



Friends of Los Altos, Inc. (FOLA)

A non-profit, non-partisan, volunteer-run organization

Will Los Altos Grow Gracefully—or Become Something We No Longer Recognize?

As residents consider the draft Vision and Guiding Principles, an important question deserves thoughtful discussion: **What kind of community do we want Los Altos to be over the next twenty years?**

The future of Los Altos is being shaped today through the City's once-every-twenty-years General Plan update. This document is more than a planning exercise—it is the legal framework that will guide land use, development, transportation, parks, and community priorities for decades to come.

Residents who have participated in City-sponsored workshops and outreach events have consistently emphasized preserving Los Altos' small-town character, investing in parks and open space, supporting local families, and maintaining the qualities that have made our community such a desirable place to live. Those priorities reflect the unique identity that has attracted generations of residents.

However, many believe the draft direction emerging from the City Council and staff places a greater emphasis on increased residential and commercial development rather than on preserving the defining characteristics of our community. While growth is inevitable—and state housing mandates require the City to accommodate additional housing—the manner in which that growth occurs remains a local decision. The question is not whether Los Altos will evolve, but whether that evolution will reinforce the community's character or fundamentally alter it.

If you are concerned (and you should be), participate in the City Council review **scheduled for July 14th by voicing your concerns about what the City has deemed to be the modernization of Los Altos**. The regular meeting starts at 7 pm at City Hall, although the schedule has yet to be published; information about the meeting will be published here by July 10th:

<https://losaltosca.portal.civicclerk.com/event/2178/overview> .

If history is any guide, the City will produce data that says there have been numerous outreach events and public meetings. What they probably won't tell you is that they (and their well-paid consultants) have ignored much of the public comment that doesn't fit with the new narrative.

This concern is not theoretical. In recent years, the City has approved or proposed a number of significant policy changes and development projects that many residents believe deserve greater public discussion.

For example, the proposed elimination of the General Plan's Historical Element raises questions about the City's long-term commitment to preserving the historic buildings and sites that contribute to Los Altos' unique identity. Historic preservation is not simply about protecting older structures; it is about preserving the story of our community and maintaining the distinctive village character that residents value.

Similarly, proposed changes along San Antonio Road—including modifications to the roadway, landscaping, and median—have generated concern among residents who fear that one of Los Altos' most attractive gateways could lose much of its visual character in pursuit of transportation objectives, effectively turning our beautiful entryway into something more like El Camino Real. Bicycle safety, for example, is an important public goal, but many believe thoughtful design could improve safety while avoiding the intrusive reflective bollards seen on El Camino Real. In fact, one might even ask if cycling on such a busy and constrained thoroughfare such as San Antonio isn't a misplaced priority.

Downtown planning has also prompted debate. Proposals to convert existing parking areas into other civic uses, including housing and public facilities, raise legitimate questions about future parking capacity as downtown continues to evolve. At the same time, projects such as the redevelopment at 40 Main Street, which now obliterates our enviable mountain view, have led some residents to question whether current design and review processes are adequately protecting the community's valued views and architectural character.

Beyond individual projects, concerns have also been raised about development standards. Residents living adjacent to higher-density developments have asked the City to better address issues such as privacy, neighborhood compatibility, traffic circulation, and transitions between commercial and residential areas. Many believe additional refinements to design guidelines could help balance the need for new housing with the protection of existing neighborhoods.

While new development receives considerable attention, many residents are equally concerned about maintaining the community assets that already exist. Deferred maintenance at facilities such as Grant Park, the Garden House at Shoup Park, Halsey House, and Redwood Grove illustrate the ongoing need to invest in the City's parks and public spaces. Likewise, as additional housing continues to be constructed along El Camino Real, residents have questioned why there has been little progress toward also providing a park in that area which has long been recognized as an underserved part of the City.

Infrastructure maintenance (i.e., our park buildings and playground equipment) also remains an important priority. Streets continue to require rehabilitation, landscape maintenance resources remain limited, and decisions affecting long-term public safety infrastructure continue to generate discussion within the community.

Ultimately, these issues point to a broader concern about priorities. Most residents recognize that Los Altos must continue to evolve and comply with state requirements. The real question is how to achieve that growth while preserving the qualities that distinguish Los Altos from countless other communities.

The upcoming City Council review on **July 14** provides residents with an important opportunity to share their perspectives on the draft Vision and Guiding Principles. Public participation matters because these guiding principles will influence planning decisions for decades to come.

Looking ahead, residents will also have an opportunity to shape the City's direction through the November election. Those who care deeply about Los Altos should consider becoming involved—whether by serving on commissions, attending meetings, providing thoughtful comments, volunteering, or even running for public office.

Los Altos has long been admired for its small-town atmosphere, strong neighborhoods, excellent parks, and engaged citizenry. Growth and change need not come at the expense of those qualities. With careful planning, transparent decision-making, and meaningful community engagement, the City can accommodate the future while preserving the character that has made Los Altos such a special place to call home.

The choices made today will shape Los Altos for the next generation. They deserve the careful attention and active participation of everyone who cares about our community.

What residents are asking for is thoughtful, incremental change that builds on what already makes this community special—not change that gradually transforms Los Altos into a place that could be almost anywhere in the Bay area. Communities don't lose their character overnight. They lose it one decision at a time.

And that is the way we see it.

Friend of Los Altos, Board of Directors

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