



The following four alternatives have been proposed by City staff to be reviewed as part of the environmental analysis for the Comprehensive Plan Update. Alternative 1 is required to be reviewed as part of State of California environmental law. Alternatives 2, 3, and 4 were refined from input received at the June 29 community workshop.

Alternative 1: Do Nothing (This is a legal requirement for the EIR)

No changes would be made to Comp Plan land use designations or policies. Projected population and job growth would be accommodated in new development permitted under existing zoning.

- **Downtown** would continue to see redevelopment of low density sites to provide additional office space and the downtown cap on non-residential development would be exceeded. Separate programs related to parking management (e.g. Residential Permit Parking) could be implemented, but no new garages would be constructed, and little residential development would occur.
- **El Camino Real** would continue to evolve consistent with existing land use designations and zoning. Auto-oriented uses would diminish and new mixed use projects would add office and housing over retail where small parcels can be assembled for redevelopment.
- **The California Avenue** area would continue to experience growth pressures, with new office and housing uses on the streets surrounding Cal Ave, and these pressures could spread to the **South San Antonio** area over time.
- **The Stanford Research Park, Stanford Shopping Center, and East Meadow Circle/Bayshore** areas would remain job centers.

Alternative 2: No Change in Land Use Designations; Policy Changes would Slow Non-Residential Development & Allow Only Modest Housing Growth to Meet State Requirements

In this alternative, the City would establish a procedure for controlling the pace of new commercial (office and R&D) development projects greater than 10K square feet, such as a yearly floor area cap. The City would also modify its policies and development standards to ensure that the amount of residential growth and development is modest, and focused on meeting State requirements, with an emphasis on smaller units that are affordable to people who work in Palo Alto. R-1 neighborhoods would be protected and policies would encourage the preservation of neighborhood-serving retail where it exists throughout the City. There would not be major new infrastructure investments, except this alternative would test the impacts and benefits of making roadway improvements included in the County Expressway study.

- **Downtown** would not change substantially from its current appearance and mix of uses, although managing the pace of non-residential development downtown would likely result in more residential development instead. The 50' height limit would remain, and one or more surface parking lots could be redeveloped to provide additional parking.
- **El Camino Real** would see increased setbacks where new buildings are developed and those buildings would not exceed three stories. Any added housing would have to be relatively low density unless it met strict affordability requirements. Retail uses would remain, and would be primarily neighborhood-serving.
- **California Avenue** would keep its eclectic, local-serving character, and no tall buildings would be added. The City would try to keep Fry's and encourage housing to be built on top. If Fry's did leave, then medium-density housing would be developed on that site. No new Tech Corridor overlay would be added. Parking would be provided to support any new growth in this area. Pedestrian and bicycle improvements would be prioritized.
- The **Stanford Research Park, the Stanford Shopping Center, and the East Meadow Circle/Bayshore area** would remain job centers. Some services for workers and a shuttle service would be added, but no housing would be added.
- The **South San Antonio** area would continue to support a variety of non-residential uses until market forces result in mixed-use development consistent with existing zoning.

Alternative 3: Slow Non-Residential Development & Change Land Use Designations to Focus Housing in Transit-Served Areas with Neighborhood Services

In this alternative, the City would establish a procedure for controlling the pace of new commercial (office and R&D) development projects greater than 10K square feet and would adjust land use designations and policies to discourage or prohibit new housing unless it's within one half mile of a Caltrain or Bus Rapid Transit stop and to increase allowable residential densities within those areas. This "swap" would effectively downzone areas that are not immediately accessible to transit in exchange for up-zoning transit served areas that include neighborhood services. R-1 neighborhoods would be protected, and policies would encourage the preservation of neighborhood-serving retail where it exists throughout the City. This alternative could test the impacts and benefits of depressing the Caltrain tracks below-grade between San Antonio Ave. and Page Mill Rd.

- High density housing would be added **Downtown**. A slight increase to the height limit would be allowed, raising it to 55 feet as long as the additional height is used for residential units. Smaller units (studios and 1-bedroom apartments) and/or senior housing would be encouraged. The 27 University Avenue site would be developed as a transit center with workforce housing.
- Along **El Camino Real**, new development would be focused in nodes at planned BRT stops, and housing would be prohibited outside of identified nodes. Portions of the **Stanford Research Park and the Stanford Shopping Center** fronting on El Camino Real could be redeveloped to include housing if these areas also incorporate neighborhood services and are coupled with streetscape improvements and pedestrian, bike, and transit connections to Downtown and Cal Ave.

- **California Avenue** itself would remain a “quirky” low scale commercial street, and the surrounding area would accommodate additional multifamily housing at medium densities with underground parking.
- The **East Meadow Circle/Bayshore** and **South San Antonio** areas would continue to support a variety of non-residential uses, and housing would be prohibited.

Alternative 4: Explore Innovative Net-Zero Impact Concepts

Under this alternative, Palo Alto would lead the state and the country in testing various “net zero” concepts: net zero greenhouse gas emissions, net zero new vehicle miles traveled (VMT), or net zero potable water use. Some policies might be applied citywide; others would be focused on specific areas. Affordable housing and neighborhood-serving retail could be exempted from such requirements, but presumably no specific growth management strategy would be needed on the theory that the “net-zero” requirements would address the pace and impacts of development. R-1 neighborhoods would be protected and policies would encourage the preservation and expansion of neighborhood-serving retail throughout the City.

- The current **Downtown** cap on non-residential development would be replaced with a restriction on net new vehicle trips. The area would retain its current mix of uses and would be promoted as a cultural gathering place for all ages, with a full range of services for residents and employees. Significant pedestrian improvements would be introduced, along with improvements to the Caltrain station and transit center intended to make Downtown a regional transit hub with free shuttle service to destinations throughout the City.
- Along **El Camino Real**, mixed use development with ground floor retail and residential above and behind would be allowed. While new development would be two or three stories in most areas, it could exceed the 50-foot height limit at three nodes along the corridor, where projects would be models of sustainability, with small units, car share and transit access rather than resident parking, net-zero energy, and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions. Wider sidewalks and bike enhancements would be prioritized along El Camino, and local energy/solar panels would be strongly encouraged all along the corridor on new and old buildings.
- **California Avenue** itself would see little change in this alternative and would remain an eclectic, neighborhood-serving retail destination but the surrounding area would evolve to include more jobs and housing. Specifically, the Fry’s site would transform to include a mix of uses with housing over commercial, with public gardens serving the new homes. A Tech Corridor overlay along Park Boulevard would facilitate the creation of small new tech companies and Park Boulevard itself would become a true “boulevard” with substantial pedestrian and bicycle improvements.
- The **Stanford Research Park** would become a cutting-edge proving ground for innovative concepts in energy generation, carbon sequestration, recycled water, urban farming, and drought-tolerant landscaping. In some areas, existing surface parking could be undergrounded and covered with vertical mixed use buildings, surrounding plazas and public gathering places, including restaurants and nighttime retail. In these areas, new housing would include townhomes, apartments, and lofts, and new streets

would be added to break up the current “superblocks.” A bike sharing program and a new free shuttle would serve residents and workers alike. All landscaping would be required to utilize low/no water plants.

- **The East Meadow Circle** area would be transformed from a research and office park to a new village center with housing around a central plaza, as well as a potential new school. The office and light industrial uses along Fabian Way and Bayshore would remain as is and transit service to the area would be dramatically improved.
- In the **South San Antonio** area, existing businesses would be protected from displacement, although there could be limited new housing once walkability and transit connections to/from Caltrain are improved.