



**Greenbriar Homes Communities<sup>SM</sup>**

*The Premier Living Experience*

August 7, 2007

Palo Alto City Planning and Transportation Commissioners  
c/o City Clerk  
250 Hamilton Avenue  
Palo Alto, California 94301

**Re: 3401, 3415, and 3445 Alma Street  
Alma Plaza Mixed Use Project  
Ordinance-PC Planned Community 4956**

Honorable Planning and Transportation Commission Members:

Our Site and Design application for Alma Plaza is on your Agenda this Wednesday, August 8th (old and proposed site plans are in Attachment 1).

As you know, City Council approved a PC Zoning Ordinance for the Property. This Ordinance 4956 became effective June 18, 2007. We have put together this binder to provide you with a summary regarding the process that the project has undergone since you last saw it and as a supplement to the staff report. We are hopeful that after reviewing our application, you will support our application and recommend the project to the Architectural Review Board.

### **City Council Approval**

This Ordinance establishes: the amount of retail at 27,717 s.f.; 37 detached residential homes and 14 BMR rental apartments; a maximum FAR, allowing 82,273 s.f. for the single family homes and 13,267 s.f. for the BMRs, and 8,900 s.f. of park space.

### **Revised Plan**

In the approved PC Ordinance, the City Council set direction for the project and fixed certain parameters while allowing flexibility in others. We have taken the plan and parameters approved by Council and significantly redesigned the plan in an attempt to address the majority of comments the Planning and Transportation Commission raised at its March 28<sup>th</sup> hearing. We believe the revised plan incorporates most of

the P&TC's requests and provides a community that will provide viable retail services for the existing nearby neighbors as well as the surrounding community in a mixed-use setting that incorporates plazas, parks and residential living spaces.

### **SITE PLANNING**

A revitalized Alma Plaza will provide a successful transition between the existing urban edge of Alma Street and the railroad line on the west, the offices at the southwest corner, the higher density apartments to the north and the east, and the single-family homes along Ramona Street, and along the southern boundary. Because of the heavy traffic and non-pedestrian friendly thoroughfare, the retail portion of the project has been oriented to the east, and toward the existing neighborhood. Retail has always been an integral part of this vision, with uses that would benefit both the existing residents surrounding the project area, and the new community of residents that will occupy the residential homes on the remainder of the site. The retail has been oriented to the east to face inward, to shield shoppers from the heavy traffic, and orient them to the gathering areas in the plazas and parks, as well as the shops and services. The central residential portion of the site has also been re-oriented to better engage the retail portion of the project, while maintaining a distinct character of its own. The homes along the grand paseo on the southern boundary remain oriented to the south to maintain a friendly interface with the project's adjacent Emerson Street neighbors.

### **PASEOS**

A series of paseos has been designed to purposefully separate pedestrians from vehicular traffic. They provide landscaped linkages throughout the new community. The single-family homes will be alley-loaded to further limit the contact between pedestrians and vehicles. A strong pedestrian connection to Ramona has been included in a landscaped paseo with rose arbors, trees and a pathway with homes fronting onto it, to invite the exiting neighborhood into the new community with its gathering areas and stores. The rose arbors at the terminus of each paseo, provide way-finding elements that reinforce directional signage as well as adding to the overall cohesiveness of the landscape design.

The paseo along the southern boundary, that connects the new community with Ramona, also honors a commitment to the neighbors adjacent the southern boundary, to have a landscaped walkway rather than rear yards abutting their properties. Situating the paseo along the southern boundary also ensures that the three homes fronting onto Ramona are not separated. Lastly, in this location there are no issues with grade separation, as would occur if this primary paseo were shifted to the north.

## **PARKS AND OPEN SPACE**

Two parks have been sited in this new Mixed-Use community, as distinguishing landscape elements. Both parks will offer a layering of trees and shrubs, interspersed with benches and connected by pathways. The larger park is in the front of the project, between the retail and the residential areas, providing a unifying presence as well as a buffer between the two uses, and distinguishing it as an informal gathering area. The larger park has homes that front directly onto it, facing the Mixed-Use building across from the park. A pathway provides direct pedestrian access to the front doors, as well as to other areas of the new community, encouraging pedestrian activity.

The smaller park is situated to provide a visual terminus for the paseo leading east from the larger park as well as a conduit to the paseo along the eastern property line. It also provides a more intimate gathering space for residents and neighbors. It may offer an opportunity for a play area for toddlers or younger children.

Additionally, each of the homes also has its own private usable open space in the side yards, with the use of shared easements.

## **RETAIL**

The Mixed-Use Building has 17,300 square feet of retail space, 15,000 square feet of which is designated as grocery store. To maximize the viability of this retail, it is located immediately adjacent to Alma Street, defining and reinforcing the edge of the street. Because of the speed of traffic along Alma Street and the noise intrusion, the fact that there are few pedestrians along this section of Alma Street, as well as for the cohesiveness of the entire Mixed Use project, this ground floor retail is primarily oriented to the residential interior of the project, creating gathering areas and visual connections to the retail shops where neighbors and shoppers can enjoy the mixed-use neighborhood environment.

To create a visually inviting frontage, the street side architecture consists of street-level details, including a rhythm of large recessed openings filled with either wood plank doors or glass, depending on the requirements of the grocery store. The street-side facade opens up with glass at the northern end of the building, to emphasize the entry to the project. From there, glass filled openings wrap around the building drawing shoppers and visitors alike to the interior of the new community. Entry doors to the smaller retail spaces open onto the entry drive aisle and rear parking area. The entrances to the grocery store and a separate entry for the second-floor BMR Apartments and the Community Room are on the eastern side of the building, as is the vehicular entrance to the basement. The loading dock has been located on the southern side of the building, away from the street and the more public areas of the new community, providing immediate egress to Alma Street.

Fourteen BMR apartments and a community room are located on the second floor of the Mixed-Use building. Each apartment has its own private balcony, providing horizontal definition to the upper portions of the façade of the Mixed-Use building and visually separating the different uses within.

Retail 1 is a two-story commercial building. It has glass on all four sides, with entrances on the northern and eastern sides. It helps provide an additional exclamation as a visual anchor at project the entrance. Although smaller, architecturally, it compliments the Mixed-Use Building to the south across the entry driveway with a similar horizontal base of recessed openings and second floor roof form. The building architecture transitions as it wraps into the community to pick up the character of retail 2.

Retail 2 is a single-story building at the eastern terminus of the entry drive way. It is envisioned as a pavilion in the park, anchoring the northern edge of the community park. It consists of a rhythm of simple columns with glass panels on the western and southern sides, while the northern and eastern sides are more solid to provide privacy for the facing homes. A layering of trees, vines growing on the solid wall and shrubs will be used to soften the area between the two uses. The roof form of retail 2 is a simple shed design with deep overhangs, picking up on the simple shed roofs of the Mixed-use building across the parking lot. Colors and materials for the retail buildings will match the deep earth tones, smooth cement plaster, rich woods and metal roof of the Mixed-Use building.

There will be legible signage that fits with the architectural styling of the buildings, along the Alma Streets side and at the entry. The signs will provide information about the stores and services, as well as way-finding information.

Exterior lights will also fit the architectural styling of the buildings.

## **RESIDENTIAL**

This project includes 37 two and three-story, single-family detached homes, the home provide the real transition between the higher density apartments on the north and east, as well as the single-family homes on Ramona Street and to the south.

There are six models; four of them are alley-loaded with front doors entering onto paseos with landscaped pedestrian walkways. Six of the homes face the mixed-use building and front onto the park. The alley-loaded homes are primarily three story single-family detached residences that help create a cohesive interface of uses which fits with their urban setting. These homes have the third story located to the rear, along the alley. This provides a better interface between the existing adjacent land uses and our new homes; this design enhances the paseo experience by placing two stories along the paseo rather than three. Each home has its own usable private open space through the use of shared easements.

The homes to be situated on Ramona Street have the typical configuration of other homes on the street, with entry doors and garages at the front, and rear yards. A full third of the residences, will offer elevators to make the homes attractive to those residents who desire to age in place, promoting a diverse community. This community promotes a walkable lifestyle offering distinct horizontal and vertical mixed-use that is innovative within Palo Alto.

### **Planning and Transportation Commission Recommendation**

At its March 28<sup>th</sup> hearing, the P&TC made a recommendation for approval of the project as proposed in the PC Zone with numerous overlying conditions. Below are the suggestions, *in Italics*, made in your March 28 Motion and, **in Bold**, how our current proposed plan meets your requests:

*Adopt the PC zone proposed*

#### **Current Plan**

**PC Zone Ordinance 4956 was approved by the City Council on June 18, 2007. (See Attachment 1 for the Approved Site Plan)**

*Incorporate CN uses and standards by reference*

#### **Current Plan**

**The Current Plan has 27,717 s.f. of retail as defined by the City Council which is equal to that required by PC Zone with the exception that it is not all ground floor retail. (See Attachment 1 for the Current proposed Site Plan)**

*Include site and plan review by commission before ARB*

#### **Current Plan**

**Implemented. This P&TC hearing is occurring before ARB.**

*Require a minimum sized 15,000 square foot grocery store*

#### **Current Plan**

**Implemented. Ordinance requires a minimum grocery use of 15,000 square feet including basement retail uses of 3500 s.f.**

*Include a park the size of what would be required by Quimby act and have this park adjacent to retail*

**Current Plan**

**Partially Implemented.** The size of the two Parks combined is, 8,900 as approved in the PC Ordinance. However, in an effort to satisfy the P&TC's request for the park to be adjacent to the retail we have substantially redesigned the site plan as described above, and relocated the larger park to a more centralized location.

*Require minimum 15% ground floor retail that is retained in perpetuity*

**Current Plan**

**Partially Implemented.** 15% equals 27,531 s.f. and this current plan reflects the PC Ordinance requirement of 27,717 s.f. of retail, which is to be retained in perpetuity. The Ordinance does not require all of the retail to be ground floor retail. The approved allocation has 17,300 s.f. of ground floor retail in the Mixed Use Building and approximately 2,790 s.f. of ground floor retail the two smaller retail buildings.

*Housing design shall create a fluid transition between mixed use, housing and open space and to provide a greater variety in housing type*

**Current Plan**

**Implemented.** As approved by the PC Ordinance, the current plan offers 3 housing types: apartments above retail, transitioning into three-story small-lot detached homes and then to more standard two-story detached homes along Ramona. There are also 14 BMR rental apartments located on the second floor of the mixed-use building.

This plan has been significantly redesigned, placing six homes along the front of the relocated park which creates a fluid transition between the retail, housing and open space. Additionally, the auxiliary retail buildings have been relocated to front on Alma Street, at the entrance to the project with the Small Retail 2 building located at the northern end of the park. This building is envisioned as a pavilion in the park, furthering the fluid transition between the uses.

*Mixed use shall be one parcel with the exception of any dedicated open space*

**Current Plan**

The Ordinance allows for flexibility of ownership. As proposed, the retail portions of the project may be parcelized, but maintenance shall be handled through a reciprocal maintenance agreement, if all parcels are not owned by same owner.

*Developer to have option of including office use in their vertical uses*

**Current Plan**

**Accepted as Ordinance permits the Develop to have the option to include medical office, banks and financial services, and neighborhood business services.**

*Access to accommodate both pedestrian and bicycle access*

**Current Plan**

**Fully Implemented. This site plan specifically separates pedestrian and bicycle access from vehicular access. All access ways will have concrete walkways. As this is a residential neighborhood and paseos serve the front doors of the homes, it is appropriate that bike riders dismount and push their bikes in these areas. Access on Alma will accommodate both pedestrians and bikes; bike racks will be provided in the retail and park areas.**

**Conclusion**

McNellis Partners and Greenbriar Homes Communities have dedicated a significant amount of effort to meet the expressed desires of the City and the neighbors with this revised application. We have worked closely with planning and public works staff and the immediately adjacent neighbors. We believe that the proposed community will be a wonderful addition to the existing Palo Alto neighborhood.

We would like to thank you for taking the time to review the project prior to the hearing and that hope you agree that the latest site plan does a good job at integrating the parameters approved in the PC Ordinance 4956 along with the majority of direction you provided in your last hearing. We request your support for our site and design application as presented.

Please call us with any questions.

Sincerely,

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