



Mountain View Coalition for Sustainable Planning  
Mountain View, CA 94041

December 1, 2014

Environmental Planning Commission  
Mountain View City Hall  
500 Castro Street  
PO Box 7540  
Mountain View, CA 94039-7540

Re: Agenda Item 5.1 (801 El Camino Real West), December 3, 2014

Chair Cox and members of the EPC:

When you reviewed this project on January 20, 2014, the Mountain View Coalition for Sustainable Planning (MVCSP) submitted a strong endorsement of it.

The project is now before you for its final review. We still admire the conceptualization and design of the project, which smoothly integrates much-needed, attractive apartments in a great location with local-serving retail. The result looks like a charming mini-village.

We like the design of the apartments--a "good neighbor" design with adequate height stepdowns and very adequate setbacks and stepbacks transitioning to less-dense residential neighbors to the south, and an unusual amount of both private and public open space.

The developer has--uniquely among other developers that have come before you during the current building boom--listened to the community and gone to much trouble and expense to retain almost all the current major retail tenants in this location, who are an established part of the neighborhood. (However, while the proposed program to retain current business tenants is impressive, we think that the "similar rent" leases to current business tenants should be written to persist for the life of the business, as that is generally defined or as agreed to by negotiation. Community benefits, which these leases are claimed to be, are generally very long-lasting capital improvement projects or affordably-priced housing units—they don't disappear after a relatively short time.)

Despite all of the good things about this proposal, we are brought up short by the disappearance, sometime during the past 10 months, of several features (floated during early public meetings) that would contribute notably to the project's environmental and economic sustainability credentials.

By far our greatest concern is the lack of BMR units in the proposal. 801 El Camino Real is in an incredibly convenient location in the El Camino Real Precise Plan area: one where residents will have easy access to shopping, transportation, schools, and other downtown Mountain View civic and cultural amenities. We are distressed that any developer would, in this situation, choose to pay affordable housing impact fees rather than provide subsidized units. This critical community need has been recognized through the City Council's repeated preference, in reviewing projects, for actual BMR apartments rather than fees. Because of Palmer, the City cannot require that such units be provided, but they can demonstrate enthusiasm or lack of enthusiasm for projects in relation to whether the developer is willing to do this. It is possible that this developer has decided that in the long run, he will do better financially if he pays the fees, and that's all that matters to him.

We have also looked at what the developer proposes to do to incentivize greener transportation and decrease Vehicle Miles Travelled for the project's residents. What is appropriate should depend to some extent on the specific characteristics (especially location) of the project, not just be equivalent to what has been required of previous projects. Here are two of the issues for this project:

- We are surprised that the project will not host any car-share vehicles. We don't know of any available in that part of town, and this would be a wonderful place for them, especially since the Avis car rental office currently on that site will be leaving. At least some recent apartment developments have provided parking for car-sharing.
- We are happy to see (in Attachment 3) that EcoPasses are the preferred transportation subsidy alternative for residents. 801 El Camino Real is, after all, right next to several very active bus lines, including express stops. We suspect that the EcoPass program does not allow providing this transit pass to some residents and not others, which would be the outcome if it were available only to residents in their first year there. It should therefore be mandated, if available, for 55 years, at approximately \$10,000/year for unlimited bus rides for all residents over five years old. That's \$3/month per resident. Clearly EcoPasses could and should be used in combination with other subsidies for people who need to use CalTrain. (Unfortunately, at full fare, the proposed subsidy will cover only a few round trips for one person/household, each month.) If residents and employees can be covered by the same EcoPass program, in this mixed-use development, the individual rate will be kept down for both. The developer and Staff should work through these details.

Finally, we are also surprised to see a "water feature" included in the project proposal. We understand that this will count as a "high water use plant" in the landscaping's water budget. Nevertheless, there is no reason to deny the existence of a drought and not use a white noise machine instead, if that's needed.

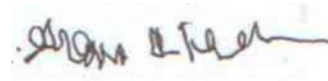
Our bottom line is that, In relation to the BMR unit question, we continue to hope that it will still be possible to turn around this undesirable change of direction that the developer has taken, so that we can provide an unqualified endorsement of the project proposal.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Sincerely,




Bruce England



Gregory A. Fowler



Aaron Grossman



Julie B. Lovins  
for the Mountain View Coalition for Sustainable Planning

cc: Stephanie Williams  
Gerry Beaudin  
Terry Blount