



San Carlos Focused General Plan Update: August 11, 2021 Community Workshop Summary

Prepared by:



800 Hearst Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94710

Introduction

In 2020, the City of San Carlos began efforts to draft a *Focused General Plan update*. A General Plan establishes a framework for how a city will grow and change over the next two decades. General plans are required to have chapters or “elements” that discuss land use, circulation/mobility, open space, conservation, noise, environmental justice, air quality, safety, and housing. The San Carlos *Focused General Plan Update* addresses the Housing Element and the Environmental Safety Element pursuant to periodic updates required by state law. As needed for consistency, other elements may be updated as well, specifically, the Land Use Element. Woven throughout the Elements’ update is a comprehensive community engagement program that will be used to inform the plan update process. This community workshop was the **fourth workshop** to engage the community in this process. The project website: www.sancarlos2040.org contains more information about the planning process and upcoming activities.

On Wednesday, August 11, 2021, the City and consultants, MIG, hosted a public workshop to recap what the planning team has heard so far, discuss potential changes that can help San Carlos achieve its housing needs, and collect input on possible zoning strategies for El Camino Real and other multi-family housing areas. Following guidance from public health agencies regarding public gatherings and COVID-19, the workshop was held virtually using online video conferencing. Forty-two (42) community members and interested individuals participated.

Lisa Porras, Planning Manager introduced Mayor Laura Parmer Lohan. Ms. Porras then introduced members of the San Carlos Team, which included Community and Economic Development Director, Al Savay and Aaron Aknin, Strategic Advisor and Principal of Good City Company. Ms. Porras also introduced Lisa Brownfield of MIG who presented on the overall planning process and MIG planner Joan Chaplick who served as the moderator and who facilitated the meeting.

Lisa Brownfield provided a brief review of the planning process and shared that the early analysis indicates that the City will need to consider changes to current regulations (zoning) to accommodate the number of units the City must plan for. Ms. Brownfield walked through scenarios that showed potential changes to two specific sites along El Camino Real, which can be used as examples for other areas along El Camino Real and in the MU-SC, MU-D, and RM-59 areas. She described how, with modifications to height, density, parking and open space requirements or some combination thereof, more housing units could be accommodated in these areas. This was followed by live polling and verbal comments.

The workshop included presentations, live polls using Zoom, question-and-answer periods, and public comment. Participants were encouraged to submit their comments using the chat function. Comments were documented in real-time using a virtual whiteboard called Mural. At the end of the workshop, a public comment period allowed participants to provide their oral comments; each participant was provided two minutes. Live poll results and key themes are summarized in this document. The workshop’s chat log and virtual whiteboard are available in Appendix A.

Polling Results and Key Themes

The workshop collected input throughout the meeting using live polling. Close-ended questions asked participants about themselves and their preferred land use scenarios. Open-ended questions asked participants to share any additional questions and comments.

San Carlos intends to collect demographic information throughout the outreach process, so the City can understand who has been reached through the process. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number for closed-ended questions. Key themes are provided to summarize open-ended comments. “n” indicates the total number of responses for each question. Not all participants responded to each question.

Question 1. How long have you lived in San Carlos?

- Less than 1 year (5%)
- 1 to 4 years (9%)
- 5 to 9 years (9%)
- 10+ years (77%)

n = 22

Question 2. What is your housing situation?

- I own my home (82%)
- I rent my home (14%)
- I live with friends/family, do not own, or pay rent (5%)
- Do not currently have a permanent home (0%)

n = 22

Question 3. What is your age?

- Under 18 years (0%)
- 18 to 29 years (13%)
- 30 to 49 years (21%)
- 50 to 64 years (38%)
- 65+ years (29%)

n = 24

The planning team presented potential two land use scenarios that would accommodate more housing than the current zoning would allow at the two-example site. After asking questions, participants identified their preferred scenarios by answering closed-ended polling questions and provided input. Figures 1 and 2 summarize these land use scenarios.

Figure 1. 1100 Block El Camino Real Land Use Scenarios

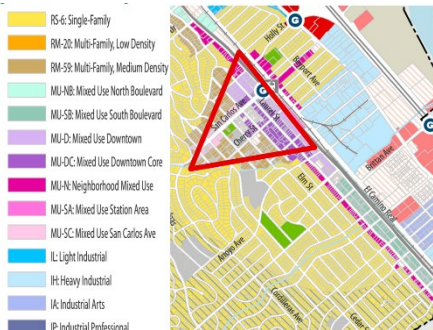
1100 Block El Camino Real						
	Existing Zoning: 50'		Scenario A: 75'		Scenario B: 90'	
	Current Parking Req.	Potential Parking Reduction	Current Parking Req.	Potential Parking Reduction	Current Parking Req.	Potential Parking Reduction
Floors	4 floors	4 floors	6 floors	6 floors	8 floors	8 floors
Units	34 units	34 units	84 units	97 units	112 units	130 units
Parking	52 spaces	17 spaces	105 spaces	49 spaces	140 spaces	65 spaces
DU/AC	50 DU/AC	50 DU/AC	122 DU/AC	141 DU/AC	163 DU/AC	189 DU/AC
Assumptions						
Lot Size	0.6 Acre					
Unit Mix	Studio 10%, 1BD 55%, 2BD 25%, 3BD 10%					
Open Space/ Amenities	23% of building total					

Figure 2. 11 El Camino Real Land Use Scenarios

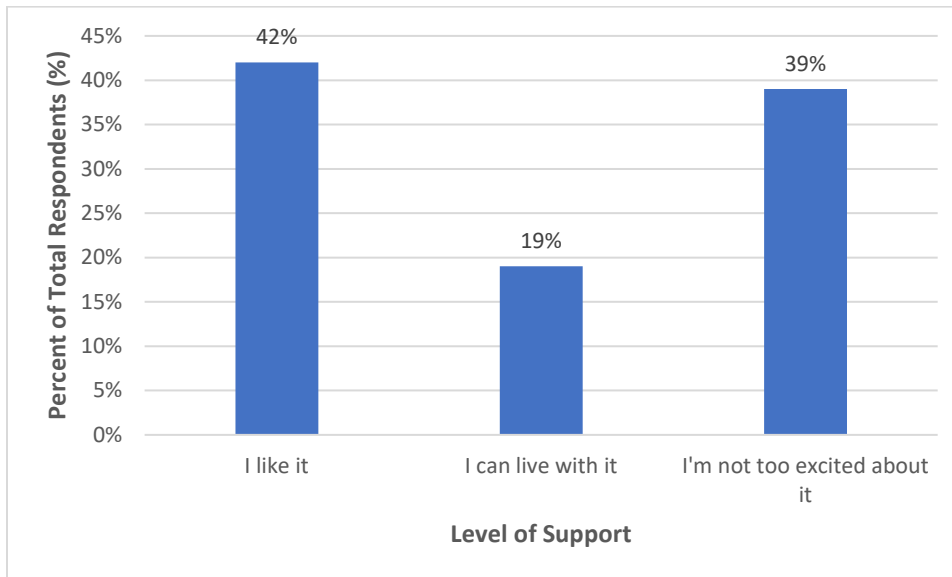
11 El Camino Real						
	Existing Zoning: 50'		Scenario A: 75'		Scenario B: 90'	
	Current Parking Req.	Potential Parking Reduction	Current Parking Req.	Potential Parking Reduction	Current Parking Req.	Potential Parking Reduction
Floors	4 floors	4 floors	6 floors	6 floors	8 floors	8 floors
Units	110 units	110 units	258 units	292 units	327 units	389 units
Parking	167 spaces	55 spaces	323 spaces	146 spaces	409 spaces	195 spaces
DU/AC	50 DU/AC	50 DU/AC	117 DU/AC	133 DU/AC	148 DU/AC	177 DU/AC
Assumptions						
Lot Size	2.2 Acres					
Unit Mix	Studio 10%, 1BD 55%, 2BD 25%, 3BD 10%					
Open Space/ Amenities	23% of building total					

Following the discussion around land use scenarios, the project team presented potential housing solutions and zoning adjustments for specific sites along San Carlos Avenue depicted in Figure 3.

Figure 3. Mixed-Use Area Under Discussion

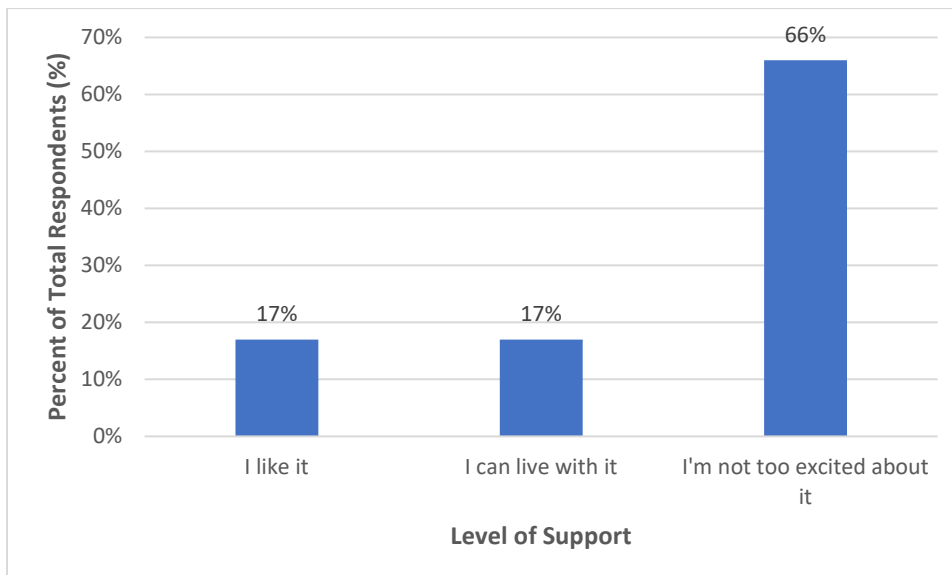


Question 4. 1100 Block El Camino Real: What is your level of support for Scenario A: 75', 6 stories?



n = 31

Question 5. 1100 El Camino Real: What is your level of support for Scenario B: 90', 8 stories?



n = 29

Question 6. Please share any additional comments about 1100 El Camino Real.

General Comments About 1100 El Camino Real:

- **Access to Public Transit** – One participant noted this site has excellent access to SamTrans buses.
- **Additional Information** – Participants asked a variety of questions requesting additional information. Participants asked about the proposed square footage of units for each

scenario, the number of below market rate units for each scenario, the assumptions made, design elements such as setbacks, the amount of accessible and walkable open space, plans for an alley, and if large developments can be built in other parts of the City, and the distance from this site to the Caltrain station.

- **Design** – Several participants asked questions and made comments on the design of the renderings. One participant asked if there will be an alley and if the alley would include the entrance to the parking garage. One participant disliked the design of the building rendering. One participant asked how deep the building will be, and another commented that the setbacks for buildings along El Camino Real is too small. Participants were reminded that the visualizations represented the general size and massing and did not include design. San Carlos has high design standards, and they would be applied.
- **Parking** – One participant commented that the parking reduction is essential to incentivize using public transit. Another participant commented that the parking reduction scenario seems unrealistic, noting that most units will need a car and would have to rely on street parking, which would negatively impact surrounding residential neighborhoods.
- **Water Use** – One participant suggested looking at water use now and projecting water usage for the proposed development scenarios.

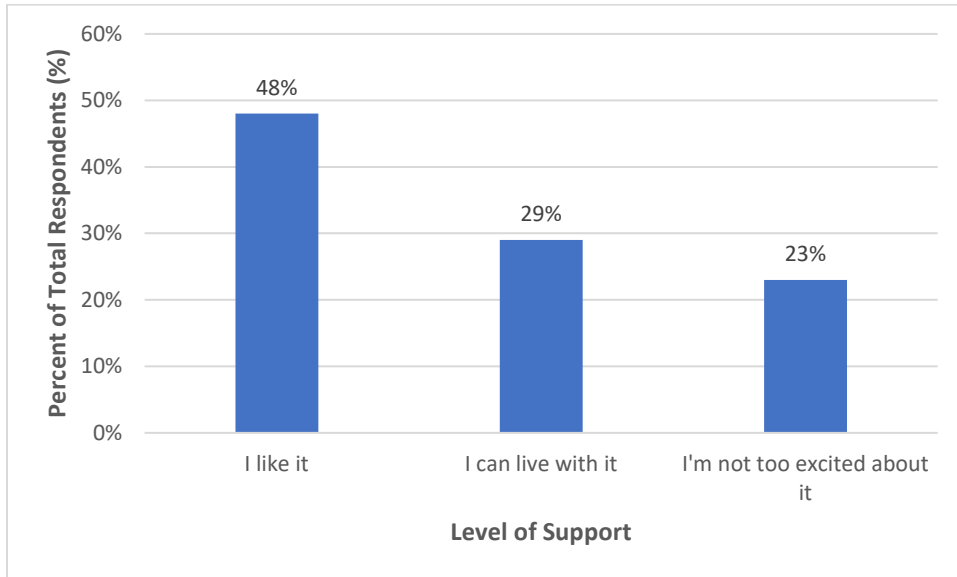
Scenario A, 75' Height, 6 Stories:

- **Supportive of Scenario A** – Four participants indicated their support for Scenario A, with one commenting that San Carlos needs more housing, and two sharing concerns about potential impacts to views, light, and walkability.
- **Design** – One participant commented that the rendering designs are “highly transactional and independent,” and asked about the City’s vision and plan for new buildings.
- **Compromise** – One participant requested a compromise between its housing goals and limiting the physical footprint of new developments.

Scenario B, 90' Height, 8 Stories:

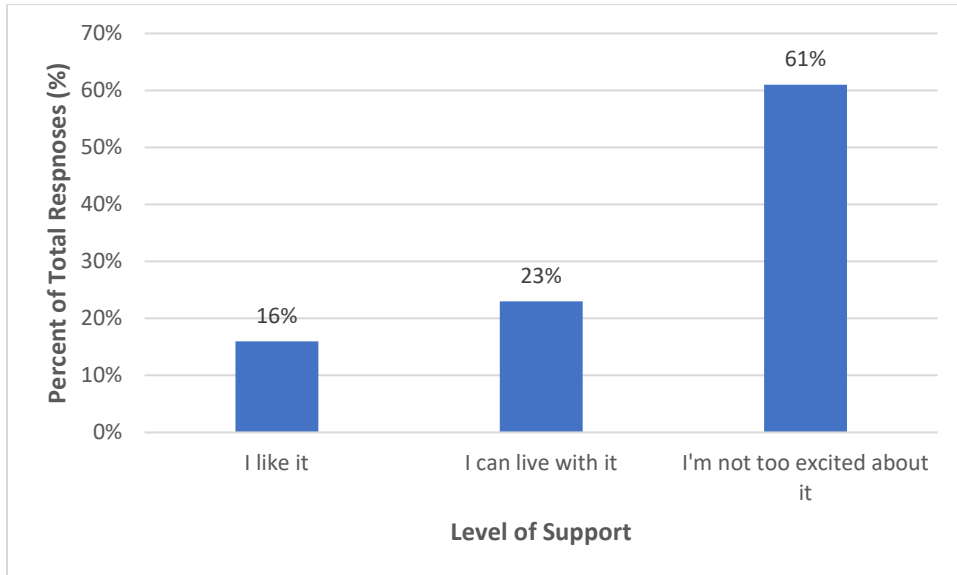
- **Building Height** – Five participants expressed concerns with the proposed height, with one concerned about cutting off sunlight and two concerned about the scale and “destroying” San Carlos’ “village feel”. One of these participants commented they would support the proposed building height if the development was within walking distance of Caltrain.
- **Public Transit** – There were conflicting opinions among participants regarding public transit. One participant commented that expecting residents to use buses is unrealistic. Two participants disagreed, with one noting that SamTrans might be encouraged to improve service in response to the new development.

Question 7. 11 El Camino Real: What is your level of support for Scenario A: 75', 6 stories?



n = 31

Question 8. 11 El Camino Real: What is your level of support for Scenario B: 90', 8 stories?



n = 31

Question 9. Please share any additional comments about 11 El Camino Real.

General Comments About 11 El Camino Real:

- **Commercial Uses** – One participant suggested incorporating commercial uses into the proposed development.
- **Neighboring Uses** – One participant commented that a primary consideration should be how the proposed development relates to and impacts neighboring uses.
- **Rooftop Parks** – One participant suggested adding a rooftop park open to the public.

Scenario A, 75' Height, 6 Stories:

- **Financial Feasibility** – One participant expressed concerns that the proposed 6- or 8-story development will not be financially feasible without significant financial incentives or assistance.
- **Location** – One participant commented that the proposed 6-story development works at this site because it does not impact single family homes, but that taller buildings like this would not work in other locations along El Camino Real.

Scenario B, 90' Height, 8 Stories:

- **Conflicting Opinions Around Scale** – Participants expressed conflicting opinions around the scale of the proposed 9-story development. One participant opposed the 8-story development because of the potential impacts to views, noise, sun, shade and wind. Another participant commented that they are more supportive of the 8-story proposal on larger lots and that allowing a few “density anchors” will enable lower density areas in between and for more below market rate units.
- **Number of 8-Story Buildings** – Several participants noted that the City would need to build eight or nine 8-story buildings to meet its housing goals. One participant commented that eight or nine 8-story buildings along El Camino Real would great a “wall”. Another participant commented that having multiple 8-story buildings could create unique and interesting spaces and corridors.
- **Transitioning Scale** – Two participants suggested developing transitions between single-family neighborhoods and the proposed 6- and 8-story developments.

Question 10. San Carlos Avenue: What do you think if the proposed development standards were applied to limited sites along San Carlos Avenue (see Figure 3)?

- **Community Input** – One participant asked the planning team to listen to community input.
- **Conflicting Opinions** – While several participants supported the proposal, several others opposed it. One participant who supported the proposal noted that this location is the best place in the City to add height because it’s adjacent to existing high-density development. Several participants who opposed the proposal suggested limiting building heights to 4- to 6-stories, and two participants opposed increasing height limits over 50 feet anywhere in San Carlos.
- **Higher Densities Throughout San Carlos** – One participant commented that the site is small and higher density development needs to be constructed throughout San Carlos.

Two participants suggested extending high density development west to Walnut Street. Another participant suggested considering areas west of Laurel and throughout the east side for higher densities.

- **Impacts to Traffic and Congestion** – Several participants expressed concerns around potential impacts to traffic and congestion and suggested developing traffic impact assessments and mitigation plans concurrently with the Housing Element.
- **Mixed-Use and Multi-Family** – One participant commented that San Carlos needs more mixed-use and multi-family development.
- **Parking** – Several participants expressed concerns around parking.
- **Public Transit** – One participant commented that there isn't enough public transportation in the area to support additional high-density developments. Another participant commented that public transportation should not be a consideration in building new housing given the poor level of service. A third participant noted that placing housing near public transportation does not address the "first and last mile" service gap.
- **Transit Village** – Participants requested additional information and expressed conflicting opinions around the Transit Village development. One participant commented that the Transit Village has been deemed a failure given its inability to find tenants and fill vacancies. City staff responded that units had in fact been rented quickly. Another participant requested data to clarify. A third participant asked if the data takes distinguishes between units that have been rented to live in and units that have been bought to list on Airbnb.
- **Transitioning Scale** – Several participants highlighted the importance of transitioning between single-family neighborhoods and high-density developments.

Question 11. Please share any additional comments.

- **Accessory Dwelling Units** – Participants asked questions and commented on Accessory Dwelling Units. One participant asked if ADUs can be counted toward the RHNA number. Another asked if the City is offering incentives for homeowners to build ADUs. A third participant suggested focusing more on ADUs as they are less likely to generate community resistance. A fourth asked if the City will be looking at legalizing existing in-law units and ADUs, and if these legalized units can be counted towards the RHNA number.
- **Additional Information** – Participants requested additional information related to a variety of topics such as the RHNA allocation, water capacity, climate change, below market rate units, Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs), parking, and traffic and congestion.
- **Aesthetics** – Several participants commented on the design of the renderings. One participant commented that the aesthetics of the rendered buildings "are terrible", while another liked the rendered buildings. Another participant commented that the 1001 Laurel development, "is an example of what not to do architecturally and design-wise."
- **Below Market Rate Housing** – Several participants would like to see more below market rate units in San Carlos. One participant asked what the average below market rate is for a one-bedroom unit in San Carlos. Another participant commented that the

City has been collecting in-lieu funds, but the value of those funds is being reduced due to increasing land costs.

- **Veev (formerly known as “Black Mountain”) Site** – Several participants asked questions about and commented on the Veev site. One of these participants commented that the site should be more dense. Two participants asked how many proposed homes would be below market rate.
- **Comprehensive Planning** – Several participants suggested undertaking comprehensive planning efforts concurrently with the development of the Housing Element. One of these participants explained that comprehensive planning is needed because development plans will attract new residents and traffic, and these changes will impact the entire City given its small size.
- **Climate Change** – Several participants asked how the City is addressing climate change in its planning efforts through, with one participant suggesting carbon neutral and water conservation policies. One participant asked how the UN’s recent report about climate change will be considered. A second participant asked whether new developments would be required to include solar panels.
- **Data** – Participants requested City data around existing developments and housing needs.
- **Development Trends** – One participant commented that most developers have focused on creating luxury units that do not address housing needs.
- **Increase Permitted Densities** – Some participants indicated that density should be increased in San Carlos. One of these participants suggested holding a workshop to discuss permitting multi-family housing throughout San Carlos and show what duplexes, triplexes, and other types of multi-family housing look like. Another commented that San Carlos should not constrain itself by limiting density and building heights. Two participants asked the City to allow more types of housing throughout San Carlos as most of the town is constrained to single-family housing.
- **Infrastructure and Services** – Several participants commented that San Carlos’ existing infrastructure and services, including water, electricity, sewer, roads, parking and schools cannot support new housing.
- **Meeting Format** – One participant asked why the workshop was being held using a webinar format and suggested holding future meetings as interactive meetings where community members can see each other and interact with each other more.
- **Parking Requirements** – Participants expressed conflicting opinions around parking needs and reduced parking requirements.
- **Potential Locations for New Housing** – Participants identified potential locations for new housing. One participant suggested developing housing on the east side of San Carlos next to the proposed Alexandria campus and developing mixed-use developments along Britain Avenue.
- **Public Transit** – Several participants expressed conflicting opinions regarding public transit. One participant commented they do not believe people in San Carlos will use public transportation and would like to focus on the impact of additional cars. Another participant commented that sites near Britain Avenue and El Camino Real have

excellent access to public transportation, and that building dense projects will encourage SamTrans to prioritize nearby routes.

- **RHNA Allocation** – Several participants asked why the City did not dispute the RHNA allocation, with one of these participants asking if the City could still dispute the allocation. Participants asked questions about the RHNA allocation, including the mix of affordable and market-rate units required and whether ADU’s count towards the RHNA number.
- **Scale** – One participant asked about potential mitigations for large buildings built close to roads.
- **Trestle Apartments (formerly known as “Transit Village”)** – Several participants asked questions and commented on the Trestle Apartments. One participant asked about the percentage of units filled. Two participants commented that the Trestle Apartments represented a missed opportunity to develop below market rate units. A third participant commented that the original proposal included significantly more units, and the developer was antagonistic to community input.
- **Water Capacity** – Participants commented on the City’s water capacity issues. Two participants asked whether the RHNA allocation considered the City’s water capacity issues. Several participants commented that there is not enough water to accommodate new housing. Another participant shared a local news article and commented that most residential water usage goes towards landscaping, noting that multi-family housing lowers per capita water usage due to reduced landscaping. While one participant indicated their agreement that multi-family developments use less water than single-family homes per capita, another disagreed. Another commented that the environmental impact study will address questions around water capacity.

Question 12. Public Comment: Please share any additional comments.

- **Affordable Housing** – One participant commented that the City needs to focus on below market rate housing and offer housing for essential workers such as teachers.
- **Balancing Needs** – One participant asked the City to balance the needs for additional affordable housing with existing residents’ desire to maintain a small village feel by limiting building height to 50 feet and using creative approaches to developing housing. A second participant agreed and highlighted the need to listen to voters over developers.
- **Comprehensive Planning** – Two participants commented that the City seems to be taking a “piecemeal” approach, and encouraged the City to develop a community vision and conduct comprehensive planning efforts that look at the City holistically. A third participant agreed.
- **Mitigate Impacts** – One participant commented that the City needs to address and mitigate the impacts of new development.

Next Steps

The City and MIG will share workshop results with the public and incorporate input into the development of the San Carlos Housing and Environmental Safety Elements. The presentation and recording of the workshop will be posted at www.SanCarlos2040.org.