

California Department of Transportation

DIVISION OF AERONAUTICS - M.S. #40
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September 9, 2024

Alvin Jen
Associate Planner
City of East Palo Alto
1960 Tate Street
East Palo Alto, CA 94303

Electronically Sent <ajen@cityofepa.org>

Re: SCH # 2022040352 - Ravenswood Business District/Four Corners Specific Plan Update

Dear Mr. Jen:

The California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), Division of Aeronautics (Division), has reviewed the Subsequent Environmental Impact Report (SBE) for the Ravenswood Business District/Four Corners Specific Plan Update (Project). The Division of Aeronautics collaborates with cities, counties, and Airport Land Use Commissions (ALUC) to ensure compliance with the State Aeronautics Act (California Public Utilities Code Section 21001 et seq.). We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the SBE review process.

The City of East Palo Alto is proposing to update the Ravenswood Specific Plan of 2013 and would increase the total amount of development allowed within the Specific Plan area by increasing the maximum square footages for office, R&D/life science, light industrial, civic/community, and tenant amenity, and the total number of residential units allowed under the Specific Plan. The Project would be implemented as one of two development scenarios. The Palo Alto Airport is located approximately 0.58 miles southeast of the Specific Plan area.

Compliance with Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan (ALUCP)

Pursuant to the State Aeronautics Act, California Public Utilities Code Section 21676(b) mandates that local agencies refer proposed amendments to general or specific plans within airport land use commission boundaries to the commission for review. If the commission deems the proposed action inconsistent with its plan, the referring agency will be notified. Any development within safety zones or airport influence areas must comply with the safety criteria and restrictions outlined in the Airport Land Use Compatibility Plan(s).

A portion of the Project site lies within Safety Zone 6 (Traffic Pattern Zone) and in the Airport Influence Area (AIA) of the Palo Alto Airport. Therefore, it must adhere to the safety criteria and restrictions outlined in the 2020 Palo Alto Airport Comprehensive Land Use Plan (ALUCP), adopted by the ALUC pursuant to the PUC, Section 21674. The ALUCP is crucial for minimizing noise nuisance and safety hazards around airports while promoting orderly development. The ALUC is responsible for assessing potential risks to aircraft, airspace users, and people on the ground near the airport.

Noise Compatibility

A portion of the plan area falls within the 60-65 decibel (dB) Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) contours for the Palo Alto Airport as shown in the ALUCP. Development within this area must adhere to the noise criteria and use restrictions outlined in the plan, particularly related to Section 4.3.2.1. of the ALUCP. Due to its proximity to the airport, the Project site may be subject to aircraft overflights and subsequent aircraft-related noise impacts.

Specifically, related to the plan development scenarios please see the below noise policies of the ALUCP:

N-4 No residential construction shall be permitted within the 65 dB CNEL contour boundary unless it can be demonstrated that the resulting interior sound levels will be less than 45 dB CNEL and there are no outdoor patios or outdoor activity areas associated with the residential project. All property owners within the 65 dB CNEL contour boundary who rent or lease their property for residential use shall include in their rental/lease agreement with the tenant, a statement advising that they (the tenants) are living within a high noise area and the exterior noise level is predicted to be greater than 65 dB CNEL.

N-5 Residential construction will not be permitted in the area between the 60 dB CNEL contour boundary and the 65 dB CNEL contour boundary unless it can be demonstrated that the resulting interior sound level will be no greater than 45 dB CNEL.

N-6 Noise level compatibility standards for other types of land uses shall be applied in the same manner as the above residential noise level.

Noise Sensitive Land Uses and Considerations

The project may encompass noise-sensitive land uses as defined by the Public Utilities Code Section 21669.5(3). This includes residential developments such as single-family and multi-family dwellings. Additionally, Section 21669.5(4) defines a "noise-sensitive project" as new construction or reconstruction for planned noise-sensitive land use within an airport's Community Noise Equivalent Level (CNEL) of 65 decibels (dB) or higher.

While California Code of Regulations (CCR: Title 21 CCR, §5006) defines 65 dB CNEL as the "acceptable level" for residents near airports, the Caltrans Aeronautics California Land Use Planning Handbook (Handbook) advises against using this standard for new noise-sensitive development. To mitigate the impact of aircraft noise, any new residential development within the airport's 65 dB CNEL contour should be designed and constructed to ensure that interior noise levels in all habitable rooms do not exceed 45 dB CNEL. To prevent this project from expanding the airport's Noise Impact Area (NIA), each residential unit should grant the airport proprietor an avigation easement, permitting aircraft noise over the property. However, while these construction measures and the easement address interior noise, they will not reduce exterior aircraft noise levels, and future residents may still experience annoyance from aircraft noise in the surrounding area.

By implementing these recommendations as mitigation measures, the project can minimize noise impacts on future residents and ensure responsible development near the airport.

Other Airport Hazards

California Public Utilities Code Section 21659 prohibits structural hazards near airports. Structures should not be at a height that will result in penetration of the airport imaginary surfaces. In accordance with Federal Aviation Regulation, Part 77 "Objects Affecting Navigable Airspace" a Notice of Proposed Construction or Alteration (Form 7460-1) may be required by the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA). For further information or a copy of Form 7460-1, please refer to the FAA website <https://oeaaa.faa.gov/oeaaa/external/portal.jsp>.

We recommend further review of potential compatibility concerns related to airport obstructions and hazards to flight, such as:

- **Wildlife attractants:** Project elements (e.g., open waste disposal areas) that could attract wildlife, posing a hazard to aircraft.
- **Lighting:** Improper lighting design or excessive light intensity could interfere with night-time airport operations and can cause safety hazards to pilots.
- **Glare:** Reflective surfaces (e.g., extensive use of solar panels) could create glare that disrupts pilots' visibility.

The Division encourages collaboration among the Lead Agency, the Airport Land Use Commission, and Palo Alto Airport representatives to prioritize the safety and well-being of current and future residents in the Ravenswood Business District/Four Corners Specific Plan area.

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment. If you have any questions, please contact me by email at tiffany.martinez@dot.ca.gov.

Mr. Alvin Jen, Associate Planner
September 9, 2024
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Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tiffany Martinez". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Tiffany Martinez
Associate Transportation Planner
Division of Aeronautics

c: State Clearing House <state.clearinghouse@opr.ca.gov>,
Matthew Friedman, Chief Office of Aviation Planning, <matthew.friedman@dot.ca.gov>,
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