

## COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

# 2

This chapter describes the public outreach and engagement process, led by the City of East Palo Alto, for the update to the Ravenswood Business District/4 Corners Specific Plan. The process included participation by a wide swath of the community, including residents of nearby neighborhoods including University Village and Weeks, community groups such as Youth United in Community Advocacy (YUCA) and Envision-Transform-Build East Palo Alto (ETB), planners from regional agencies, and groups representing property owners such as the Ravenswood Shores Business District, among many others.

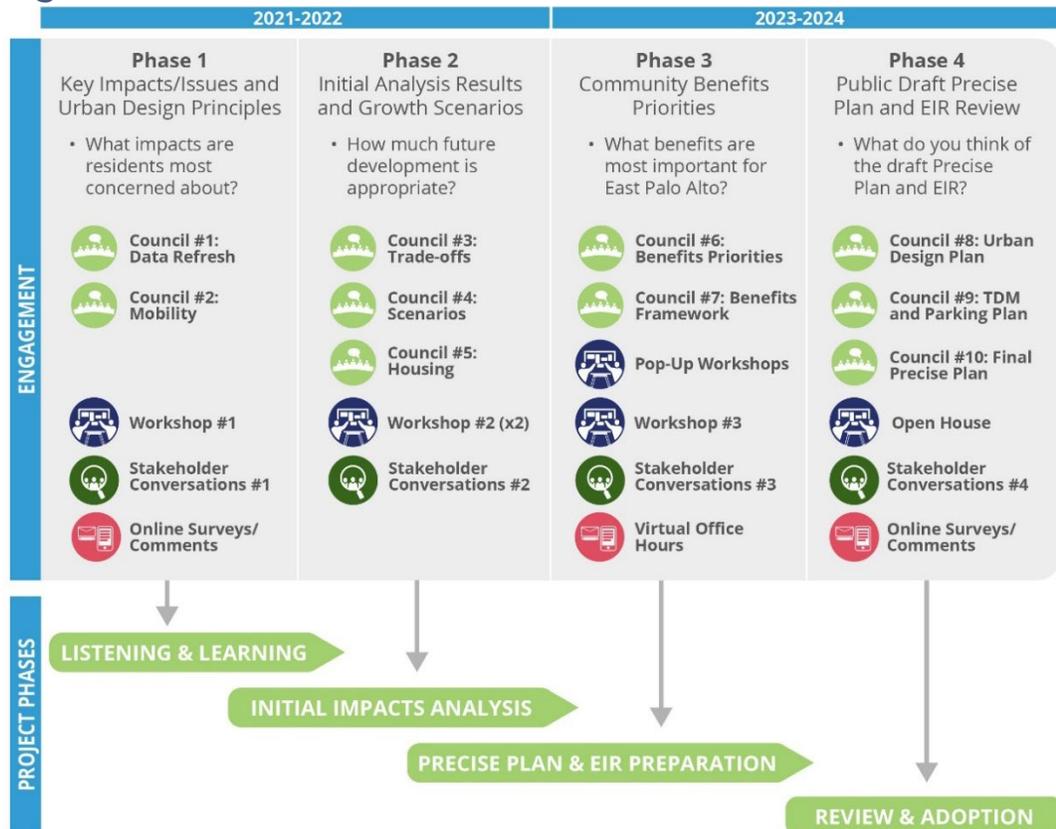
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The fundamental goals of this planning and engagement effort were to:

- **Listen and learn from the community about their concerns**, in order to develop a future growth and development scenario that minimizes impacts on existing neighborhoods, businesses, and residents.
- **Identify the key physical design outcomes desired by the community** to help inform new objective design standards, with an overall goal of developing a “complete neighborhood.”
- **Understand the community’s top priorities for benefits** in order to craft a framework and process in the Plan that will assure an effective, sustainable, and fair partnership between the community and the long-term investors/owners in the Plan area.

Figure 2-1 shows how the public process informed the update of the Specific Plan, at key points.

**Figure 2-1: Public Process**

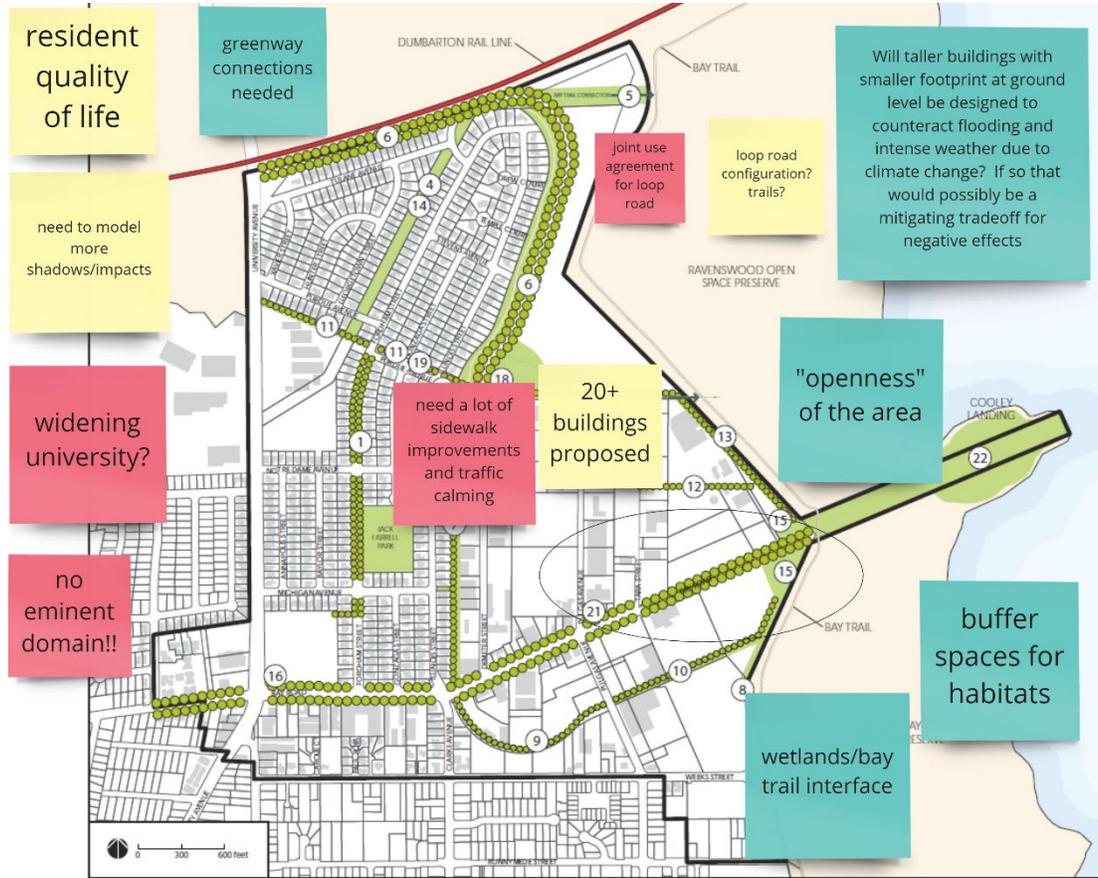


## Summary of Engagement Activities

For the Specific Plan update, the City developed an extensive strategy and plan for public outreach, based around a transparent process that iteratively incorporated feedback from community, organizations and intentionally reached out to underrepresented groups. Between 2021 and 2024, this highly inclusive engagement included all of the following:

- A website with regularly updated project information and a calendar of scheduled public events/hearings.
- A series of public workshops that introduced the community to the Specific Plan Update process and allowed residents and stakeholders to provide invaluable feedback at key points of the process including the generation of the primary CEQA alternative.
- Regular presentations given to City Council and Planning Commission Meetings that provided the City decision-makers and the general public with updates on the project and other important information related to the Plan's land use, urban design, housing, and mobility issues.
- "Pop-Up" workshops held in various parts of the city to engage with the community in an informal setting while providing them with up-to-date information on the Specific Plan effort.
- Regular (at times monthly) meetings between the City team and the key property owners/developers in the Plan Area, to ensure that the Specific Plan is implementable immediately upon adoption.
- Online engagement at various phases of the project, held at multiple times of day in order to maximize accessibility for all populations who live in East Palo Alto. Opt-in web surveys were conducted to mirror in-person workshops, and informal "Office Hours" were offered for follow-up questions after formal events.

Figure 2-2: Community Input Gathered at Workshop #2



- The only hope/improvement is the Marsh/Bayfront expressway getting transformed into a real highway. An on-going project with MenloPark/Caltrans
- Narrowing streets will reduce speed and provide more street parking.
- Bike safety - need improvement on University and connections from East Palo Alto to Palo Alto.
- Would like to reduce traffic within the city, encourage alternative modes to driving.
- Need more than exit from 101 to University.
- don't trust the improvements will come!
- Need to engage regionally.
- TDM ordinance will apply
- how does EPA tie into the regional network?
- where are our regional big money projects...
- Heavy traffic on Pulgas from Embarcadero/Oregon exit

## Community Meetings and Workshops

This section describes the community meetings that the City held as part of the planning process. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, initial engagement activities were conducted virtually.

### **Virtual Public Workshop #1: Introduction to the Specific Plan Update**

In May 2021, the City virtually held an initial community workshop to share information about the Specific Plan update process and proposed developments in the area. At the workshop, residents and stakeholders were invited to share their ideas, concerns, and vision; and engage with fellow residents, stakeholders, and City staff. Participants worked in small breakout groups to discuss their desired vision for new development in the Ravenswood Business District / 4 Corners.

### **Virtual Public Workshop #2: Maximum Growth Scenarios**

A second virtual public workshop was held in September 2021 to discuss potential growth scenarios for the Plan Area, and the potential impacts and benefits of each scenario on community benefits, transportation, infrastructure, jobs, affordable housing, and open space. The primary goal of this workshop was to give the community an opportunity to provide input on the different growth scenarios before the City began a comprehensive analysis of each scenario. The project team refined the growth scenarios based on input from this workshop.

### **Virtual Public Workshop #3: Community Benefits**

At the Community Benefits Virtual Public Workshop, held in March 2021, residents and stakeholders shared ideas and voted on community benefits in the RBD. After sharing an overview of the status of the Specific Plan Update process and a presentation on required community benefits from RBD developments, attendees participated in small, breakout groups to discuss their priorities for community benefits.

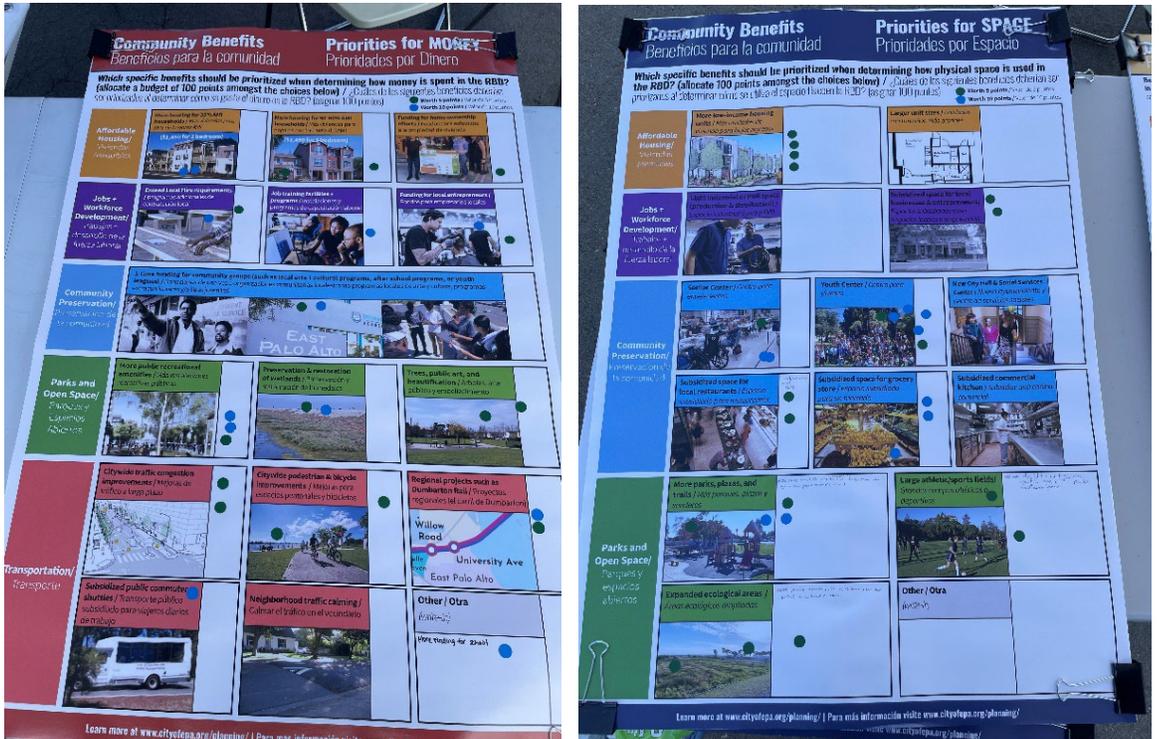
### **In-Person “Pop-Up” Workshops**

The City held four in-person informational “pop-up” workshops in different areas of the city: two events at Fresh Approach Farmer’s Market, one event at Jack Farrell Park during the 25th Anniversary of the Fordham Street Faire, and one event during the Community Music Festival hosted by Moveable in September 2022.

Figure 2-3: Community Pop-Up at Farmer’s Market



Figure 2-4: Community Pop-Up Feedback at Jack Farrell Park



## Stakeholder Meetings

The City assembled a select group of key stakeholders representing a variety of community interests to help guide the Specific Plan process by providing input at key points in the project; reaching out to members of the community to encourage their involvement; and making recommendations to the Planning Commission and City Council. The CAC held five meetings prior to the publication of the Draft Specific Plan:

Key community organizations that were engaged in the process included:

- YUCA (Youth United in Community Action)
- EPACANDO
- ETB/Renter's Coalition
- Nuestra Casa
- Community Legal Services
- EPACENTER
- The Primary School of East Palo Alto

Key regional environmental groups that were consulted included:

- Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District
- Citizens Committee to Complete the Refuge
- Sierra Club
- Green Foothills
- Canopy
- MTC Bay Trail Program

## Community Outreach

During the course of the project, the City made a concerted effort to reach out to members of the community in a number of different ways in order to inform them about key milestones, , In response to community comments during early phases, the City intentionally expanded the scope of the project's outreach and engagement, including:

- Project website with event calendar, background resource materials, and summaries of all public events

- A large physical billboard located at a major Plan Area intersection that announced project meetings (University Avenue & Bay Road)
- Several rounds of postcard mailers sent to all City addresses
- A listserv containing the emails of thousands of interested residents and stakeholders who received regular electronic updates.

### Planning Commission and City Council Meetings

East Palo Alto's Planning Commission and City Council both took an active role throughout the process of updating the Specific Plan. They contributed their input at the following meetings:

#### 1 City Council Meeting #1: Existing Conditions

On March 23, 2021, the City Council discussed the preliminary findings around key constraints and existing conditions in the Specific Plan Area.

#### 2 City Council Meeting #2: Mobility

On June 8, 2021, the City Council held additional discussions related to mobility challenges and potential solutions in the Specific Plan Area.

#### 3 Joint Planning Commission/City Council Meeting #3: Trade-Offs

On September 28, 2021, the Planning Commission and City Council held a joint meeting to discuss the trade-offs of different amounts of office and R&D development in the Specific Plan area.

#### 4 City Council Meeting #4: Growth Scenarios

On November 18, 2021, the City Council met to render a decision on the maximum growth scenario(s) to be studied under the Specific Plan Update CEQA process.

#### 5 City Council Meeting #5: Housing

On February 1, 2022, the City Council decided on the total number of housing units to study under CEQA in the Specific Plan area, and which locations are appropriate for studying residential uses.

### **6 City Council Meeting #6: Community Benefits**

On May 17, 2022, the City Council presented the summary results of resident input related to community benefits from new development and discussed priorities and policy mechanisms related to benefits for East Palo Alto.

### **7 City Council Meeting #7: Community Benefits**

On July 26, 2022, the City Council met to discuss community benefits and confirmed the framework of policies and requirements that will guide provision of benefits from RBD developments.

### **8 City Council Meeting #8: Land Use and Urban Design**

On April 25, 2023, the City and project team provided the City Council and the public with an update on key Specific Plan issues including urban design standards/concepts, view corridor protections, land use, and transportation/utilities analysis.

### **9 City Council Meeting #9: Parking and Mobility**

On July 25, 2023, the City and TDM Program consultant provided City Council with a presentation on a proposed framework for implementing the citywide Transportation Demand Management (TDM) Ordinance, formation of a Transportation Management Association (TMA), and parking policies.

## **Key Community Desires**

A number of key requests emerged from the community engagement that form the basis of this Plan's community benefits framework:

- Ensure that the long-standing East Palo Alto community and its culture are preserved and not lost due to changes brought on by development in the Plan Area.
- While this development offers many opportunities, the most critical one is to seize the chance to redirect outside investment towards reintroducing the founding vision of the City, which was to build something for the people, to create a community with a permanent stake in its own prosperity and flourishing.

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- Expand the opportunities for community ownership. Expanding opportunities for local ownership, including both home ownership and business ownership by residents, is critical to the Plan's success.
- Ensure that there is transparency and fairness in the amount/financial value of benefits provided by developers for the community. The community should enjoy direct and long-term benefits from development, and that benefit should be in proportion to the increased entitlement value granted.
- Allow the community to be involved in the future decision-making process about community benefits. The community should have an opportunity to provide recommendations related to the distribution of community benefits funds and spaces provided by developments, rather than leaving all decisions to the City Council.
- Ensure that benefits are sustainable for the long-term. Community members called for clear mechanisms to ensure ongoing benefits accrue to the community and will persist for as long as impacts are felt from new developments.
- Mitigate the impacts of new commercial development on housing affordability. Since new development brings in employees from outside the City and in turn this will intensify the demand for housing in East Palo Alto, the allocation of office space should be tied to the construction or support for new affordable housing.
- Ensure that the most important priorities identified by the community are achieved. These top priorities for benefits are:
  - **Affordable housing.** The community asks that projects build or otherwise enable the construction of new deed-restricted rental housing (primarily for 35 to 60% AMI households) and also provide funding for home ownership or anti-displacement programs. Both of these approaches are necessary to keep existing residents rooted in the City and to attract former residents to return home. New income-restricted apartments should match actual East Palo Alto incomes, with the main focus on 35 to 60% AMI households and a secondary focus on 60 to 100% AMI households to

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serve recent college graduates. Promoting home ownership is critical to neighborhood preservation and can be achieved through financial support for City programs such as the Second Unit fund or First Time Homebuyer program.

- **Job training and education.** The community understands a successful economic future is based around upward mobility for residents and gaining access to a mix of middle- and higher-income skilled jobs. Residents want a consistent upskilling pipeline with resource centers, afterschool classes for kids, mentors/training for young adults, internships for high schoolers, and finally leading to subsidized or free incubator spaces for local start-ups/digital entrepreneurs.
- **Attainable, middle-income jobs.** In addition to job training and education to eventually reach higher-skilled professions, the community desires immediate access to a mix of lower- and middle-income jobs that do not require four-year college degrees. This could be achieved through funding and space for local retailers or merchants, trades schools/associate degree programs or vocational education, support jobs and ancillary services related to office and R&D, inclusion of ground-floor flex space in developments, and continuation or expansion of light industrial uses in the area.
- **Support and spaces for community businesses, organizations, schools, and individuals.** Both funding and space should be reserved for use by East Palo Alto residents and businesses, including but not limited to existing or



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displaced small businesses, local co-working space, commercial kitchen space, non-profit space, community events/programs, local sports leagues, local artists, organizations that fund educational opportunities, and fabrication/makerspaces. Residents generally preferred that this space be prioritized for community use rather than the local City government.

See Chapter 4, Vision and Strategies, and Chapter 10, Community Benefits for additional details on the policies, standards, and mechanisms that will ensure that the community receives the benefits that it expects.

