Utilities in order to propose a solution that would not result in the removal of a high number of proposed trees from the project. In “Tree Conflicts with Wet Underground Utilities”, green circles represent trees that are 5 feet or more away from underground wet utilities, and red circles represent trees that are within 5 feet. Utility lines are also shown with red representing sanitary sewer, purple for gas, blue for water, green for storm drain, and black for dry utilities. Concern is only for wet utilities because tree roots may search for water at joints in the pipelines. The wet underground utility line that has the most conflicts is the sanitary sewer line.

The first solution was to specify alternate tree species that were smaller as shown in “Revised Plant Palette for Underground Utilities”. Smaller tree roots are not expected to grow any larger than 3.5 feet deep. The City’s Urban Forestry Section and Public Works Engineering have reviewed the proposed alternate tree and shrubs species.

¹ The information provided in this section is based on analysis prepared by the report author prior to the public hearing. The Architectural Review Board in its review of the administrative record and based on public testimony may reach a different conclusion from that presented in this report and may choose to make alternative findings. A change to the findings may result in a final action that is different from the staff recommended action in this report.

The initial 5-foot clearance resulted in removing 62% of the proposed trees. In further discussions, an alternate solution was developed that include installation of a tree root barrier system for trees that would be within 5 feet of wet underground utilities. A tree root barrier system, such as DeepRoot Tree Root Barriers, would help direct tree root growth downwards and not linearly towards wet underground utilities. In “Tree Conflicts with Wet Underground Utilities”, the trees that are circled in red are further broken down to be within a 1 foot clear, 1-2 feet clear, 2-3 feet clear, and 3-5 feet clear from a wet utility pipeline. The following table shows the percentage of proposed trees and their clearances from wet underground utilities.

Distance within a Wet Underground Utility	Percentage of Proposed Trees
1 foot	26%
1-2 feet	14%
2-3 feet	17%
3-5 feet	5%

Public Works Engineering is continuing to work with Utilities and Urban Forestry to develop an acceptable clear distance for wet utilities if a tree root barrier is used in conjunction with an alternate smaller tree species. Proposed trees that are within 1 feet of wet utilities are foreseen to be removed regardless due to its close proximity to wet underground utilities.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, Area Plans and Guidelines²

The project is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as noted in the ARB Findings (Attachment B). The planting plan and plant palette refine the landscaping component of a previously-approved project which implements a roadway project identified in the Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan. The plantings would be located in traffic medians, intersection bulb-outs, and bioretention facilities that are intended to calm traffic, enhance bicycle and pedestrian connectivity and safety, and provide stormwater treatment for the roadway.

Multi-Modal Access & Parking

This project consistent with the Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation Plan in that it will improve safety for pedestrians, bicycles and automobiles. The project is located on a Safe Routes to School path for Briones Elementary School, Hoover Elementary School, Terman Middle School and Gunn High School. The Transportation Division has given their comments regarding the project’s design, which will be reflected in the 100% drawings that are ultimately implemented. Comments included but were not limited to the review of striping detail specifications, placement of pavement markings, design specifications for turns, and traffic signal design.

Consistency with Application Findings

² The Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan is available online: <http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/topics/projects/landuse/compplan.asp>

The findings for approval of an Architectural Review application are included in Attachment B. A detailed palette can be found in “Plant Palette”. The landscaping proposed along the Charleston-Arastradero Corridor consists of regionally indigenous plantings that are drought-tolerant, and therefore in conformance with the ARB’s required findings.

Environmental Review

The subject project has been assessed in accordance with the authority and criteria contained in the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the State CEQA Guidelines, and the environmental regulations of the City. An Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) Was Prepared for the Charleston Arastradero Corridor Project in 2004. An addendum to the IS/MND was prepared in conjunction with the Concept Plan approval in 2015. The planting plan and palette constitute a refinement of the landscaping identified with the Concept Plan, and present no environmental impacts beyond those identified in the IS/MND. The project has also been reviewed and approved in conformance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The CEQA and NEPA information is included in Attachment C.

Public Notification, Outreach & Comments

The Palo Alto Municipal Code requires notice of this public hearing be published in a local paper and mailed to owners and occupants of property within 600 feet of the subject property at least ten days in advance. Notice of a public hearing for this project was published in the *Palo Alto Weekly* on June 30, 2017, which is 13 days in advance of the meeting. Postcard mailing occurred on July 3, 2017, which is 10 days in advance of the meeting.

Public Comments

As of the writing of this report, no project-related, public comments were received.

Alternative Actions

In addition to the recommended action, the Architectural Review Board may:

1. Approve the project with modified findings or conditions;
2. Continue the project to a date (un)certain; or
3. Recommend project denial based on revised findings.

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Attachments:

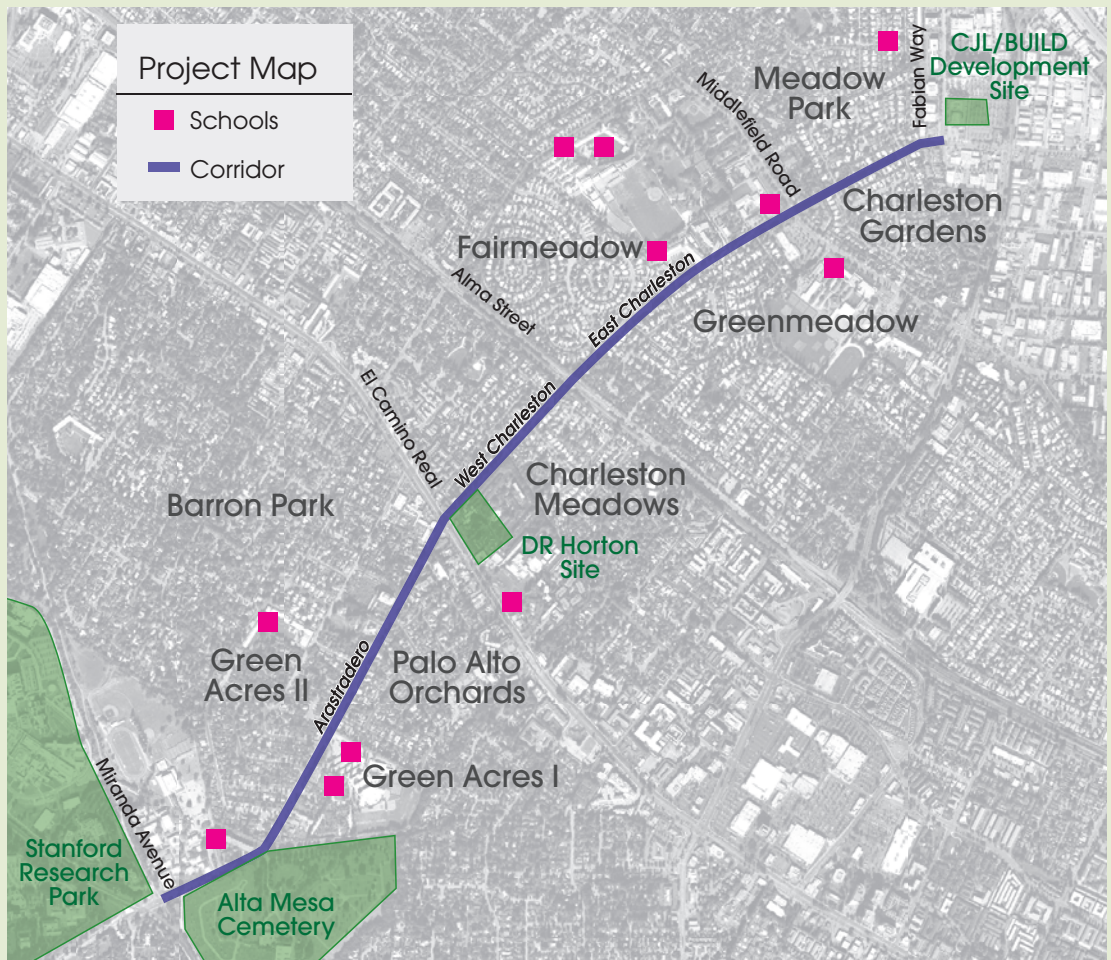
- Attachment A: Project Map (PDF)
- Attachment B: ARB Findings (DOCX)
- Attachment C: Environment Assessment (DOCX)
- Attachment D: Project Plans (DOCX)



CORRIDOR MAP

The Charleston-Arastradero Corridor:

- Located in south Palo Alto
- High volume, 2.3 mile roadway
- Serving 11 Schools and lined with Private Residences, Commercial Uses and Non-Profits



Attachment C

Environmental Documents

All environmental documents for the Charleston-Arastradero Corridor Project can be reviewed online here:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/news/displaynews.asp?NewsID=3794&TargetID=145>

A direct link to the Initial Study and Draft Mitigated Negative Declaration (MND) (December 2003) can be found here:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/57919>

A direct link to the Addendum to the Final Initial Study/MND (August 2015) can be found here:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/57923>

A direct link to County Notice of Declaration for California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) (November 2015) can be found here:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/57918>

A direct link the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) (November 2015) can be found here:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/57920>

Attachment D

Project Plans

Hardcopies of project plans are provided to ARB Members. These plans are available to the public online and by visiting the Planning and Community Environmental Department on the 5th floor of City Hall at 250 Hamilton Avenue.

Directions to review Project plans online:

The Public Works Engineering Division maintains a news detail for the Charleston-Arastradero Corridor Plan. The website has additional information on the development of the plan and associated environmental documents.

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/news/displaynews.asp?NewsID=3794&TargetID=145>

A direct link to the projects plans are included here:

<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/57425>

Additionally, the Transportation Division maintains a website for the Charleston-Arastradero Corridor Plan. The website contains background information on the development of the concept plan line and associated studies. A link to the website is included here:

http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/gov/city_information/projects/transit/charleston.asp