



Monday, March 3, 2008

Mayor Andrew M. Cohen
And City Councilmembers
Menlo Park City Hall
701 Laurel Street
Menlo Park, CA 94025

RE: 389 El Camino Real Project - SUPPORT

Dear Mayor Cohen and Members of the City Council:

For 50 years, Greenbelt Alliance has protected the region's working farms and natural areas while making the Bay Area's cities better places to live. A key component of our work is identifying where new growth should occur and which development proposals best meet the needs of the region. Our Compact Development Team endorses and advocates for livable, transit-accessible communities with a wide range of housing options for families of all sizes and income levels. We write to inform you of our endorsement of the 389 El Camino development proposed for Menlo Park.

The 389 El Camino project is fortunate to be well located, within 0.5 mile from the Menlo Park Caltrain station and in close proximity to a large amount of jobs and services. Stanford Hospital and a new Safeway Shopping Center are nearby, and downtown Menlo Park is close as well. The project has the additional benefit of synching up well with the Grand Boulevard Initiative, in which Greenbelt Alliance plays an active role by sitting on the Task Force. This initiative aims to revitalize the El Camino corridor with new jobs, shops, homes, reinventing El Camino as a "Grand Boulevard" where pedestrian and transit connections are clear and convenient. The initiative has 10 guiding principles¹. This letter seeks to highlight three of these principles and establish how the 389 El Camino project achieves them.

"Encourage compact mixed-use development and high-quality urban design and construction"

The 389 El Camino proposal includes 48 compact homes and pairs residential development with ground-floor, neighborhood-serving retail. Its compactness is appropriate for El Camino and fits clearly within the broader Grand Boulevard vision. The site plan reveals attractive urban form that will improve the pedestrian environment, especially when compared to the site's current use as a fenced-off asphalt lot. The project's entrance will lead to a landscaped inner courtyard, providing connections to the project's retail component.

"Create a pedestrian-oriented environment and improve streetscapes, ensuring full access to and between public areas and private developments"

Matteson Realty's project includes a landscaping buffer along the El Camino frontage to create a pleasant environment for people passing the project on foot or on bike. The project will include sidewalks widened to accommodate and emphasize the increase in foot traffic that can be expected with a project of this kind. Street furniture will provide a place to sit down near the development's retail portion. Secure bicycle parking and on-street bicycle parking will be provided to ensure that cyclists have as good of access to the project as motorists do. By placing parking in an underground garage and in a lot behind the development, Matteson is

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deemphasizing in an effort to prioritize the pedestrian experience. However, in a project such as this, half a mile from Caltrain, along several bus routes, and oriented around major services, the amount of parking required for this kind of development could stand to be reduced to reflect modern lifestyles.

“Pursue environmentally sustainable and economically viable development patterns”

Some families choose to live in sprawling development not because they desire long commutes and large gasoline bills, but because they cannot find affordable homes near work. For this reason, any “environmentally sustainable” development should include affordable homes or contribute to funds made available to build such development nearby. Ten percent of the homes in this project will be offered at below-market rates. This means that not only will 389 El Camino meet an unmet need for homes near transit, jobs, and services, but it will also meet a particular need for affordable homes in a good location. By growing in this way, Menlo Park’s neighborhoods can do their part to accommodate the region’s growth in a way that protects and enhances quality of life for everyone. This kind of development shows that Menlo Park is willing to confront the specter of climate change.

In summary, Greenbelt Alliance urges the City Council’s support of 389 El Camino as a means of fulfilling the Grand Boulevard Initiative’s bold vision of a unified corridor designed with pedestrians, cyclists, and transit riders in mind.

Regards,

/s/

Marla Wilson
Livable Communities Outreach Coordinator

CC:
Glen Rojas
Arlinda Heineck

ⁱ To read all 10 Grand Boulevard Initiative guiding principles, visit: <http://elcaminoreborn.com/gp/guidingprinciples.html>.