

Stanford University

PLAN FOR THE EL CAMINO REAL FRONTAGE



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Land, Buildings and Real Estate
March 2008

Stanford University

PLAN FOR THE
EL CAMINO REAL FRONTAGE



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I. INTRODUCTION

Stanford's unincorporated lands stretch for approximately 1.5 miles along El Camino Real, from Quarry Road on the north (or west) to Stanford Avenue on the south (or east). Through this zone, the street itself is entirely within the incorporated limits of the City of Palo Alto.

In December, 2000, the County of Santa Clara adopted the Stanford University Community Plan (SUCP). Concurrently, the County incorporated into the Conditions of Approval for the Stanford University General Use Permit a requirement that the University create a plan for its frontage on El Camino Real (Condition L-1):

"Prior to or in connection with submitting an application for any development along El Camino Real, Stanford shall submit a streetscape design for unincorporated Stanford lands along the south side of El Camino Real that includes but is not limited to height and setback requirements that are, at a minimum, at least as stringent as those of the City of Palo Alto and may, at the request of the ASA Committee, be more stringent. The streetscape design shall be prepared in consultation with the City of Palo Alto and shall be presented to the CRG before being submitted to the County Planning Office for review and approval." (pages 26-27)

In 2001, the City of Palo Alto undertook the development of a master schematic design plan for all of El Camino Real within its city limits. El Camino Real is a state highway, and its right-of-way is under the jurisdiction of the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), which coordinated and funded the development of the plan. Since Stanford's El Camino Real frontage fell within this project's study area, the University was invited to participate in this design process.

Within that process Stanford staff worked closely with the City to develop design standards for the Stanford frontage that were compatible with and complementary to those being developed for the City's right-of-way. Thus the process generated a unified vision for both properties that responded both to the multiple objectives of the City and to the special landscape character of Stanford's El Camino Real frontage. All of the issues related



El Camino Real at Stanford

to the future design or redesign, of the area within the public right-of-way along the Stanford frontage were resolved, and the conclusions were incorporated into its final report, *Master Schematic Design Plan for the El Camino Real/Caltrans Right-of-way*, Public Review Draft, March, 2003.

The present document is intended to supplement that Plan and to address the Stanford land immediately adjacent to the El Camino Real right-of-way. These matters include:

- building setbacks
- building heights
- land use
- vegetation and landscape character

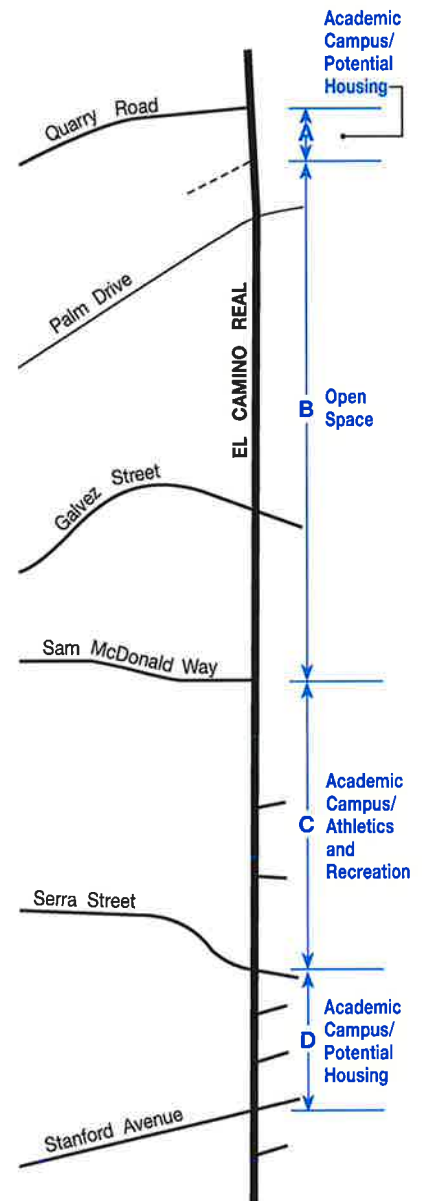
Some of these are covered, at least in part, by the SUCP. So this report will reference that document as appropriate.



II. EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Stanford frontage along El Camino Real, excluding the Shopping Center, can be divided into four general zones based on their land use classification in the SUCP and on their current use. Each of these zones has a somewhat different visual character.

- Zone A** – At the corner of El Camino Real and Quarry Road, in front of the Hoover Pavilion, is the site of potential future housing. This portion of the El Camino frontage is within Stanford's Academic Campus as designated in the SUCP. It is basically an open field planted in seasonal grasses, and scattered along its edges are trees of various sizes, mostly oaks and eucalyptus.
- Zone B** – From the edge of the housing site southward past Palm Drive and Galvez Street to the pedestrian entrance at Sam McDonald Way, the El Camino frontage is designated as Campus Open Space in the SUCP. The portion of this frontage to the north of Galvez Street is part of what Stanford calls its "Arboretum", which was established shortly after the founding of the University. It extends from El Camino into the heart of the University and is traversed by Palm drive, its only formal feature, which connects downtown Palo Alto to the Oval in front of the Main Quad. The Arboretum was originally planted with a wide variety of native and exotic species. Fast-growing eucalyptus trees were planted through much of the area to supply shade to the other plants, many of which were slower growing and less tolerant of the heat and aridity of the region than were the eucalyptus. Over time, the eucalyptus thrived, most of the other species vanished, and the original intention to manage the area as an arboretum was dropped. Today, with the exception of the recently restored Cactus Garden, the Arboretum is not generally maintained as a place to study plants. Stanford has begun the process of reintroducing oaks and other species into this area. The Arboretum serves various functions including casual recreation, the detention of storm water, the accommodation of overflow parking for athletic events, and the annual Pow Wow. The visual character of this zone is dominated by large trees, and there are views into the campus through the fairly sparse understory planting and seasonal grasses.



A master plan for the Arboretum has been prepared, and it generally foresees a continuation of the current rustic character of this zone. Along El Camino, approximately at the property line there is the standard Stanford bollard-and-chain. Over time the bollard-and-chain will likely be replaced by the same type of fence that defines most of the remainder of Stanford's El Camino frontage. The informal, rustic character of the Arboretum edge is interrupted at Palm Drive, where a relatively elaborate set of curved walls and a pair of pavilions create a forecourt marking the historic main entrance to the campus.



Pavilions at the Palm Drive entrance

South of Galvez Street and set well back from El Camino is the Stanford Stadium. The stadium itself is screened by a buffer of trees. The landscape between the Stadium and El Camino, also known as Stadium Grove, is more open than that of the Arboretum and is characterized by scattered groups of large oak trees. Here, as in the Arboretum, in the spring portions of the ground are covered with seasonal grasses; elsewhere the ground is covered in bark mulch. This area sees intermittent use for event parking and for the annual Christmas tree sale. Along the El Camino edge of the property there is a three-and-a-half foot tall fence fabricated of Cor-Ten (self-rusting) steel planted with climbing red roses.



Eucalyptus & oaks at the Arboretum

- **Zone C** – Along El Camino from Sam McDonald Way to Serra Street is the edge of Stanford's extensive athletic and recreation fields. This area, part of the Academic Campus, includes extensive turf areas that are used mostly by the Stanford Athletics Department but also serve other recreational purposes. Some of the turf areas also act as storm water detention basins. While there are two groves of large trees, most of this frontage is visually open to the street. Across the playfields Hoover Tower is clearly visible, as are the dark green hills beyond the campus. The athletic fields are in almost continuous use and thus provide passers-by a glimpse of campus activity not found elsewhere along the El Camino frontage. The steel fence with climbing roses continues across the entire frontage of the athletics zone.
- **Zone D** – Along El Camino from Serra Street to Stanford Avenue is the frontage adjacent to Escondido Village, an extensive district of graduate student housing laid out in the sixties and currently



Stadium foreground



Athletic fields

undergoing renovation and infill. Along the right-of-way line at El Camino the steel boundary fence with roses continues. Between the fence and Escondido Village is a swath of land, part of the Academic Campus, that is anticipated for future housing and a proposed child care center. The frontage is dominated by groups of moderately sized California Live Oaks with native grasses underneath.

The urban fabric of the Palo Alto frontage varies along this reach and extends north and south along El Camino in a way that is distinctly more urban than the Stanford frontage. This is most apparent in the number and distribution of buildings along the Palo Alto side where the diversity of shape, scale, and setback conforms generally to the pattern of commercial development to the north and south of Stanford, although there are also stretches of open space at Palo Alto High School and near the intersection with University Avenue.

The existing landscape character of the Palo Alto side of the street is also less unified and visually more discontinuous than the landscape of the Stanford edge. However, over time this should change as *Master Schematic Design Plan for El Camino Real/Caltrans Right-of-way* is implemented. Working within the Caltrans right-of-way, the City intends to modify the street to reduce the amount of vehicular paving and to provide more room for planting. A prominent part of this effort will be the installation of regularly spaced street trees along both sides of the street and, wherever possible, in existing and new medians, interrupted only by large-scale existing trees and by the more rural portions of Stanford's frontage. Some of this new planting has already been installed. Ultimately, El Camino is to be transformed into an urban boulevard with wide sidewalks, numerous trees, and significantly more shade. The City's relatively urban approach to the design of the landscape – in part a response to the complex functional requirements of a major arterial street – will provide a contrast to those portions of the Stanford landscape that will remain traditionally "rural", open, and informal in character, thus reinforcing Stanford's identity.



Escondido Village frontage



Before



After

Typical changes proposed for future El Camino Real:
Stanford Avenue intersection

Source: *Master Schematic Design Plan*,
City of Palo Alto

III. LAND USES

Opposite Stanford, the El Camino frontage within the City of Palo Alto has had a very different development history and today has a less unified landscape character than that of the Stanford side. In Palo Alto the frontage has been subdivided into multiple lots of a wide variety of sizes and of a considerable diversity of use, including single-family residences, retail stores, offices, hotels, a school, and a public park.

The University's intended land uses along El Camino are set forth in Chapter 2 of the Stanford University Community Plan (SUCP). About half of the frontage – specifically the zone in front of the Stadium and the frontage of the Arboretum – is designated as "Campus Open Space". The rest – specifically the frontage along Escondido Village, the athletic fields, and the parcel at the corner of Quarry road – is designated as "Academic Campus".

Along the El Camino frontage within the area designated as Campus Open Space no change in use is planned, although it is likely that the demands for use of this area for passive recreational and environmental mitigation use of this area will increase over time. Within the area of the Academic Campus a variety of uses is permitted. Among these is housing, and two housing developments are planned within along the El Camino frontage. Both of these developments are specifically described in Chapter 3 of the SUCP.

- **Between Quarry Road and the Arboretum.** On the other side of Quarry Road from the Stanford Shopping Center and adjacent to the Hoover Pavilion, is a site of approximately 6.2 acres that is currently identified as potential housing for post-graduate students and medical residents of the Stanford University Medical Center (SUMC).
- **Between Serra Street and Stanford Avenue.** Between Olmsted Way along the edge of the existing housing of Escondido Village and El Camino is a linear site of approximately 4.3 acres that is currently identified for potential graduate student housing and is proposed to include a child care center to serve approximately 100 children.



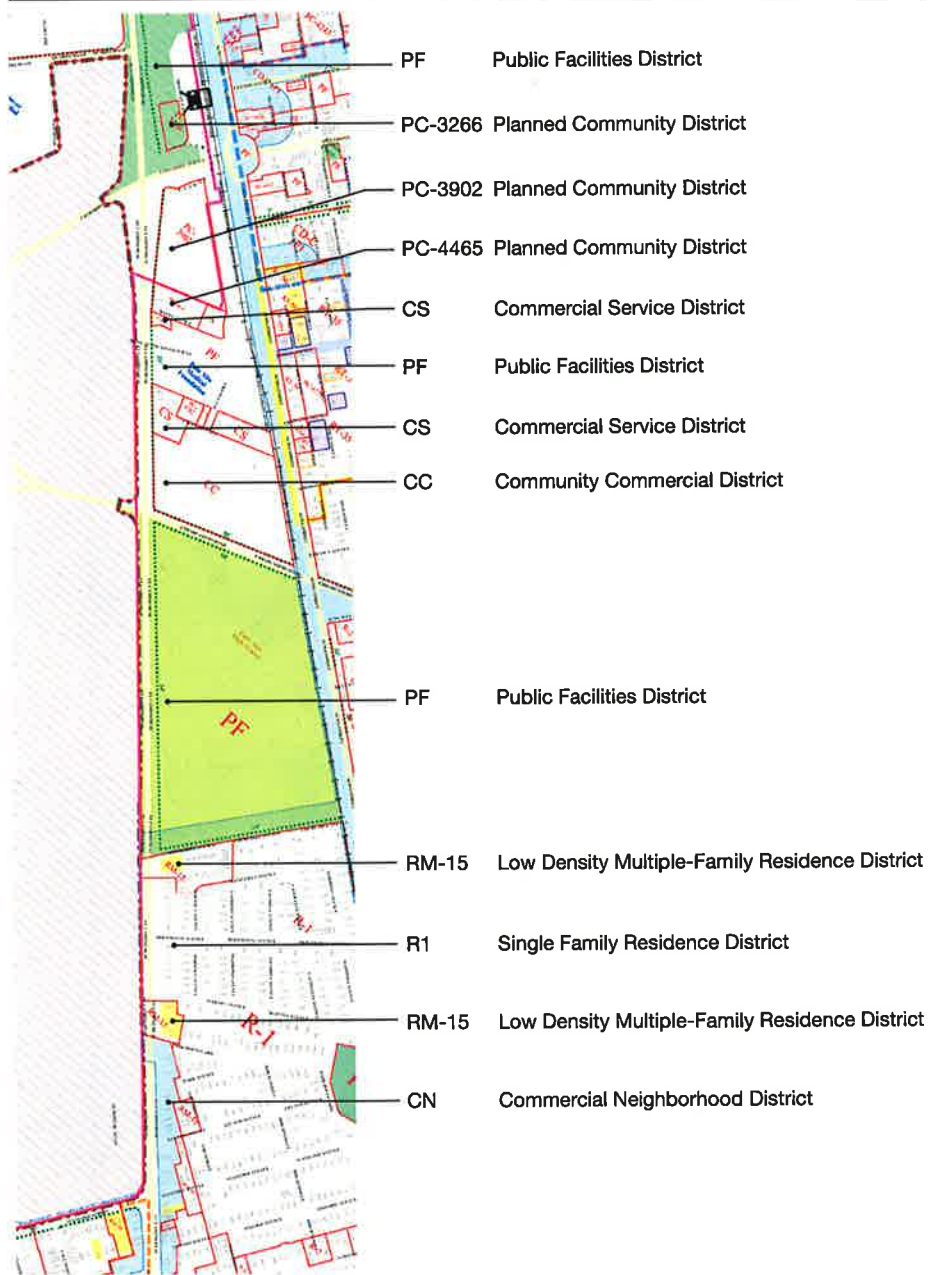
Housing site at Quarry Road



Housing site at Escondido Village

It is Stanford's intention that these developments not take their vehicular access from El Camino and that, where appropriate, they be buffered from the street by additional planting. The rest of the El Camino frontage within the Academic Campus is largely given over to athletic fields and recreational facilities. This area has seen a gradual intensification of use with the development of new and up-graded facilities, and this process may continue; however, neither the uses nor the essentially open character of the existing condition along El Camino are expected to change.

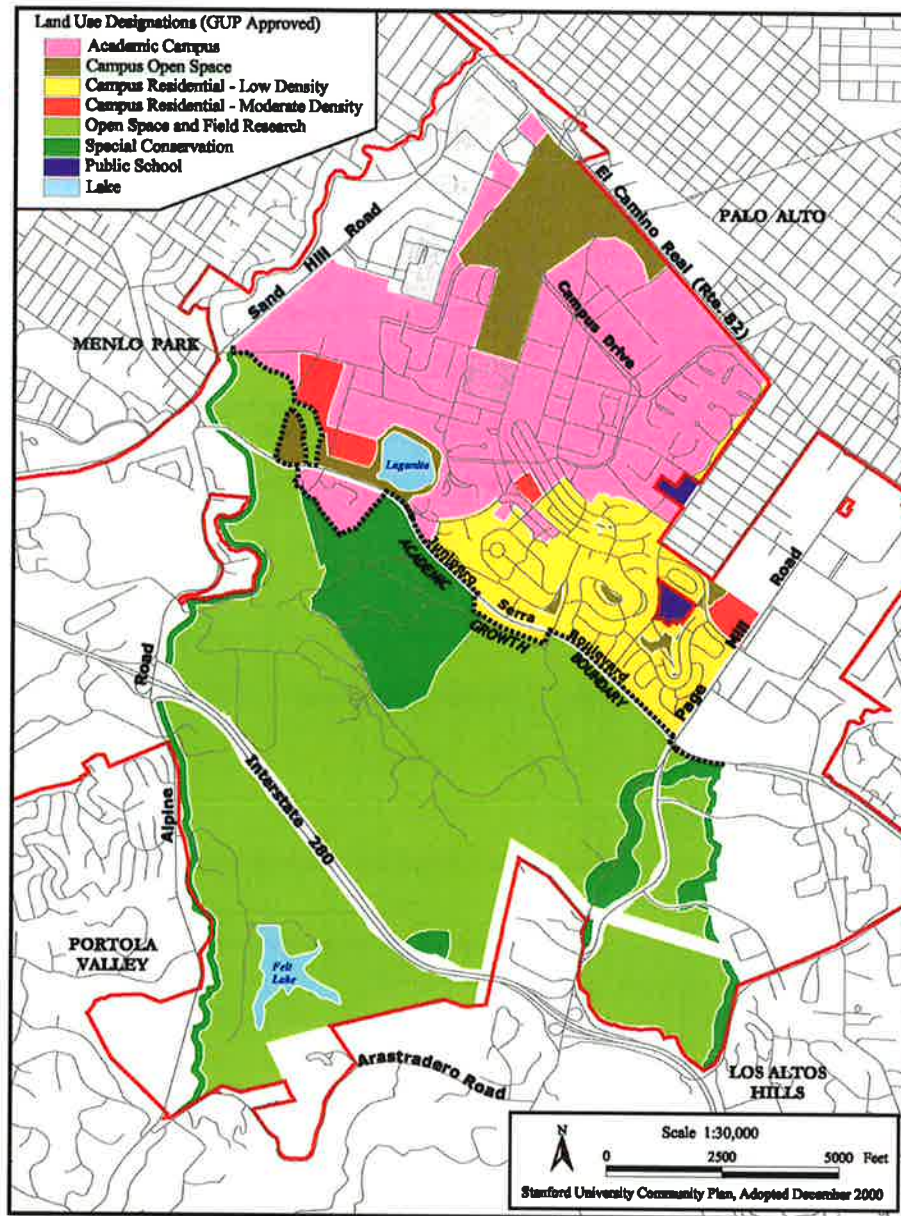
Fig. 1. Palo Alto Zoning Opposite the Stanford Frontage



LEGEND		
Zone	Max. Height	Min. Setback
CC	50'	0'
CN	25'-35'	10'
CS	50'	0'
PC	varies	varies
PF	50'	20'
R1	30'	20'
RM-15	30'	20'

Source: City of Palo Alto Zoning Maps

Fig. 2. Stanford Land Use along the El Camino Real Frontage



Source: Stanford University Community Plan

IV. BUILDING SETBACKS AND HEIGHTS

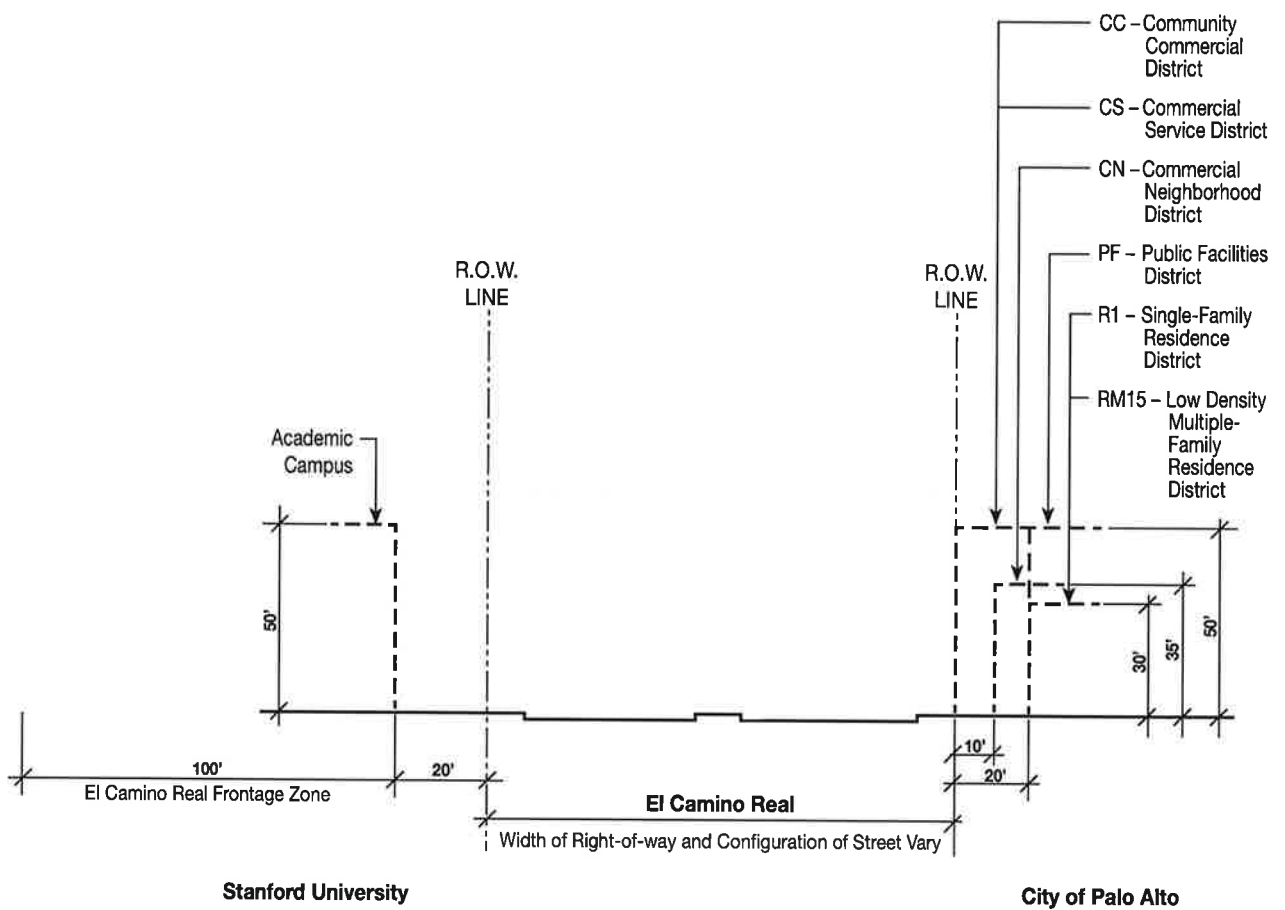
The land along the Palo Alto side of El Camino falls into seven different City zoning categories, each of which is subject to different controls, including those on height limits and setback requirements for buildings. The height restrictions vary from 35 feet to 50 feet. The setback requirements vary from 0 feet to 20 feet.

By contrast, Stanford's frontage is characterized by only two land use designations: one is Campus Open Space, the other is Academic Campus. Academic Campus covers the core of the University, where, in recent years, the University has been encouraged to develop land more efficiently and at greater density as a means of stewarding its resources. For the Academic Campus portion of the El Camino frontage Stanford is proposing the following setback requirements and height restrictions. While Stanford currently views these as reasonable, if there are future proposals that do not meet these minimum/maximum requirements, such proposals would need to be submitted to the County for special consideration and a variance.

- **Building Setbacks.** All buildings shall be set back a minimum of twenty feet (20') from the property line along El Camino Real. This setback requirement matches the most stringent setback requirements on the other side of El Camino and provides room for planting and any functional elements related to proposed buildings. For properties on the opposite side of the street within the City of Palo Alto, the required setbacks vary between zero and twenty feet (20').
- **Building Heights.** All buildings shall be limited to a height of fifty feet (50') from the level of the existing ground. This limit is consistent with the building height limit for this portion of the campus. For properties on the opposite side of the street within the City of Palo Alto the height limits vary between thirty-five feet (35') and fifty feet (50'), with the majority of the frontage having the latter height limit.

For the purpose of this plan the El Camino Real frontage is defined as that land that falls within 100 feet of the Caltrans right-of-way line.

Fig. 3. Building Height Limits and Setback Requirements along El Camino Real



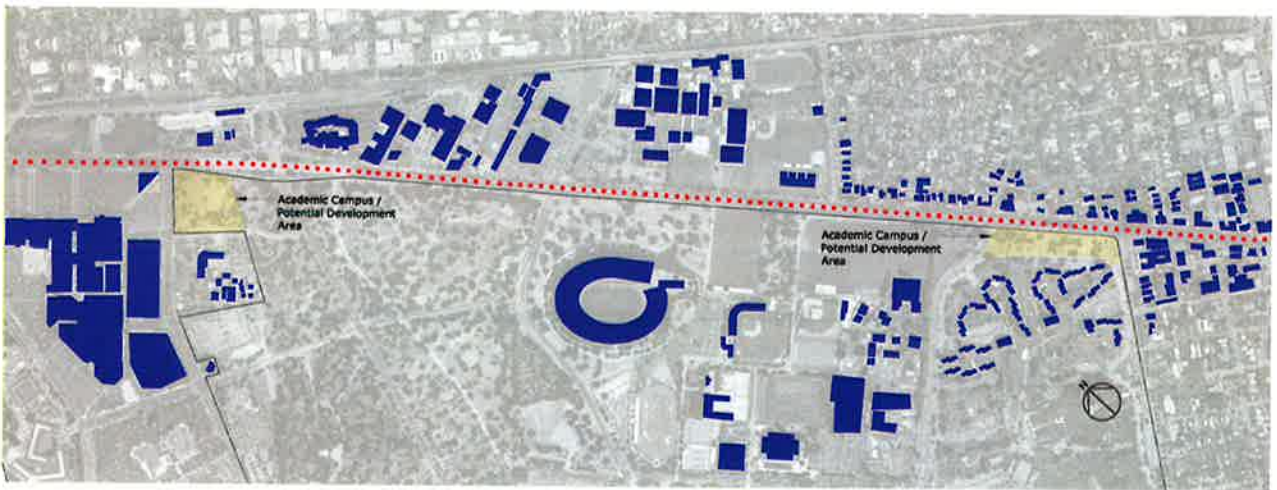
For the two Academic Campus parcels identified in the SUCP as potential housing, Stanford may choose to develop in one of two methods. We view both as appropriate, and since there are no proposals currently on the table, these will both be retained as acceptable alternatives:

- Develop housing in a higher density, urban manner: In the context of an improved El Camino with bike paths, shops, special pavement, street trees, etc., the Stanford east and west parcels along El Camino could extend the streetscape character adopting an urban form with doors and walkways facing El Camino and continuing the sidewalk and street tree treatment to enhance this urban corridor. For this treatment Stanford is proposing a minimum building setback of 20' from the right-of-way, with a building height limit of 50'.
- Retain the rural buffer of 'The Farm'. To maintain the current Stanford casual open space look, development would be set back further from the street, behind large trees and open fields, and would not orient towards El Camino at all. For this treatment Stanford is proposing a minimum building setback of 50' from the right-of-way, with a building height limit of 50'.

The potential development sites on the east and west ends of El Camino may take the same approach or each apply a different approach. To the west the parcel lies between the very developed Stanford Shopping Center and the arboretum so the transition to rural could occur on either side of the property. To the east, the parcel lies adjacent to Stanford Avenue which has commercial development up to the corner, and is desired through the City's plan for El Camino, to be upgraded. This corner site could participate in that rebirth along El Camino, or buffer itself to make a more distinct transition as one crosses Stanford Avenue to Stanford.

The Academic Campus portions of the El Camino frontage currently occupied by athletics fields will remain for the foreseeable future and no significant structures are planned. If there is ever a need to propose building in that zone, Stanford will bring forward to the County and the City specific concepts regarding what portions of the frontage should retain open or rural landscape character and where more urban development may be appropriate.

Fig. 4. Buildings in Relation to El Camino Real



V. LANDSCAPE MATERIALS AND CHARACTER

Passing by Stanford on El Camino Real, many people who have never set foot on the campus think of Stanford as having big trees and relatively low densities in comparison with the surrounding cities. This image of the “Farm” is more than just a remnant of Stanford’s past: the University has consciously sought to maintain some portions of the original landscape of the Stanford property and to extend the informal look of that landscape where appropriate. The University wants to maintain that character and, to the extent possible, to enhance it.

- **Trees.** The dominant visual element of the Stanford edge will continue to be large trees planted informally. Since the characteristic tree of the campus is the California Live Oak, that will be the most common tree. However, it will be supplemented with several other kinds of oaks that are either native to the area or well adapted to the local conditions. There will also be other species that are compatible with the oaks. The intention is to use a variety of species to respond to local conditions of drainage and use, to permit varying degrees of screening of views, and to ensure that any new disease which might attack one of the species would not unduly affect the overall visual character of the campus edge. Over time the University expects to have far fewer of the large eucalyptus trees that currently dominate the Arboretum and a portion of the athletic fields, as the Eucalyptus are increasingly prone to disease and, as they age, a tendency to break in warm weather or high winds. So, as the eucalyptus die off or need to be removed, they will be replaced with other trees. In the past several years Stanford has planted nearly 100 new oak trees of several species along its El Camino frontage in order to extend the tree canopy and reinforce the character of the campus edge.
- **Ground Plane Planting.** Both ends of the frontage will be filled with shrubs and small trees to provide a screen of vegetation between El Camino and the new housing on these sites. Elsewhere the planting of ground plane will vary greatly. For the athletics area, the irrigated turf will continue to provide long, virtually unimpeded views deep into the campus. In the Arboretum there will be selective planting of shrub masses but much of the ground plane will remain in native and drought-tolerant seasonal grasses and/or bark mulch so that the understory will be relatively open and thus continue to permit views



California Live Oak



Typical view into the Arboretum

into the campus. The historic entry walls and pavilions at Palm Drive present a special case. There, in response to the formality of the architecture, will be a more formal planting, with color introduced into the treatment of the ground plane, probably in the form of a more horizontal version of the red roses used elsewhere along the boundary fence.

- **Access.** While Stanford wants to remain visually open towards its neighbors, security is always a real, if generally understated, concern. The University seeks a balance between its desire to be accessible to the surrounding communities and its need to exercise some control over access to its property. In general, along El Camino the University will continue to limit pedestrian access to those points where street crossings are safe and where pedestrians will not interfere with campus activities. The University will continue to limit general vehicular access to designated streets and, on occasion, to special gated entries.
- **Barriers.** In keeping with the desire to foster views into the campus, access will generally be controlled by one of two kinds of a visually pervious low fence. Along most of the El Camino frontage the University has already installed a specially designed fence of moderate height. This fence is rustic in appearance but it is sturdy, durable, easy to maintain, and effective in keeping sports participants and their equipments out of the street. Along the fence, at regular intervals, are planted red rose bushes trained to climb the fence. The roses have been in place for many years and are now identified with Stanford. Along portions of the Arboretum frontage at the property line is the University's standard wood bollard-and-chain. The bollard-and-chain will eventually be replaced by the same fence that has been installed along the rest of the El Camino frontage. In those portions of the frontage where the street curb has been moved to the right-of-way line, the fence will be set back about ten feet to increase the sense of openness. That setback may vary to accommodate large existing trees.



Pedestrian access



Boundary fence with roses

- **Lighting.** The existing tall fixtures in the public right-of-way of El Camino provide considerable light along the campus edge. These poles also seasonally exhibit banners announcing University events and add an air of festivity to this Palo Alto stretch of El Camino. In order to complement the generally rural character of the adjacent landscape, whatever supplemental lighting may be required for the safety of pedestrians and vehicles will be directed toward walks and driveways, and selected from the standard fixtures of Stanford's campus lighting plan. In general lighting will be concentrated along the vehicular and pedestrian entries to the campus and along paths. An exception to this is the specialty lighting required for the after-dark use of the athletic fields.

In the creation of the *Master Schematic Design Plan for the El Camino Real/Caltrans Right-of-way*, Stanford and the City agreed that the current visual character of Stanford's El Camino frontage should be preserved and strengthened. Over the past decade the University has been working incrementally toward this goal by planting trees and shrubs, installing new fences and upgrading irrigation systems.



Stanford banners on El Camino Real light poles



Typical path light fixture

Fig. 5. Proposed Landscape Character along
El Camino Real and Intersecting Streets



VI. IMPLEMENTATION

For matters relating to the Caltrans/public right-of-way of El Camino, Stanford has participated in the City of Palo Alto's 2003 development of its master schematic design and supports its proposals which accommodate landscape, pedestrian and bicycle travel, and parking. On Stanford's own property many of the elements of the design have been in place for a long time, and in recent years Stanford has been gradually up-grading the landscape along El Camino. The steel fence along the athletics and Escondido Frontage has been completed and the bollard-and-chain has been installed along most of the Arboretum frontage. University is continuing its program of planting trees, in some cases relocating them from the interior of the campus to the El Camino frontage. In 2006 the University will construct a pathway connection to the pedestrian crossing of El Camino Real at the Palo Alto Medical Foundation, which ultimately connects to the Homer Street pedestrian and bicycle tunnel under the railroad tracks. The Palm Drive entrance will be replanted in the summer of 2006.

At the appropriate time, when designs for the proposed housing developments at Quarry Road and Stanford Avenue are developed, the plans, including site and landscape treatments, will be go through the regular process of review and approval with the County of Santa Clara and the City of Palo Alto.



Before



After

Stanford's El Camino Real frontage:
proposed crosswalk at
Churchill Avenue

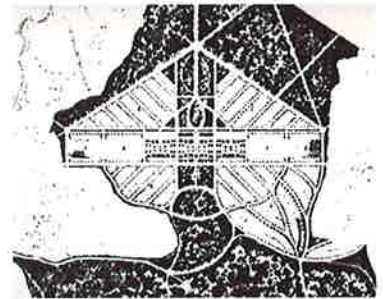
*Source: Master Schematic Design Plan,
City of Palo Alto*

APPENDIX A. – A BRIEF HISTORY OF STANFORD'S EL CAMINO REAL FRONTAGE

The original Olmsted plan of 1888 for the Stanford campus was inwardly focused: it placed the core of the University at the center of the Stanfords' extensive stockfarm property, with future growth to be arrayed around that core. The plan paid relatively little attention to the edges of the property, but implicit in the drawings is the suggestion that the university would forever be surrounded by an extensive buffer zone of vegetation.

The visual consequences of that decision persist. To this day the University does not generally have clearly defined landscaped edges, and for the most part it is difficult to know exactly where the University's land abuts its neighbors. An important exception is the frontage along El Camino Real, which in the minds of most visitors and residents forms a clear spatial edge to the campus. Furthermore, while only some residual pieces of the original buffer zone of vegetation still exist, one of the most prominent of those pieces runs along El Camino Real. For many people the visual character of this edge, which contrasts strongly with adjacent urban development, still evokes the memory of "the Farm" on which the university was founded.

In contrast to the stability of the visual character of the Stanford frontage over time, the nature of El Camino Real itself has changed dramatically over the past century. It has evolved from a small country road into a regional arterial highway running through an urban area extending from San Francisco to San Jose and beyond. Both to the north and the south of Stanford it is lined by a great variety of commercial and residential uses and densities. As the volume of traffic increased, the road was repeatedly widened and its right-of-way extended. While new uses and buildings were occupying the side of the street in the City of Palo Alto, Stanford generally held its buildings well back from the street and maintained a buffer of planting. Consequently the Stanford frontage was perceived as being "vacant". Thus, the expansion of the right-of-way was disproportionately at Stanford's expense. Incrementally, the centerline of the street shifted toward the Stanford side, and parallel to the street new utility easements were created on the Stanford property. As recently as 2001 Caltrans widened a portion of the street just south of Quarry Road so that the curb is actually on the University's property line leaving no remaining right-of-way for pedestrians or landscape.



Original Stanford Campus Plan,
circa 1888



Original entrance to Palm Drive

Meanwhile, from the point of view of visual impact, Stanford's relatively unchanged rural frontage came to present a considerable contrast to the surrounding development. In recent years this undeveloped edge has come to be valued by many as a welcome relief from the visually chaotic mix of developments stretching many miles to the north and south.

Despite the relatively rural and open visual character of the Stanford edge, there have been several intensive developments that are visible from El Camino. In the 1920's the stadium was built just south of Galvez Street, but it was sited well back from El Camino and partially surrounded by an earthen berm. Over time it has largely been hidden by the growth of trees. In the 1930's the Stanford Hospital (now Hoover Pavilion) was built just off Quarry Road, and again set well back from El Camino. In the 1960's the housing of Escondido Village was developed along El Camino between Serra Street and Stanford Avenue, but here too the buildings were held back from El Camino, and they are now largely screened by trees. The only portion of Stanford's El Camino frontage to have changed dramatically is the area between Quarry and Sand Hill Roads. There the Stanford Shopping Center, which is inside the incorporated limits of the City of Palo Alto, presents the same sort of intense commercial development that typifies much of El Camino to the north and south of the University.

In recent years the City of Palo Alto has taken the lead in an effort to improve the appearance, functionality, and safety of El Camino. The City's *Master Schematic Design Plan for the El Camino Real/Caltrans Right of Way* of 2003 aims to reunify the street visually and to give it the character of an urban boulevard. This will involve a consistent planting of regularly spaced Sycamores as the dominant street tree, the narrowing of the vehicular cross section of the street, and the provision of more planting areas in the median and along both sides of the street. In the work sessions that produced this plan it was agreed that the informal landscape character of the Stanford frontage would be a contrast to this character and a welcome special relief from the otherwise urban edge.

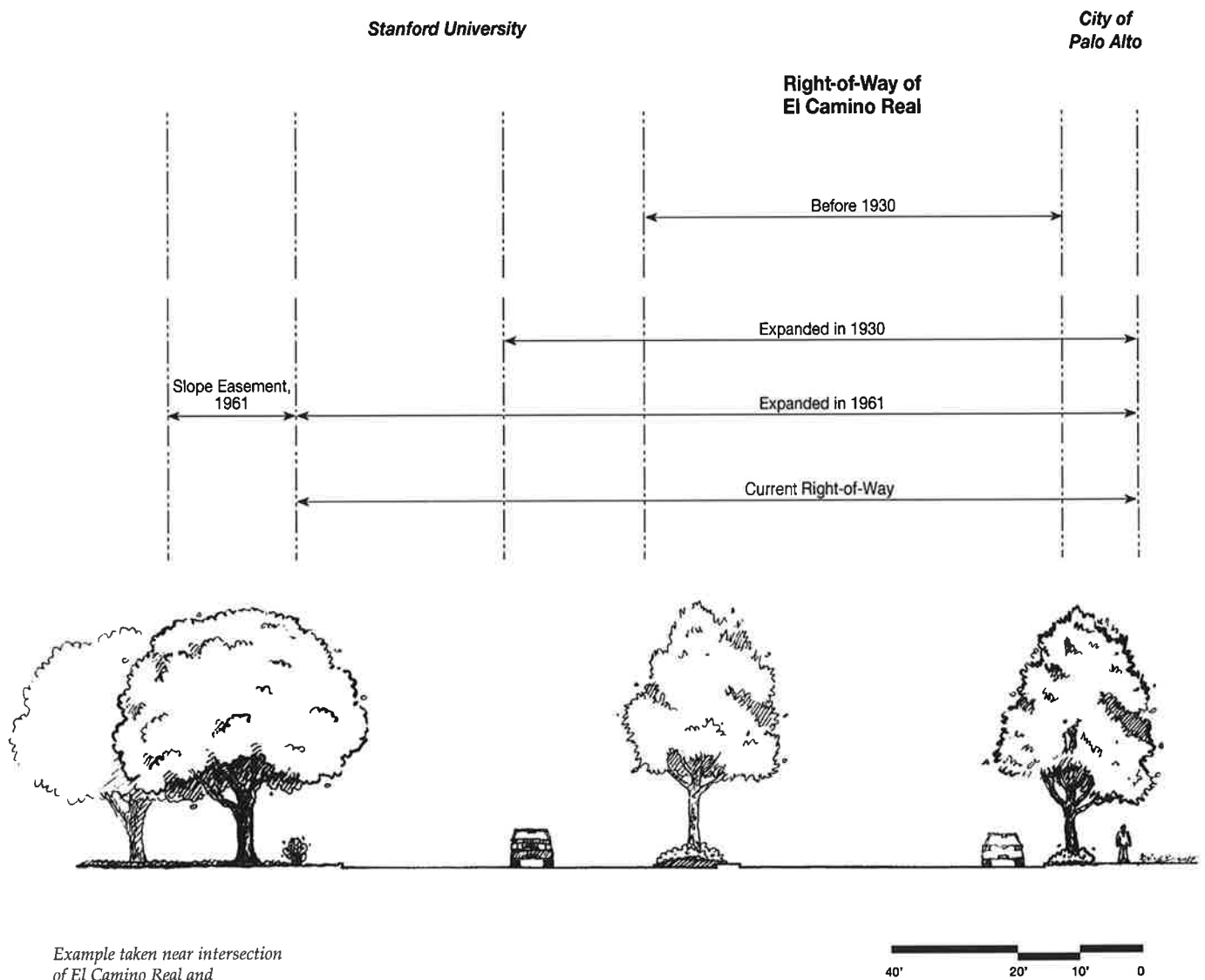


Early view of Stanford Stadium and Palo Alto High School



Hoover Pavilion

Fig. 6. Historic Expansion of the El Camino Real Right of Way



APPENDIX B. – BIBLIOGRAPHY

The following sources were used in the development of this document and contain information that may be useful in its implementation:

- City of Palo Alto, Planning Division, *Master Schematic Design Plan for the El Camino Real/Caltrans Right of Way*, Public Review Draft, March, 2003.
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