



**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS
of the Los Altos-Mountain View Area
97 Hillview Avenue, Los Altos, CA 94022**

May 18, 2014

Mayor Clark and Members of the City Council
City of Mountain View
500 Castro Street
Mountain View, CA 94041

Re: City Council Study Session May 20, 2014 – Item 3.1 El Camino Real Precise Plan

Dear Mayor Clark and Members of the City Council:

The League of Women Voters would like to comment on the in-process El Camino Real Precise Plan. We are all keenly aware of the increasingly critical problem with the lack of housing affordable to the many diverse socio-economic groups who live or work in Mountain View. We wrote about these concerns last week when the Council was considering the Draft Housing Element.

We have urged the Council on many occasions to consider affordable housing as the most important community benefit to be provided when a developer exceeds the FAR provided in the zoning code or General Plan. We suggested that an affordable housing overlay zone be included as part of the Housing Element programs, but were advised that it was more appropriate to see this type of program as part of the new precise plans. Therefore, we would like to see affordable housing (most likely in the form of below-market-rate units (“BMR’s”) being constructed as part of a development) being specified more robustly in the El Camino Real Precise Plan as the default community benefit. We recommend that any development that exceeds 1.35 FAR include affordable housing, and the higher the FAR, the more BMR’s and the lower the rents being charged for them.

We are also concerned that all the new housing being built in Mountain View serves only those with above-moderate incomes. Most importantly, we would like to see housing provided for those at the lowest incomes, who are being forced out of Mountain View by rapidly rising prices. This is probably done best through affordable housing developments where the City invests considerable funds, or through BMR units. This concern is particularly relevant for the El Camino Real Precise Plan because we anticipate that as the El Camino Real Corridor is redeveloped, much of what has become housing affordable to those at lower incomes will be torn down, the residents will be displaced, and expensive market-rate housing will be built in its place.

But we also see a need for a variety of housing to satisfy diverse needs and incomes. Perhaps there could be language written into the El Camino Real Precise Plan that would allow the City to require fewer BMR’s if a developer exceeds the FAR threshold of 1.35, if the developer builds smaller units going for lower rents. We highly recommend diversity in sizes of units and would like to see more units ranging from 400-500 square feet, especially in rental developments. However, we also think that smaller ownership units, such as the stacked flats that Councilmember Bryant referenced, could

help some potential moderate-income homeowners. We realize this is an area that needs to be carefully explored, but we would urge some innovative thinking as to how this diversity of a mix of housing types could happen.

We encourage the Council to find incentives so that a mix of residential and commercial/retail uses are built as often as possible, as, so far, most new residential developments along El Camino Real are solely residential.

We agree with the City's plans to help owners/developers consolidate small parcels; this was mentioned as a program in the Draft Housing Element and again in the El Camino Real Precise Plan.

Sincerely,
Donna Yobs
Co-Chair, Housing Committee
LWV of the Los Altos/Mountain View Area

cc. Dan Rich
Randy Tsuda
Martin Alkire
Terry Blount
Eric Anderson