



# Planning & Transportation Commission Action Agenda: October 25, 2023

Council Chambers & Virtual  
5:00 PM

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## Call to Order / Roll Call

5:02 pm

Chair Summa called to order the October 25<sup>th</sup> Planning and Transportation Commission Special Joint meeting with the Human Relations Commission (HRC).

Ms. Veronica Dao, Administrative Associate, conducted the roll call and announced all commissioners were present with the exception of Commissioner Reckdahl, who had an excused absence.

Minka van der Zwaag conducted a roll call for the Human Relations Commission, all Commissioners were present except for Chair Kaloma Smith (arrived late).

Chair Summa stated that the HRC's Chair (HRC) Smith would be arriving approximately thirty minutes late.

## 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 share their comments with the Commission on items not on the Agenda.

Ms. Dao, Administrative Associate, announced there were no speakers for oral communications.

## Agenda Changes, Additions and Deletions

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

Chief Planning Official Amy French suggested moving forward with the Agenda after the joint study session with the Human Relations Commission, Chair Summa agreed.

## Study Session\*\*

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

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**2. LEGISLATIVE STUDY SESSION:** Recommendation to City Council Regarding Proposed Amendments to Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Title 18 (Zoning) Chapter 18.42 (Standards for Special Uses) Section 18.42.160 (Safe Parking) to Permanently Establish the Congregation-Based Safe Parking Program by Allowing Overnight Safe Parking as an Ancillary Use to a Church's and Religious Institution's Use in All Zoning Districts Where Churches and Religious Institutions are Allowed Uses, and Establishing Regulations Related to Safe Parking, Including a Maximum Number of Vehicles Per Night on Each Site.

Ms. Rachel Tanner, Interim Manager Specialist with the Department of Planning and Development spoke regarding the Safe Parking Program and explained the purpose for the joint session was to have the study session together with the PTC and the HRC so that they would benefit from hearing each other and sharing views, thoughts and recommendations for City Council, as opposed to taking the item to City Council sequentially. The Safe Parking Program is designed to provide a safe place for un-housed participants dwelling in their vehicle to have a better option than parking on the street and connecting them to services that will ultimately lead to secure and stable housing. The Safe parking Program was developed due to the needs of un-housed Palo Alto residents. The participants have added safety in addition to connections to services, and access to restroom and hand washing facilities. Congregation Based and 24 hour parking are the two types of programs provided to the participants. The first permit was submitted and approved in March of 2021 and the latest permit was issued in June of 2023. The program has continued providing safe spaces for participants. Congregation based programs are at churches and religious institutions; and the 24 hour parking programs are at publicly owned parking lots. The lot 24 hour lot is located near the Baylands at 2000 Geng Road and provides spaces for RVs. The City of Palo Alto count of people experiencing homelessness decreased 25 percent, from 274 in 2022 to 206 in 2023. The 206 people counted included 187 unsheltered, 181 of which were sleeping in vehicles. Of those vehicles, 68 percent were RVs. This data suggests an ongoing need for safe parking sites in Palo Alto and demonstrates that more individuals and households are sheltering in recreational vehicles than in other vehicle types. Of the 276 unhoused Palo Alto households in 2022, 29% identified their vehicle as the most frequent place they slept. This is the second most reported sleeping location after "outdoors" (33%). The congregation-based safe parking program requires that permit holders (which are the congregations) contract with a qualified safe parking operator to administer the program. The data for congregational sites is low as those have been the recent permits however it indicates a higher percentage of positive placements from congregation sites as compared to the 24-hour site. While the overall population is small at the congregations, due to the size limitations, the sites are occupied for a number of evenings, serve mostly Palo Alto affiliated individuals, and lead to positive placements. Overall, 17 positive placements among congregation-based sites from 37 individuals. Due to the experimental nature of the safe parking program, the initial program had unique permitting timelines. Specifically, permits were valid for 90 days. If no violation of permit conditions were found, the permit was extended an additional 270 days. Together, this made

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permits valid for one year. In the proposed ordinance, the permits would not expire. Like other discretionary permits issued by the City, permits remain subject to revocation in the event a permit holder doesn't comply with permit regulations. Community meetings were hosted by the city to provide information on the project and allow for public feedback. Ms. Tanner noted that the County and Program provider in Palo Alto were not in favor of having preferences to the spots due to the fact they have vetted the participants and feel they have already been placed where they would be most suitable. Contingency plans are proposed if the demand for the spots becomes exorbitant. Currently the congregation-based safe parking spots are not at capacity, as discussed above. Should, however, shifts occur in the availability of on-street parking, there may be an increase in demand for congregation-based safe parking spots. Some noted aspects of the pilot program that are proposed to continue include the fee waiver and appeal distance. While the draft ordinance (and currently adopted ordinance) references a fee, the municipal fee schedule does not include such a fee. Given the minimal number of staff hours and the negligible number of permits, staff can absorb the cost of issuing safe parking permits into the department budget. Should the Council now, or in the future, determine the need to charge for the review and issuance of the permits, the department can and shall calculate a fee and update the fee schedule accordingly. By allowing no-cost permits, the City can encourage provision of services to unhoused persons. Chair Summa opened the floor to commissioners for any clarification comments.

Commissioner Akin inquired about the concerns for serving RV's in the Congregation sites.

Ms. Tanner replied that this was not an ordinance issue but an operator preference in which Mountain View operates the Congregation sites relaying that the sizes of the RV's were not suitable for the site since congregational sites have parking hour limits and have to move daily, and they were unsightly from the neighbor's perspective.

Commissioner Akin asked if the lots could accommodate multiple family members that wanted to shelter as a group.

Ms. Tanner had not specifically posed the question to service providers and did not have relevant data to confirm whether or not this was a common occurrence.

Vice Chair Chang inquired how many churches were in Palo Alto and wondered if there were additional spaces for regular vehicles at the 24 hour lot.

Ms. Tanner replied that if the lot was reconfigured there could be more room for regular vehicles.

Vice Chair Chang expressed interest if one of the reasons the sites were not ideal for RV's was due to the lack of hook-ups.

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Ms. Tanner responded that neither site provided hook-ups but vouchers were provided to dump waste on a site in Redwood City. Congregation sites do not have hookups.

Vice Chair Chang inquired what was driving the comment from the congregation applicant regarding changing the neighborhood notification process and if there had been an issue.

Ms. Tanner concluded that it was either a misunderstanding of the process or a question of when the public would be notified, and the issue was addressed by having the neighborhood meetings and allow the appeal process to begin prior to applicant approval. Stevenson House located next to the Unitarian Universalist Church raised security questions for their neighbors and by the City providing answers while building trust , they mitigated security concerns.

Vice Chair Chang asked if CalTrans proposal to reduce available parking on El Camino was temporary or permanent.

Ms. Tanner replied that it was expected to be permanent, however a lot of politics can happen between now and that time.

Vice Chair Chang requested information regarding site permit expiration limits.

Ms. Tanner explained there is no set time limit, however, guidelines need to be maintained within the program to ultimately provide participants with safe permanent housing.

Vice Chair Chang asked if they ever had to turn participants away due to reaching capacity.

Ms. Tanner answered that no capacity challenges had been noticed but gaps in placement could be present due to transition time and outreach challenges with unhoused participants when they first enter the programs.

Chair Summa announced that Chair (HRC) Smith from Human Relations Commission had joined the meeting.

Ms. Tanner announced that Michael Love with Move Mountain View was also in attendance via zoom to help provide context.

Vice Chair (HRC) Eberle asked if there was any feedback from the participants.

Ms. Tanner replied that the participants had not been surveyed, all feedback came from the program operator.

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Vice Chair (HRC) Eberle expressed concerns that the participants did not have adequate outdoor area for children to play.

Ms. Tanner suggested Mr. Love may be able to address that later during his comments.

Vice Chair (HRC) Eberle commented that it appeared there were more positive permanent placement from the congregation site as opposed to the 24 hour site.

Ms. Tanner explained perhaps it's both up to what is available to provide to participants as well as their willingness to accept it, or participants may choose to leave the program.

Vice Chair (HRC) Eberle asked if there was a benefit from having a smaller space, if there was more help available as well as having more contacts with the tenants.

Mr. Michael Love from Move Mountain View responded that no specific research had been done but it appeared there was value in having the smaller lots however it is easier to place a one single person versus an entire family. Congregation lots rarely sees children. Children have permission to play on the RV lots and are encouraged to do so. Upkeep of the property for safety and fire concerns is a priority and families are asked not to leave anything out. Single parent families and families with children often have more services offered to them by the programs and they are not generally on the lots for extended periods of time.

Chair Summer interjected and asked if there were any requests for Public Comment.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

Commissioner Causey was pleased to see the programs and asked how it was determined that four would be the maximum number of vehicles allowed on congregation lots.

Ms. Tanner explained that research was completed comparing other neighboring programs in their cities with similar to theirs as well as program with a long standing record and tried to mimic them.

Commissioner Causey asked if any regulations around RV safety were considered.

Ms. Tanner stated that the site plan was approved by the fire department and RV placement was determined based on size to mitigate safety hazards. The Geng Road site had to submit a site plan due to the shape of the lot so that emergency vehicles could enter the property if needed.

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Commissioner Causey asked if adopting the proposed preferences would cause more vacancies.

Ms. Tanner concluded that only at the time the program faces scarcities of site shortages would be if the preferences were required due to space shortages.

Commissioner Causey inquired about the community meetings process.

Ms. Tanner explained meetings are scheduled by the Director once an application is received and has met all criteria. Standard notifications are sent stating there is a pending application that will be approved unless it is appealed within fourteen days.

Chair (HRC) Smith inquired how many churches applied to the program.

Ms. Tanner responded that initially there had been more interest when the program began, ultimately to date four churches have applied and four permits have been provided.

Chair (HRC) Smith asked what the resistance was and if it was internal to congregations or external from the community.

Ms. Tanner answered that the Pandemic occurred after the ordinance was adopted and the yard space was used for church services as well as other facility enhancements.

Chair (HRC) Smith cited two points of opposition in the packet include from neighbors and changes in the notification process, and some neighborhood churches found the application process to be daunting considering the community opposition and asked how this was balanced.

Ms. Tanner explained the ordinance notification is exclusive to neighbors within a 600 foot radius as those would be most impacted and are the only neighbors allowed to appeal. The best way to bridge those gaps is through conversations. PTC could change their process and suggest that the churches hold their own meetings. However, people are often not interested until the city sends the notifications.

Chair Summa noted that the appeal process was not free.

Commissioner Kraus inquired about the most recent lot that had become available, with only 23 participants.

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Mr. Love explained that while most participants do not show up at the exact time the lot becomes available, the participants also leave as soon as they get up. Also noting that there was not much interchange between the Congregation lots versus the 24 hour lots. Although there was a slow start in Palo Alto to fill the lots, participants were occupying spaces across 7 Congregation sites. The newest site was used less frequently which made it difficult to schedule visits with case workers due to seldom seeing the participants. Most communication is through phone or text.

Commissioner Kraus was unaware of the number of churches or Mosques in Palo Alto but noted there were three Synagogues that may prove useful for long term data.

Commissioner Lu asked how the four vehicle limit was enforced and how often capacity was reached.

Mr. Love responded that there was never an instance that more than four vehicles were placed on a site so that scenario would not be an issue. Pre-registration is required, and no participants are allowed that are not in the program. Occasionally the congregation lots fill. Hosting additional vehicles would prove difficult for congregations due to the size of parking lots, however additional changes in policy can be revisited after a year or two.

Ms. Tanner added that site visits were conducted each night and morning to ensure unregistered vehicles were not present.

Commissioner Lu inquired if anyone needed to be turned away at any site. Mr. Love assured Commissioner Lu no one had been turned away in Palo Alto.

Commissioner Lu asked if more outreach was done to get more participants in the program, and if there were program limitations preventing them from joining.

Ms. Tanner responded a possible limitation would be the participants having to routinely move. Participants may feel the benefits being offered could be found in a different location without the frequency of having to move.

Mr. Love added the program was not as attractive to a participant that is used to being independent and was not looking to participate in a program based on checks and balances. In addition to having a safe place to park, Palo Alto is starting an outreach program to entice participants that need the help but don't necessarily want to work with a case worker.

Commissioner Lu inquired if there were any concerns with the operational challenges that were being proposed.

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Ms. Tanner noted that the preference program was not supported by Move Mountain View, however, did not believe there were operational challenges.

Mr. Love stated that after exploring the options from the preference program, Move Mountain View is supportive of the program itself, however it did not work well for Mountain View. Program preferences did not appear to be a constraint to the program, proximity to the locations for Mountain View unhoused seemed more to be the challenge.

Commissioner Templeton was pleased with the positive results of the pilot program and requested information on how the difficult political environment was navigated and if vetting occurred.

Ms. Tanner explained that extensive coordination was present at the county level with a unified system that ensured a no tolerance policy to bad behaviors in the Move Mountain View sites.

Mr. Love confirmed that the system would be noted and flagged for anyone that was egregious in their violations of the program, with an explanation of actions as to why this participant would no longer be served. The participant would not be moved from one site to another under these circumstances. A participant displaying a lesser egregious act may be moved to an alternate site with a warning, prior to being removed from the program, most people discharged from the program have no desire to move towards secure housing and want to simply park in their lot.

Commissioner Templeton expressed concern with current hate crimes against faith based communities and the security of the participants and suggested more consideration on the subject.

Chair (HRC) Smith asked about the total number of parking spots needed due to the uptick in unhoused people since the pandemic. Ms. Tanner responded that a significant number of parking spaces would need to be provided if every person dwelling in their vehicle agreed to join the program.

Commissioner Hechtman inquired about the discrepancies in the volume of people reported as dwelling in their vehicles. Ms. Tanner explained that the figures were derived from 2 different data sources, one being a specific point in time and the second was numbers reported from the county's system. Both figures were included to express the magnitude of the challenge.

Commissioner Hechtman suggested revisiting the wording of temporary structures or amenities in the ordinance to be more clear between what is allowed and what is not.

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Ms. Tanner acknowledged the suggestion and added that items such as playpens or chairs were accepted but expected to be returned to inside the dwelling after use.

Commissioner Hechtman spoke with the Executive Director of the congregation and was informed that the permit was received in June, and there have been no incidents and only positive feedback was provided. The lot usually has one car occupying the space; the most there had ever been were two vehicles at one time. Confirmation of restrooms at least twenty-five feet from the street was received, and he suggested the Director have more flexibility in case other congregations are interested in implementing the program and find that a constraint.

Commissioner Hechtman suggested a preference list not be used unless the lots become filled, so not to limit the congregations in pursuit of their mission. This is a national issue with regional impacts. Density of permits and should be revisited and the radius should be expanded to 1200 feet to further limit overlapping of congregations to ensure sensitivity to existing neighboring homes.

Chair Summa agreed giving the faith based institutions as much leeway as possible to fulfill their mission without having to be concerned with preferences and suggested more thought to be given to the ordinance in the circumstance that a larger congregation would have more capacity to hold more than four vehicles. Chair Summa did not feel that there would be a problem with the density due to how well the properties were being selected and was pleased with the permit process to obtain safe parking on these sites and requested more clarity on the the appeal process.

Ms. Tanner explained that appeals are sent directly to City Council for decisions.

Chair (HRC) Smith commented that the Middlefield site would prove to have an issue with density due to having four congregations within the 600 foot radius but did not see an issue on any other site.

Ms. Tanner responded that the permit fee was \$700 dollars, and the County's system included people looking to engage in the program, with an interested in services which is currently twenty-nine to thirty people, which was about half of the un-housed population.

Vice Chair (HRC) Eberle expressed concern with density in South Palo Alto as Middlefield has a number of churches and has experienced equity hardships. There is also a considerable difference in the number of churches located in north Palo Alto and south Palo Alto. Ms. Tanner acknowledged the churches were not evenly distributed and the age of the churches in terms of spaces available would be a factor in considering a density limit for south Palo Alto.

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Vice Chair (HRC) Eberle was pleased with the successful outcome of the program considering the outcry from concerned residents who have opposed the idea.

Minka van der Zwaag commented that the City started a contract with Life Moves for the services of two outreach workers that will have a route in different places in the community and will be making contact with vehicle and RV dwellers as well as partnering with agencies with ties to RV communities.

Chair Summa expressed an interest for why there had been a diminishment of RV's on El Camino in front of Stanford. Assistant City Manager Melissa McDonough responded that after discussions with police officers and service providers, more movement of RV dwellers is due to football games. and the need for parking spaces.

Vice Chair Chang mentioned with having less than sixty vehicles and 120 RV's that the RV parking would be the challenge and questioned where they were going and what the solution was since only twelve spaces are available currently for RV's.

Ms. Tanner explained the numbers suggest if more space was acquired there would be more participation in the program. Additional options could be for the City to identify more available resources to accommodate RV's through expanding the public program and allowing other types of lots such as shopping centers and the Stanford Research Park.

Ms. McDonough explained that there is a Sanitary Sewer Replacement Project on El Camino and that may also be the reason RV's have left that area. RV dwellers parked on the streets were being notified of both the daily and nightly work being done. Communications have also taken place with Move Mountain View and other stakeholders.

Ms. Tanner corrected the previous statistic from the County's Vi-SPAT program of thirty individuals to 79 individuals (29% of unhoused) living in their vehicles which lends to the issue of having more un-housed individuals than safe parking spaces for them.

Chair (HRC) Smith acknowledged allowing faith based institutions to structure around their mission and provided an example of a Catholic church in Mountain View that was looking to provide a safe haven to females. Negative press of and fear mongering needs to be considered in the appeal process with an understanding of institutions sensitivities. In addition, Chair (HRC) Smith recommended other institutions and community partners be considered as a means to expand capacity as well as re-evaluation of the number of spots available based on the size of the church to possibly accommodate more vehicles.

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Commissioner Causey extended her hope that the congregations expand their capabilities to provide more help to people in need while also showing concern to the neighborhood sensitivities; and was in favor of giving faith based institutions as much flexibility as possible to serve their mission.

**PTC called for a break to allow the HRC time to leave.**

**PTC returned from break with all members present (Commissioner Reckdahl absent).**

### **ACTION ITEMS**

- 3. LEGISLATIVE ACTION:** Recommendation to City Council Regarding Proposed Amendments to Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Title 18 (Zoning) Chapter 18.42 (Standards for Special Uses) Section 18.42.160 (Safe Parking) to Permanently Establish the Congregation-Based Safe Parking Program by Allowing Overnight Safe Parking as an Ancillary Use to a Church's and Religious Institution's Use in All Zoning Districts Where Churches and Religious Institutions are Allowed Uses, and Establishing Regulations Related to Safe Parking, Including a Maximum Number of Vehicles Per Night on Each Site.

Commissioner Akin supported there being no need for a preference list at this time however political advantages of having density limits are appreciated while operational concerns for having closely spaced sites without a direct path was still a concern. Perhaps more spaces can be made available on an as needed basis.

Vice Chair Chang addressed the density issue by suggesting more research be done to determine the formula to allow additional spaces at congregations sites, particularly the congregations on Middlefield. She supported preferences not currently being needed.

Commissioner Hechtman inquired if the Geng site was subject to the ordinance. Ms. Tanner responded that the Geng site was not included in the ordinance.

Commissioner Hechtman recollected from his experience with working with addiction facilities that neighborhoods fear these types of programs, despite the positive outcomes and suggested that a map be provided for Council to view all congregation sites to chart the radius of affected neighborhoods. This would allow a direct path to help both congregations and residents see the potential positive outcomes from the program. He suggested starting small and adding a few spaces each year to help ease the concern of residents if there was a demand for more and provided the congregations wished to continue the program.

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Commissioner Templeton spoke in favor of the preference list which showed concern for students that have parents that may have lost their homes due to economic reasons. It can be very disruptive to the students while parents seek secure housing within the same school district.

Chair Summa was in favor of students having preferences but did not support the other preferences at this time. She also supported creating a map that shows a 600 foot radius versus a 1200 foot radius for churches in the program and for potential churches to see which neighborhoods would be impacted.

Commissioner Hechtman expressed concern for the preference of families with school age students and the potential risk of the preference due to the history of most occupants in vehicles at the congregation sites are single occupants and not families.

Commissioner Templeton reminded staff that students could be eighteen and homeless and that these were not exclusive scenarios but rather frequent occurrences within Palo Alto, and congregations that are following ordinance standards should not be object to this restriction.

Commissioner Akin suggested that providing a map of a 1200 foot radius may dissuade Council from considering liberalization of the rules due to overlapping of some kind. Huge areas will likely have overlapping of some sort.

Commissioner Lu expressed reservations on density restrictions and that allowing as many congregations as possible to participate would be highly beneficial and provide a broader network of people who could support the programs. He supported capacity plans and sees the value in both Preference 1 and 2, giving people who live in the community or are involved locally to have safe parking near their families or community. He didn't see much difference in having a combination of both RV's and vehicles on a given site as opposed to one or the other.

Vice Chair Chang agreed that school age students should be the priority and impacted the most. She supported accommodating RV's on larger sites but that decision would ultimately defer to the operator and suggested staff look to resolve that before it becomes a problem.

Commissioner Templeton inquired if RV's posed more of a health hazard due to the dumping of waste matter. Ms. Tanner replied that during discussions the types of vehicles were considered and that while RV's are permitted it is an operational decision which type are allowed on each site. Having issues in the past, Ms. Tanner suggested that the Commission could give staff direction to develop a clause that Council could incorporate allowing a maximum number of RV's.

## **PUBLIC COMMENT**

None

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## MOTION

Commissioner Hechtman moved that the PTC recommend that City Council adopt proposed amendments to Palo Alto Municipal Code, Title 18, Chapter 18.42 and 18.42.160 recommended by staff, with the following modifications: (1) Delete the second preference, F12 to 'i' and modify the first two rather than say families with students to just clarify it as students. (2) Modify the ordinance to create a path to increase the maximum number from four to six after one year of operation, and from six to eight after two years of operation, with the same process applicable as the initial permit issuance (to include right to appeal) (3) Clarify the use of the word amenities in subpart F14 as discussed. (4) instruct the staff to provide a map to City Council showing radius of 600 and 1200 feet from the faith based institutions in Palo Alto to inform the Council's dialogue on whether there should be any density limit.

## SECOND

Vice Chair Chang seconded the motion.

## VOTE

Ms. Dao conducted a roll call vote and announced the motion carried 6-0.

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

**Commission Action:** Motion by Hechtman, seconded by Chang. Passed 6-0-1 (Reckdahl absent)

## City Official Reports\*\*

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

Ms. Amy French, Chief Planning Official reported that Council heard Stafford University Medical center development agreement modifications on October 23, 2023. Commissioner Akin will represent the PTC at upcoming Council meetings in November that may need representation. Planned communities, Middlefield/Ellsworth Place will go to action as well as the Electrification Equipment consent item with modification on November 6. November 13, 2023 will be the Comprehensive Plan Amendment ordinance implementation and a design application at 575 Los Trancos Rd. On November 27, 2023 will be the Rental Registry. The Safe Parking Program is scheduled to go to Council in December as well as the Downtown Housing Master Plan, a consent

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item focusing on the SB9 Housing Standards which will be altered after a few visits with both the ARB and the Focus Group.

## Study Session

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

### 4. **Study Session:** Retail Study Introduction and Check-in

Chair Summa called for the Staff Report

Ms. French reported that the interim ordinance on thresholds for Conditional Use Permits (CUPs) were brought to Council as an extension due to the retail study not being completed. Street Sense joined and presented to City Council and approved in June. The Retail Recovery Study was continued and informed by Street Sense with an expanded scope from fall of 2022.

Mr. Dan Wery, Senior Associate with Michael Baker International, shared the goal of the Retail Recovery Study was to retain, strengthen and facilitate retail in key commercial areas of Palo Alto to modernize the regulation and ensure a vibrant commercial area. Benchmarking good practices and retail trends and analyses related to retail recovery were focused on University and California Avenue as well as the Midtown Shopping Center and El Camino Real. Peer city interviews and research along with stakeholder interviews are being held in addition to zoning and procedural constraints analysis conducted. The newest addition of Assembly Bill (AB) 2097, impact on parking strategy and management was added to the study in conjunction with the Street Sense Economic Strategy Development Report and will be combined to incorporate all data into the final report. Preliminary analysis concluded much synergy between Street Sense and the initial report conducted which will aide in recommending land use regulatory changes. Due to AB 2097, parking is considered a critical component in retail. Prior to completing a final draft report with detailed findings, several meetings are scheduled with the PTC regarding scope and budget.

Ms. Surabhi Barbhaya, Project Manager/Senior Urban Planner at Michael Baker International, explained seven business and property owner interviews have taken place with peer cities including Redwood City, Mountain View, and Santa Monica, with intentions to conclude all interviews in November 2023. A tentative project schedule was designed in July, and staff are in the process of interviewing stakeholders. Best practices will be revised and resubmitted to the City by the end of November as data is currently being collected for parking analysis. Zoning review and recommendations are scheduled to begin early December with the hope to conclude by the end of March 2024. Work on the preparation of reports will simultaneously continue. Adoption hearings are tentatively set for May or June 2024.

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Commissioner Akin inquired whether the parking areas downtown currently under a parking preference program were being considered as part of the parking resources and how they would be utilized.

Ms. Barbhaya explained that the data collected mainly focused on the City garages and the street parking with the main focus of parking analysis lent to understanding the amount of development needed for University and California Avenue that could be absorbed without parking in light of AB 2097.

Commissioner Akin inquired if there was awareness of adjacent parking already being used for other parking resources and was concerned that the census based strictly on the garage and street parking downtown would be inaccurate.

Mr. Wery replied that data collected from residential and commercial permits were tracked and older but comprehensive survey data provided good inventory for street spaces including side streets.

Commissioner Akin asked for clarification of side streets to include all permit parking areas in the district.

Mr. Wery confirmed that all data would be considered.

Mr. Akin commented that the parking assessment districts were complex and a simple census of space won't capture the desired data.

Vice Chair Chang inquired how the City Staff compiled the twelve stakeholders that were selected.

Ms. French answered a list was developed with consultation of the Director of Planning and Development Services.

Steve Gallardo, Assistant to the City Manager, explained the list was compiled from the stakeholders representing various retail operators in town who work with Michael Baker International to ensure a statistical representation sample of retail sectors.

Vice Chair Chang inquired if the interviews have been completed and asked if opportunity for feedback was possible.

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Ms. Barbhaya confirmed Santa Monica along with Redwood City and Mountain View was completed and they are leaving the option open for additional cities to be included.

Commissioner Lu inquired if the transit analysis was included with the parking scope.

Ms. Barbhaya explained that the main focus was to analyze the ordinance zoning and parking and the integration of their report with Street Sense reports which shows various strategies for pedestrian and transit improvement would be implemented.

Commissioner Lu recommended pedestrian cycle public transit access as first class access and inquired if the stakeholder interviews also included interviewing landlords and believed there is a strong case to having them included in that process. Ms. Barbhaya responded that landlords as well as a few developers were interviewed.

Commissioner Hechtman requested clarification on whether different types of retail spaces would be studied separately; he received written comments suggesting different drivers and motivations impact different types of retail. Mr. Wery responded that the full range of uses for mixed retail would be studied to support the overall vitality of the area including restaurants.

Commissioner Hechtman asked if bike and walking access would be incorporated in the study.

Mr. Wery replied that the study did not specifically include bike and walking access but it was included in the overall objective of the project and to include a strong emphasis on all models of activities.

Ms. Barbhaya suggested recommending a study of streetscape improvements.

Chair Summa shared concern with the Residential Parking Permit Program. California Avenue was also included in the program as part of the California Business district however did not extend all the way south to Page Mill. The report approved in August by City Council included bike and pedestrian letters received as well as Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and was in favor of including small businesses that operate in the district.

Commissioner Akin inquired if the focus was on zoning because zoning is a critical function of the PTC.

Mr. Wery replied that that was a fair assessment.

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## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

None

Vice Chair Chang commented that adding Los Altos could make a big impact, as well as broadening the demographics to include Sunnyvale and Cupertino and Pasadena would offer more retail opportunities.

Mr. Wery explained the initial outreach included Mountain View and later expanded due to a suggestion to broaden the scope.

Commissioner Akin commented that regarding stakeholder interviews, he was curious about the number of businesses that relocated out of Palo Alto that appear to still be viable economically and the reason they moved. Interview candidates would likely be interested in including University Art, as well as creating a list of other candidates that fit the criteria.

Mr. Wery responded that was a great idea.

Commissioner Lu asked for clarification of the quantitative analysis.

Mr. Wery explained if technical or procedural changes could be made whether temporarily or permanent and show a number of new businesses attracted or retained, the increase foot traffic could increase sales where the study by Street Sense would be used to determine this. Actual use rates for City standards along with Urban Land Institute and Institute for Transportation of Engineers will be calibrated with actual occupancy rates to track trends and correlate them with regulations.

Commissioner Lu suggested useful data could be established if trends in similar cities have formula or retail restrictions on the impact of rent or overall occupancy and would prove inherit value in independent and local retail and suggested including Los Altos as a peer City due to the many independent local retail stores that preserve local businesses and was unclear of the biker pedestrian or ADA access, however, was in favor of including it in the scope.

Chair Summa supported the idea of including Los Altos, as many successful businesses that left Palo Alto moved to Los Altos.

Mr. Wery asked for examples of businesses that have left the area.

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Chair Summa along with Commissioners Chang, Hechtman, and Akin listed numerous businesses that have moved from Palo Alto and suggested any additions would be emailed.

Commissioner Akin suggested trade-offs for increasing density through zoning should be considered.

## **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

5. Approval of Planning & Transportation Commission Draft Verbatim Minutes of September 9, 2023

Chair Summa requested a motion.

### **MOTION**

Commissioner Hechtman moved to approve the draft verbatim minutes of September 9, 2023 as revised.

### **SECOND**

Commissioner Akin seconded the motion.

Chair Summa requested a roll call vote.

### **VOTE**

Ms. Dao conducted a roll call vote and announced the motion passed 5-0-2 (Reckdahl, Templeton Absent).

**MOTION PASSED 5** (Akin, Chang, Lu, Summa, Hechtman,) -0 -2 (Reckdahl, Templeton absent)

**Commission Action:** Motion by Hechtman, seconded by Akin. Pass 5-0-2 (Reckdahl, Templeton absent)

## **Committee Items**

None

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

Vice Chair Chang reminded everyone to email their districts to fill out the survey for Safe Systems, the new traffic safety survey on the City's website so they can gather the information about the near-miss accidents.

## **Adjournment**

8:09 pm

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