



City of Santa Clara

**Planning Commission
Adoption Hearing
April 8, 2026**

El Camino Real Specific Plan

Community Development Department



Agenda

- Project Background
- Overview of the Specific Plan and Program EIR
- Retail Market Overview
- Trends and Best Practices
- Recommendation



Background



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What is the project?

- A **Specific Plan** for El Camino Real in Santa Clara
 - Refine and implement the 2035 General Plan vision for the El Camino Real Focus Area
 - Focus Area – area identified in General Plan to accommodate growth
 - Priority Development Area – area designated with State for higher density, transit-oriented growth
- Consistent with the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), an **Environmental Impact Report (EIR)** was prepared to assess potential environmental impacts of the project.

Background

2010 General Plan El Camino Real Focus Area

“The General Plan vision for El Camino Real is to transform this Focus Area from a series of automobile-oriented strip-malls to a tree-lined, pedestrian- and transit-oriented corridor with a mix of residential and retail uses.”





Background

How did we get here?

- **2010** General Plan Update changed corridor to residential / mixed-use
- **2017** – City Council direction to prepare Specific Plan to provide more detailed policies for new development
- **2017 – 2021** staff worked with consultant & CAC to prepare a draft Specific Plan
- **June/Sept 2021** – City Council direction to modify Specific Plan
- **March 2023**– Start of Phase 2 to revise the Specific Plan per Council direction
- **Dec 2024/Feb 2025** – CAC Meeting/Public workshop to gather feedback
- **June 2025** – Planning Commission and City Council Study Sessions to get direction



Background

City Council Direction on Revised Plan

- Prepare a **reduced density** Specific Plan to address community concerns over residential adjacency and the **impacts of higher-density development** (e.g. shadows).
- Maintain the **higher density activity centers** in the Specific Plan
- Retain enough development capacity (**4,400 residential units**) and elements of the prior Specific Plan to support mixed-use development



Specific Plan

Overview



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El Camino Real Specific Plan

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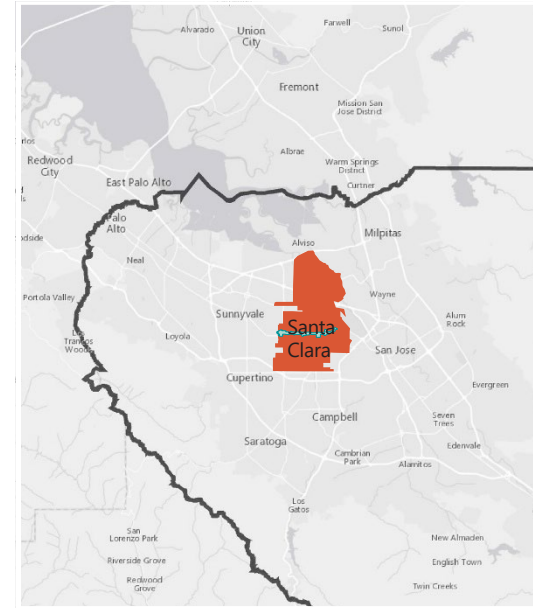
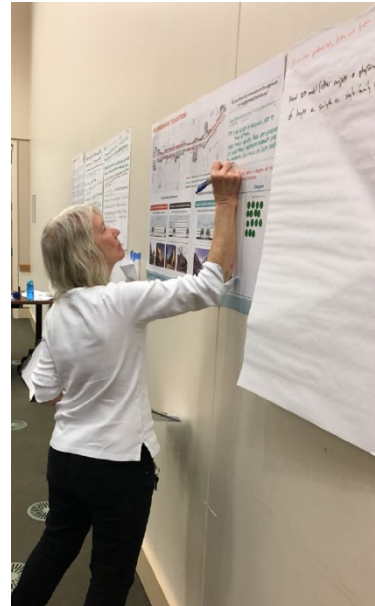
Chapter 5: Transportation + Public Spaces

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Chapter 1: Introduction

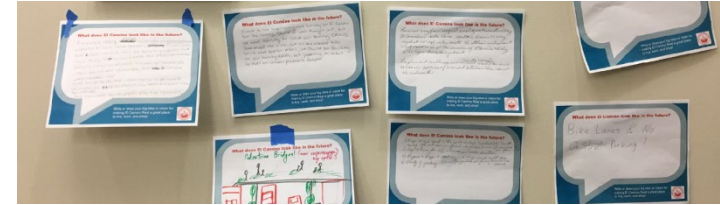
- Location and Plan Context
- Purpose
- Relationship to Other Plans
- Community Engagement Process





Chapter 2: Vision + Framework

- Vision
- Desired Outcomes
- Planning Frameworks
 - Focus development at key activity nodes
 - Respect the character of adjacent neighborhoods
 - Create memorable public open spaces
 - Enhance connectivity
 - Improve multimodal access and safety for all modes
 - Promote a range of housing options





Chapter 3: Land Use

- Land Use policies
- Land Use Plan (zoning map)
- Development growth potential
- Open Space Plan (existing and proposed open spaces)


LAND USE

This section describes the future land uses in the 22 Census Tract Specific Plan Area. It provides broad policy direction for the future of future land use envisioned along El Camino Real. The overall program goal is to create a vibrant, walkable, and diverse community that is a model for the region. It also includes an overview of the three character areas along the corridor, including the intent to retain the each and associated land use designations.

3.1 Land Use Policies

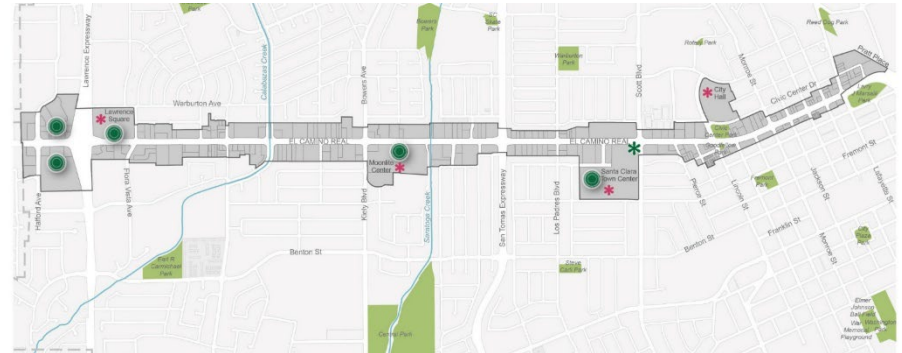
The policies below provide guidance about the intended mix and form of land uses in the 22 Census Tract Specific Plan Area. They provide a policy framework for the future and involve specific design standards and guidelines found in Chapter 4.

- Use regulations.** Land uses in the Plan Area shall be consistent with the General Plan land use designations shown in Figure 3-1.
- Activity Center nodes.** Support the identification of development at major intersections to create dynamic and distinctive nodes that will enhance the identity and function of 22 Census Tract as an emerging destination for both local residents and regional visitors. Encourage the clustering of commercially-oriented commercial services, housing, and community gathering places with pedestrian-oriented amenities that are accessible and walkable.
- Diverse mix of uses.** Encourage a diverse mix of uses including retail, services, community facilities, housing, and recreation that will complement and support the economic vitality of the corridor.
- Neighborhood services and amenities.** Support an increasing range of neighborhood goods and services such as grocery stores, pharmacies, banks, hardware stores, cafes, restaurants, and other amenities to allow people living along the corridor and in nearby neighborhoods to meet their daily needs close to where they live.
- Small preservation.** Work to ensure the retention and establishment in the Specific Plan Area, even as the character and mix of the corridor changes over time.
- Street-orientated retail.** Encourage and establish areas of vibrant and well-served street-level and other uses that support and add interest to create a pedestrian-friendly and successful shopping environment. Allow and encourage temporary pop-up retail and pop-up shops to understand retail options.
- Building design.** Ensure that the resulting architecture and design of building forms provide interest, integrate with the neighborhood, and retain a consistent look that respects public realm.
- Neighborhood transitions.** Ensure that new development provides appropriate transitions in height, bulk, and formality to adjacent residential neighborhoods along the corridor.
- Liveable and beautiful corridor.** Create a more livable and beautiful corridor through the addition of wider sidewalks, landscaping, street furniture, activation, bikepaths, and neighborhood gathering spaces that will create an environment where people want to be.
- New places and public space.** Encourage a variety of public-private, privately owned street furniture, open public environmental amenities, and gathering spaces to meet the needs of new and existing residents, visitors, workers, and businesses.
- Flexibility.** Incorporate planning flexibility into design to create an evolving experience, adapt to market fluctuations, and respond to short-term opportunities to land acquisition. Various solutions may include private street and sidewalk pavilions, interactive landmarks, neighborhood signage, and public art.
- Broad public benefits.** Ensure that large developments provide broad public benefits and improvements, such as new parks and public space, pedestrian and bicycle improvements, and shared parking.
- Community programming and events.** Allow and support specific programming by local organizations, property owners, tenants, or other groups to activate the corridor and encourage social gathering amenities, and gathering spaces to meet the needs of new and existing residents, visitors, workers, and businesses.
- Range of housing types.** Encourage a broad range of multi-family housing types and forms, including small, medium, and large residential units for a variety of different household types, sizes, and shapes of the household members.
- Provision of affordable housing.** Encourage the development of affordable housing throughout the Plan Area with the goal of ensuring that at least 10% of new housing units along the corridor are affordable to lower and moderate income households.



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Land Use Plan Revisions

Key Changes

1. Adds a new, lower density land use designation for townhomes
2. Reduced density along sensitive interfaces (proximity to single-family, particularly on the north side of ECR)
3. Revised Land Use Plan to be consistent with existing/recent entitlements
4. Reduced development potential - 4,400 residential unit capacity (from 6,200 units in the original plan)



Chapter 3: Land Use

Revised Plan – 4 Mixed-Use / Residential Designations

Regional Corridor Mixed-Use

- (Activity Center)
- 55-100 DU/AC
- Minimum FAR 0.2



Corridor Mixed-Use

- 45-65 DU/AC
- Commercial frontage required at some locations



Corridor Residential

- 26-45 DU/AC
(4-story)



Corridor Residential - Low

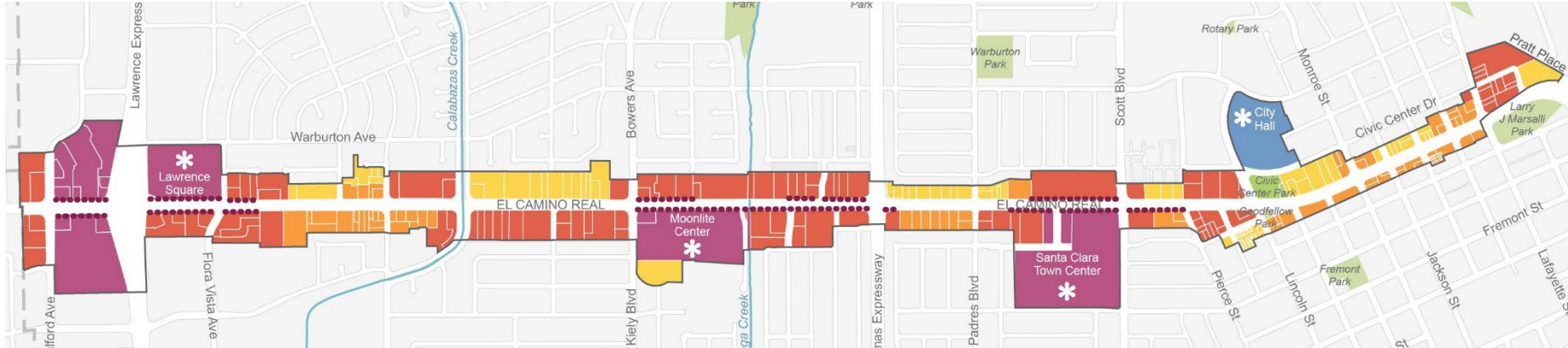
- 12-25 DU/AC
(3-story)





El Camino Real Specific Plan

Land Use Plan



Legend

- City Boundary
- Plan Boundary
- Parcel
- * Landmarks
- Park
- Creeks

Land Use Designation

- Regional Commercial Mixed Use
- Corridor Mixed Use
- Corridor Residential
- Corridor Residential - Low
- Public/Quasi-Public

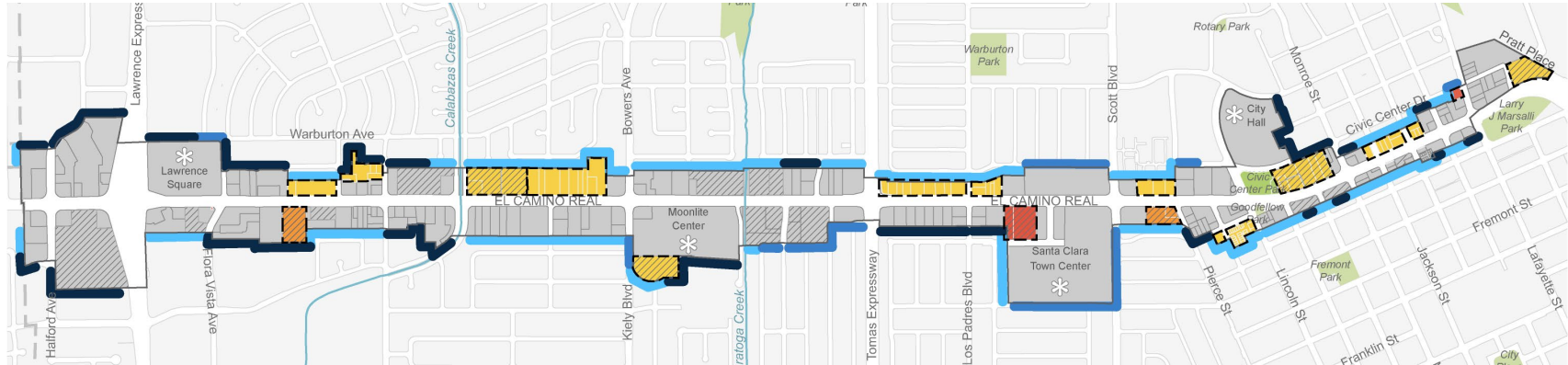
Commercial Overlay

- Ground Floor Commercial Required



El Camino Real Specific Plan

Land Use Change Parcels



Legend

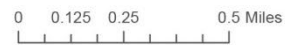
- City Boundary
- Plan Boundary
- ▒ Parcels
- ▨ Recent/Pending Projects
- - - Land Use Change Parcel
- * Landmarks
- ▒ Parks
- Creeks

Land Use Designation

- ▒ Regional Commercial Mixed Use
- ▒ Corridor Mixed Use
- ▒ Corridor Residential
- ▒ Corridor Residential - Low
- ▒ Public/Quasi-Public

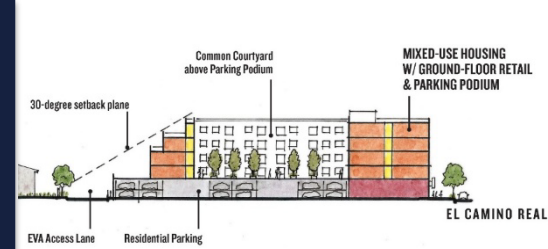
Residential Adjacency

- ▒ Directly abuts a single-family residential parcel
- ▒ Across the street from a single-family residential parcel
- ▒ Directly abuts or across the street from a multi-family residential parcel



Chapter 4: Development and Design Standards

- Land Use Table of permitted uses
- Development Standards (density, heights, setbacks, open space)
- Objective Design Standards



4.3 Standards and Guidelines by Character Area

Regional Commercial Mixed Use (Activity Centers)

Activity Centers are areas with concentrations of retail, services, and uses people gathering and are identified as Regional Commercial Mixed Use. They are located in major transportation along the arterial development corridors and are characterized by their pedestrian-friendly, regional commercial mixed use character. They are designed to be vibrant, walkable, and provide a mix of uses including retail, services, and multifamily residential. They are designed to be vibrant, walkable, and provide a mix of uses including retail, services, and multifamily residential. They are designed to be vibrant, walkable, and provide a mix of uses including retail, services, and multifamily residential.



Table 4.2: Regional Commercial Mixed Use Height, Density, & Intensity Standards

Parameters	Regional Mixed Use
Height, Density, & Intensity	6 to 10 stories max
Maximum Building Height (ft)	100
Maximum Density (Units per Acre)	100 Units/Acre
Minimum Lot Size (Square Feet)	10,000
Minimum Lot Width (Feet)	100
Minimum Lot Depth (Feet)	100
Minimum Lot Area (Square Feet)	10,000
Minimum Lot Area (Acres)	0.23
Minimum Lot Area (Square Feet)	10,000
Minimum Lot Area (Acres)	0.23

1. Density and height standards are based on the maximum height and density standards for the Regional Commercial Mixed Use character area. 2. Density and height standards are based on the maximum height and density standards for the Regional Commercial Mixed Use character area. 3. Density and height standards are based on the maximum height and density standards for the Regional Commercial Mixed Use character area. 4. Density and height standards are based on the maximum height and density standards for the Regional Commercial Mixed Use character area. 5. Density and height standards are based on the maximum height and density standards for the Regional Commercial Mixed Use character area. 6. Density and height standards are based on the maximum height and density standards for the Regional Commercial Mixed Use character area.



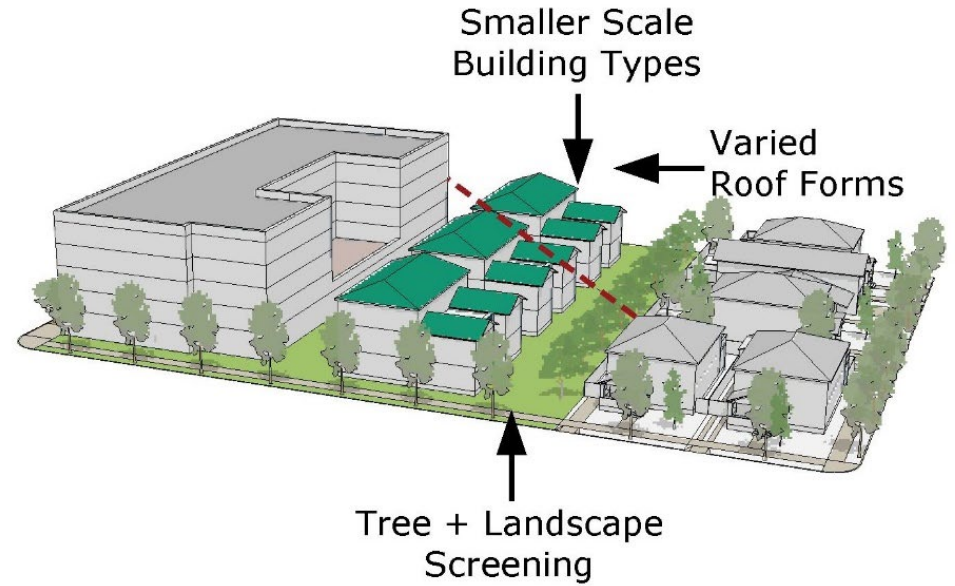
Chapter 4 Revisions

Key Changes

1. Added development and design standards for the new Corridor Residential – Low land use designation
2. Revised neighborhood transition standards for North side of ECR- 30-degree daylight plane
3. Removed the commercial FAR requirement from the Corridor Mixed Use land use designation; Commercial is still required for sites designated with the Ground Floor Commercial Overlay
4. Minor revisions to development and objective design standards to align with recently adopted Zoning Code and best practices

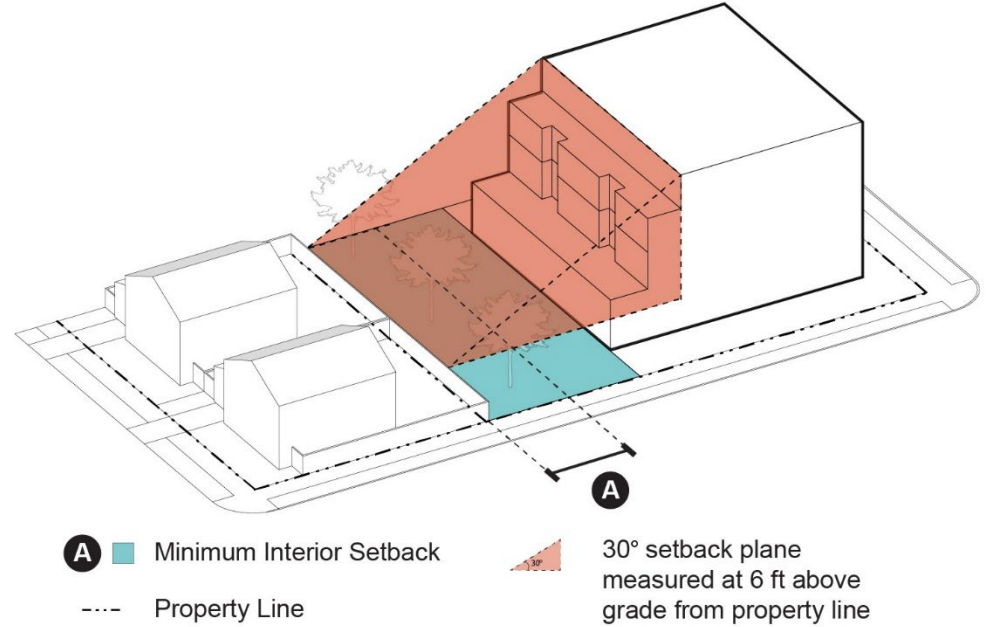
Neighborhood Transition Strategies

- Daylight Plane
- Building setbacks
- Upper-story step backs
- Smaller scale/house-form building types and varied roof lines
- Orient windows and balconies away from existing homes
- Landscape buffers



Daylight Plane

- **30-Degrees** on N side of ECR
- **45-degrees** on S side



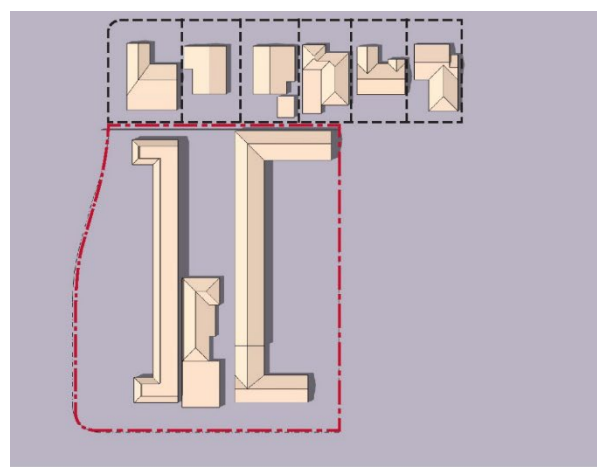


Shadow Studies

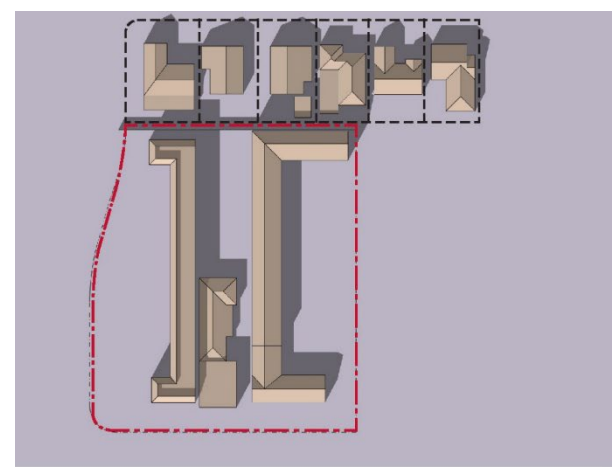
Test Site – Morse Lane/ECR



Shadow Studies



June 20 - Summer Solstice - 2:00pm



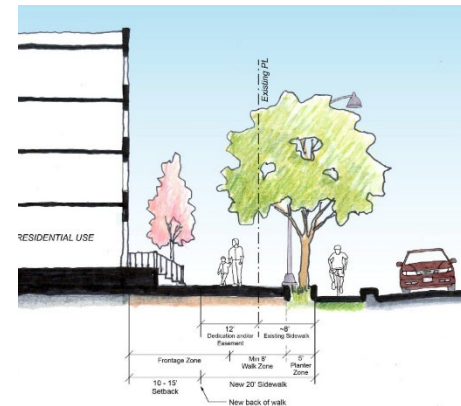
December 21 - Winter Solstice - 2:00pm





Chapter 5: Transportation + Public Spaces

- Mobility Framework
- Proposed Bike Network
- Proposed Pedestrian Network
- Sidewalk and public realm standards
- ROW Concept for ECR
- Parking and curbside management





Chapter 6: Implementation

- Project Administration
- Community Benefits
- Implementation Actions + Programs
- Recommended Capital Improvements
 - Water
 - Sewer
 - Stormwater
 - Street reconfiguration
 - Public realm
- Funding + Financing Strategy



Figure 3-1. Water and Sewer System Recommended Improvements



Stormwater

There is the potential to improve stormwater drainage along 33rd Avenue Road by installing permeable paving within the proposed cycle track, as described in Table 4-3. Locations where the slope for permeable paving is dictated by utility lines existing between the proposed cycle track location and the potential for installing storm drain infrastructure. There are locations where permeable paving can be installed on the north-south westbound side of 33rd Avenue Road. In addition, there are, however, additional storm drain infrastructure would need to be installed. Permeable paving is feasible along the middle of the path adjacent to the westbound side of 33rd Avenue Road as it is the most just directly adjacent to existing storm drain lines in most cases.

The location of trees and tree gardens can be interdependent; not additional accommodations for tree gardens should be sought out at the natural low points along the 33rd Avenue Road corridor and where catch basins already exist to capture existing drainage. Catch basins in the tree-trait buffer existing along the cycle track will allow for runoff from the roadway to catch basins and capture about about the back of curb. Given the view of 33rd Avenue Road existing roadway into the median and the lack of additional drainage through it, there is further potential to install tree gardens and landscaping within the median and drain portions of the street network.

Table 4-4. Stormwater Capital Improvements

Project	Description	Estimated Timing	Responsibility	Cost Estimate
Permeable Paving in Cycle Track	Permeable paving may be placed in areas of the cycle track to improve stormwater drainage and reduce runoff, including stormwater.	Following an Complete Streets project or placed through the corridor.	City	\$60 per foot x 4 in x 4 mile cycle track
Tree Garden	With trees installed existing along the westbound side, it is feasible to install permeable paving in the median and the back of curb.	Following an Complete Streets project or placed through the corridor.	City	\$60,000 per 100 sq ft tree garden

El Camino Real Specific Plan

Environmental Review

- An Environmental Impact Report (EIR) was prepared in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).
- The EIR analyzes program-level impacts of the El Camino Real Specific Plan.
- The Notice of Availability (NOA) was issued on December 12, 2025 and the Draft EIR circulated for a 45-day review period from December 12, 2025 to January 26, 2026.
- The EIR found that **all potentially significant impacts can be mitigated to a less than significant level**. The mitigation measures are included in the Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP).
- During the Draft EIR comment period, a total of four comment letters were received. None of the comment letters identified new or more significant impacts than was disclosed in the EIR.



Recent Meetings + Engagement

- CAC Meeting – *December 16, 2024*
- Community Open House Workshop - *Feb. 24, 2025*
- Silicon Valley Chamber of Commerce – *Mar. 25, 2025*
- Community Meeting – *April 2, 2025*
- PC Study Session – *June 11, 2025*
- CC Study Session – *June 27, 2025*

El Camino Real Specific Plan

Feedback Received

- **Specific Site Designation:** parcels at NE corner of San Tomas are designated as lower-density townhomes – suggestion to change to higher density given adjacent trail and location.
- **Measurement of Daylight Plane:** Consider measuring the 30-degree daylight plane from the lower grade of adjacent single-family homes rather than from El Camino Real parcels.
- **Stacking of Bonus Programs:** Stacking of the State Density Bonus Law with local incentives (e.g., LEED, transit, and affordability bonuses in the General Plan) will be allowed where feasible based on the specific provisions of each program.
- Concerns regarding vacant retail and **current market conditions** to implement the Plan.
- Concerns about **preserving existing retail:** *Per the growth projections developed for the plan, the projected non-residential loss (~289,000 sq ft) is a small portion of the total non-residential space (~2M sq ft).*



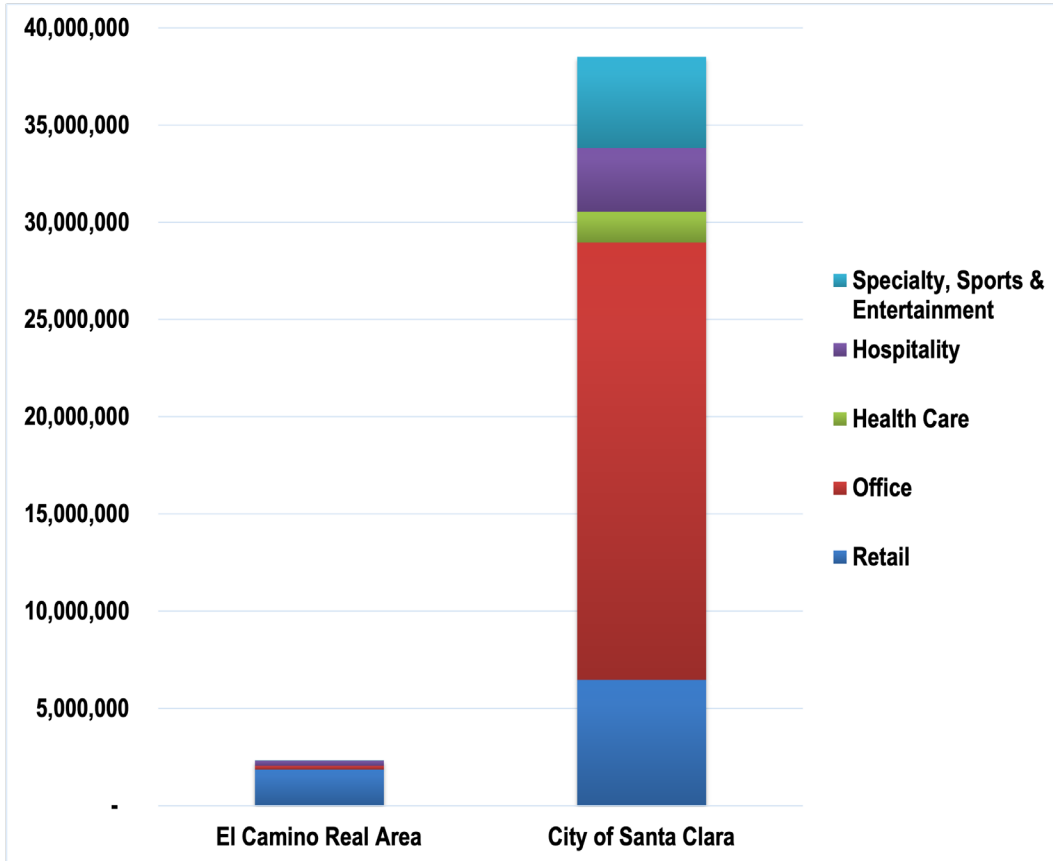


Retail Market Overview

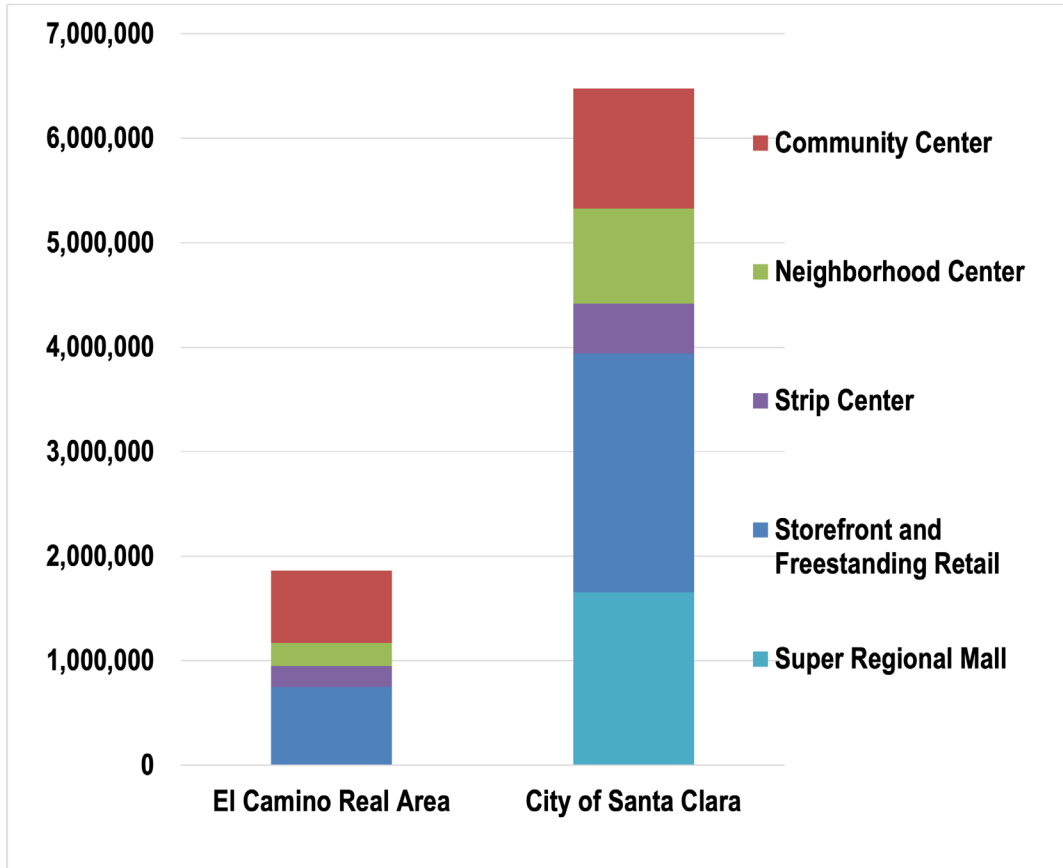
Citywide and El Camino Real Specific Plan Area



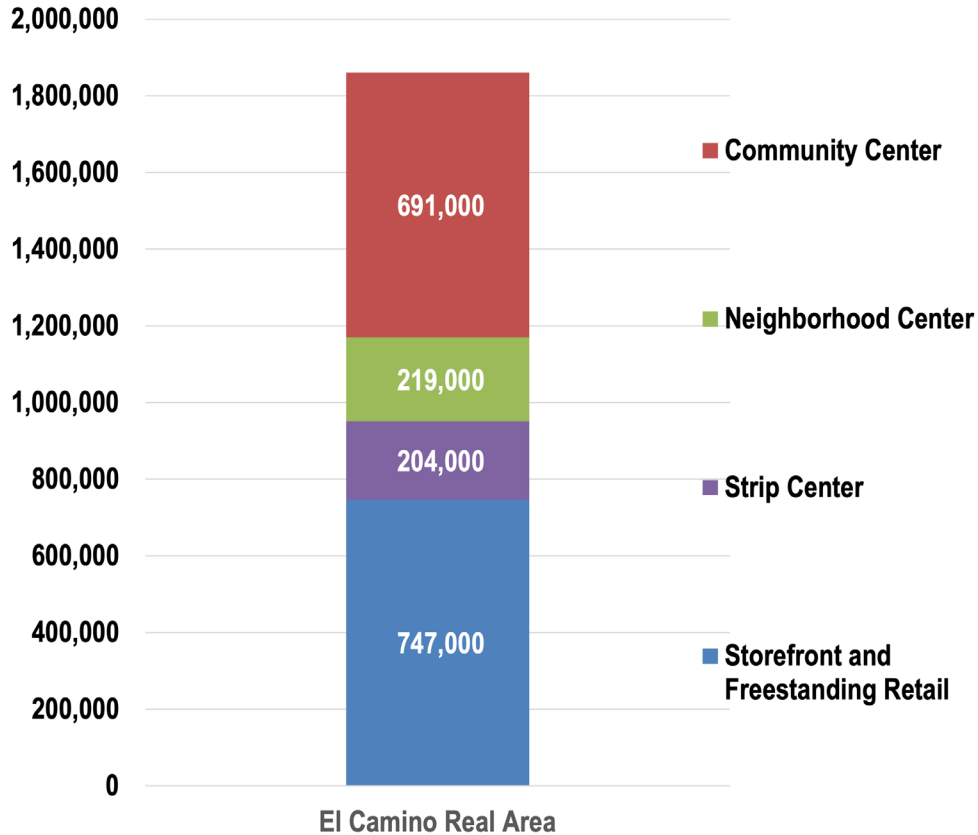
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Comparative Distribution of Commercial Uses—El Camino Real Area and City of Santa Clara



Comparative Distribution of Retail Types— El Camino Real Area & City of Santa Clara



Community Centers

Santa Clara Town Center*
Moonlite Center*
Lawrence Expressway Plaza*

Neighborhood Centers

Lawrence Square Center*
El Camino Shopping Center
McWhorters Village

** Designated Mixed-Use & Activity Centers in ECRSP Area*



Retail Observations in El Camino Real Area

- Daily needs retailers like grocery and drug stores
- Strong clusters of Korean businesses to the west and Indian businesses to the east
- Non-continuous, inactive and automotive uses hinder vibrancy and connections
- Layout, design and some uses not conducive to walkability and desirable retail co-tenancies
- Shallow lots hinder multifamily infill development



Trends & Best Practices

Promote Retail and Mixed-Use Development



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Key Retail Trends

- **Consumer preferences** continue to rapidly evolve
 - Seeking convenience, connectivity and unique offerings
- Retail centers/clusters **must enhance shopper experience and encourage longer stays** to remain competitive
 - Retailers must refresh and evolve to attract patrons
 - Spaces need to be flexible, tech-ready and strategically located
 - Complementary businesses are critical (like fitness and wellness)
- **Poorly designed, weak performing centers will continue to struggle** to fill spaces and likely face closure



Retail Success Factors

- **Corners/Intersections**– Near main thoroughfares, intersections, plazas
- **Visibility/Facade**– Signage, visibility to traffic, transparency, lighting, design
- **Heights**–14 feet clear for small spaces and 16 feet clear over 3500 SF
- **Space layout**– Minimum 45 feet deep (preferably 55 feet deep) with limited columns/inside walls





Retail Success Factors cont.

- **Custom Features**—Customized to retailer, e.g. size, finishes, MEP etc.
- **Sidewalks**— Width, plazas, parklets
- **Accessibility**— Customers, deliveries, garbage, curb management etc.
- **Parking**— Location, availability and access to customers/employees



Photo Credit: KDA Architects



Retail in Mixed-Use Spaces

- **Hybrid work has shifted retail demand** to residential and workplace-adjacent areas
- **Emphasis on live, work, play (LWP)**
 - Surrounded by dense populations, strong employment and housing growth
- **Key success factors**
 - Right mix of tenants
 - High foot traffic and walkability
 - Plazas and shared spaces that build community

WHY MIXED-USE SPACES ARE THE FUTURE OF RETAIL

By Kurt Volkman

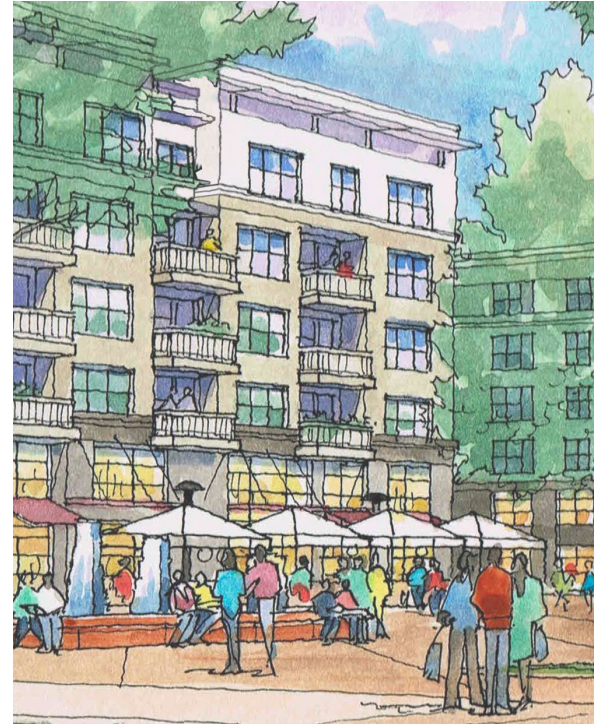


Some existing retail centers are being reimagined as live-work-play developments.
Alacatr via iStock/Getty Images Plus



Mixed-Use Retail Success Factors

- **Desirable location and excellent design** to attract quality retailers
- **Adequate lot depth and building height**
- **Visibility, foot traffic and accessibility**
- **Plazas and community spaces to gather**
- **Horizontal vs. vertical mixed-use can be easier to accomplish**





Mixed-Use Retail Recommendations

1

Promote success with desirable, vibrant retail

- Only require retail where most successful and minimize vacancies
- Allow other types of uses to activate street

2

Focus retail on well-located, larger sites

- Focus on deep sites at corners/intersections
- Allow housing on shallow and mid-block properties

3

Encourage sponsors to engage retail experts

- Assess market to recommend tenant mix and requirements
- Customize design to address retailer needs



Thanks to Data Sources

- City of Santa Clara
- Joint Venture Silicon Valley
- CoStar
- Cushman Wakefield
- CBRE
- Greensfelder Real Estate Strategy
- ICSC
- NAIOP Commercial Real Estate Development Association
- Retail Real Estate Resources
- Urban Land Institute



In Summary, the Specific Plan:

- Implements the General Plan vision by transforming El Camino Real into a mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented corridor
- Refines land use designations and allowed densities to better transition to adjacent neighborhoods while maintaining key activity centers.
- Strengthens development standards, including a 30-degree daylight plane and other design measures to minimize neighborhood impacts.
- Enhances mobility, public spaces, and infrastructure with a clear implementation and funding strategy.
- Aligns retail strategy with market trends, focusing retail in key areas while supporting flexible mixed-use development.



Questions

El Camino Real Specific Plan



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Recommendation

El Camino Real Specific Plan



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El Camino Real Specific Plan

The Planning Commission:

- Adopt a resolution recommending that the City Council certify the EIR and related CEQA documents.
- Adopt a resolution recommending that the City Council approve the El Camino Real Specific Plan, a specific plan consistent with CA Government Code Sections 65450-65457.
- Adopt a resolution recommending that the City Council approve General Plan text amendment creating the Regional Corridor Mixed Use (55-100 DU/AC; 0.2 Commercial FAR); Corridor Mixed Use (45-65 DU/AC); Corridor Residential (26-45 DU/AC); Corridor Residential - Low (12-25 DU/AC); and Ground Floor Commercial Overlay land use designations, and amending the General Plan Land Use diagrams for Phases II and III to reflect the land use designations in the El Camino Real Specific Plan and remove the El Camino Real Focus Area.
- Recommend that the City Council approve the ordinance amending the zoning code to create the El Camino Real Zoning districts.



El Camino Real Specific Plan

Next Steps

- City Council hearing – May 19, 2026