

Appendix C

Notice of Preparation

Notice of Preparation of an Environmental Impact Report/ Environmental Assessment

Date: August 12, 2015
To: Agencies, Organizations, and Interested Parties
From: City of Palo Alto Public Works Department
Project Title: Newell Road at San Francisquito Creek Bridge Replacement Project

The City of Palo Alto (City), as the Lead Agency under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), will prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the proposed **Newell Road/San Francisquito Creek Bridge Replacement Project** (herein referred to as the “Project”). Under assignment¹ from the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans, District 4 Office of Local Assistance acting for the FHWA) is the Lead Agency under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and will prepare an Environmental Assessment (EA) as a joint document with the EIR (an EIR/EA). The purpose of this Notice of Preparation (NOP) is to notify agencies, organizations, and interested parties about the proposed Project and to request input on the environmental analysis to be performed. From public agencies, we are requesting comments on the scope and content of the environmental information, which is germane to each agency’s statutory responsibilities with regard to the proposed Project. Agencies may need to use the EIR/EA prepared when considering permitting or other approvals for the proposed Project.

Due to the time limits mandated by state law, responses must be sent at the earliest possible date, but not later than 30 days after receipt of this notice or **Monday, September 14, 2015**, whichever is sooner.

Please send your comments to:

City of Palo Alto
Public Works Department
Attention: Joe Teresi, Senior Engineer
RE: Newell Road Bridge
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, California 94301

Project Vicinity and Location:

Newell Road Bridge at San Francisquito Creek, Palo Alto, CA (refer to Figures 1 and 2).

Project History:

During the 1998 El Niño storms, the banks of the San Francisquito Creek failed damaging approximately 1,700 properties in the cities of Palo Alto, Menlo Park, and East Palo Alto. As a result,

¹ Title 23 USC 327: NEPA Assignment Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), between FHWA and Caltrans, effective October 1, 2012.

the San Francisquito Creek Joint Powers Authority (SFCJPA) was established in 1999 to address flooding issues affecting the several jurisdictions within the San Francisquito Creek watershed. After the 45-year flood in 1998, the SFCJPA and the affected jurisdictions identified the need to replace the Newell Road Bridge (herein referred to as the “bridge”).

The City has conducted a number of public meetings beginning in June 2012, to provide preliminary information about the proposed Project and solicit comments and questions from members of the public. Concurrently, the City has been collecting information and conducting technical analyses to assess the feasibility of implementing the proposed Project. During this early planning period, the City conducted an alternatives screening analysis (including a detailed traffic study) and ultimately identified four (4) potentially feasible alternatives for replacement of the bridge. The identified alternatives are further discussed under *Project Alternatives*, below.

Project Description:

The City proposes to replace the existing Newell Road Bridge² which crosses San Francisquito Creek to safely accommodate vehicle, bicycle, and pedestrian traffic. The proposed Project would also incorporate channel improvements to widen a bottleneck segment of San Francisquito Creek along the northern bank that stretches approximately 900 feet downstream of the bridge (Figure 2).

The bridge is within the SFCJPA study area for proposed channel and bridge improvements that would provide increased flood protection and hydraulic capacity. Previous technical studies conducted by the SFCJPA have determined that the bridge constrains streamflow in San Francisquito Creek. The bridge would need to be reconstructed in order to accommodate the estimated 1% flow rate³ for San Francisquito Creek at Newell Road and to allow for SFCJPA’s planned reconstruction of the upstream bridge at Pope Street/Chaucer Street (the Pope-Chaucer Street Bridge). The height of the bridge would be designed to meet Caltrans’ standards for accommodating the 1% flow rate and freeboard⁴ requirements. The profile of the replacement bridge would be approximately one to two feet higher than the existing bridge, which would require the construction of retaining walls along the edges of the roadway approaches to the bridge.

The existing bridge provides access across San Francisquito Creek between the City of Palo Alto and the City of East Palo Alto. In East Palo Alto, Newell Road connects to Woodland Avenue which provides access to University Avenue and United States Highway 101 (US 101). In Palo Alto, Newell Road connects to Edgewood Drive and main thoroughfares including Channing Avenue and Embarcadero Road. Newell Road is a two (2)-lane roadway facility, but the width of the existing bridge is currently too narrow to safely accommodate two (2) lanes of vehicle traffic. In addition, the existing bridge does not provide safe access for bicycle and pedestrian traffic access across San

² Newell Road Bridge is Bridge #37C-0223.

³ A 1% flow rate (also informally referred to as the 100-year flow rate) is the creek flow rate that has a 1% chance of being equaled or exceeded in any given year.

⁴ Freeboard, expressed as the construction of a barrier above a predicted flood level, provides a factor of safety and compensates for the many unknown factors that could contribute to flood heights greater than the height predicted for a selected size flood.

Francisquito Creek. As a result, the existing bridge is classified by Caltrans as being Functionally Obsolete (FO).⁵ The FO status of the existing bridge along with its low sufficiency rating⁶ of 40.9 makes the existing bridge eligible for replacement under the Federal Highway Bridge Program (HBP).

The creek widening, would increase the capacity of the creek downstream of the bridge, and allow a lower profile for the bridge and reduce impacts on the roadway approaches to the bridge. The creek widening design would utilize a retaining wall or bank stabilization system that could be planted with native vegetation to stabilize the banks of the widened creek channel.

For all Federal HBP funded projects, such as this one, Caltrans has project oversight authority and manages the project financing. The proposed Project falls within the jurisdiction of Caltrans, District 4 Office of Local Assistance. As a result Caltrans will provide review and approval of the following documents prepared for the proposed Project including: environmental technical studies, engineering technical reports, and construction documents.

Purpose and Need:

The purpose of the proposed Project is to:

- Protect adjacent communities from flood hazards by accommodating the 1% flow rate of San Francisquito Creek at Newell Road.
- Maintain connections for vehicular, bicycle, and pedestrian transportation across San Francisquito Creek at Newell Road while avoiding the following:
 - diversion of a significant number of vehicles to adjacent streets;
 - a significant increase in the number of vehicles using Newell Road; and,
 - an increase in average vehicle speed on Newell Road.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access across San Francisquito Creek at Newell Road.
- Improve safety for all modes of transportation across San Francisquito Creek at Newell Road.

The Project need is demonstrated by the following deficient conditions:

- The existing bridge is hydraulically deficient and results in flooding at high-flow levels.
- The existing bridge is classified as Functionally Obsolete (FO) because:
 - it does not safely accommodate two (2)-way vehicular traffic;
 - it does not provide safe access for pedestrians or bicyclists; and,

⁵ “Functionally obsolete (FO)” describes a bridge that is not suitable for its current use, such as a lack of safety shoulders.

⁶ “Sufficiency rating” is a 0-100 score (100 percent would represent an entirely structurally-sufficient bridge and zero percent would represent an entirely structurally insufficient or deficient bridge).

- it provides poor drivability for vehicular traffic due to substandard sight distances and vertical profile.

EIR/EA Scope:

The EIR/EA will address the following environmental issues:

- Aesthetics;
- Air Quality and Greenhouse Gas Emissions;
- Biological Resources;
- Cultural Resources;
- Geology and Soils;
- Hazardous Materials;
- Hydrology and Water Quality;
- Land Use and Planning (including Parks and Recreation Facilities);
- Community Impacts;
- Noise and Vibration;
- Population and Housing;
- Public Services and Utilities;
- Traffic and Transportation; as well as,
- Cumulative Impacts, Alternatives to the Project, and Growth-inducing Impacts.

The cumulative impacts analysis in the EIR/EA will consider the potential impacts of the Project and Project alternatives in combination with planned growth and other capital improvement projects in the San Francisquito Creek corridor area.

Project Alternatives:

In accordance with CEQA and NEPA, the EIR/EA will evaluate a reasonable range of alternatives to the proposed Project and a “No-Build”/“No Action” alternative (Figures 3a and 3b). Alternatives will be identified based on their feasibility to meet most of the Project objectives and reduce or avoid significant environmental impacts.

In 2014, the City prepared an Alternatives Screening Analysis Report⁷ (ASAR), which evaluated a total of eight (8) alternatives including alternatives to remove the existing bridge and construct a bicycle/pedestrian-only bridge, as well as various alternatives that would maintain vehicular use on different horizontal alignments. The ASAR evaluated the alternatives taking public input collected to date into account.

⁷ Available at: <<http://www.cityofpaloalto.org/civicax/filebank/documents/39192>>.

Considering the information in the ASAR which took agency and public input into account, the City has since identified the following four (4) Build Alternatives as potentially feasible and that meet the Project purpose and need, and are appropriate to carry through the EIR/EA analysis:

- Build Alternatives (all presume construction of a new bridge)
 - Alternative 1: A one (1)-lane bridge with two (2)-way traffic (under signal control) on the existing alignment of Newell Road (ASAR #5).
 - Alternative 2: A two (2)-lane bridge on the existing alignment of Newell Road (ASAR #6).
 - Alternative 3: A two (2)-lane bridge on a partial realignment of Newell Road (ASAR #7).
 - Alternative 4: A two (2)-lane bridge on a full realignment of Newell Road (ASAR #8).
- No-Build/No Action Alternative (keep existing bridge) proposes to leave the facility as it currently exists (ASAR #1).

The City will consider public and agency input on the scope of the EIR/EA in response to this NOP, including comments on potential alternatives, before making a final decision as to the alternatives to be analyzed in the EIR.

Probable Environmental Effects:

Based on a preliminary review of the Project site and in consideration of the proposed Project activities, the City has determined that potential direct and indirect impacts related to aesthetics; biological resources; cultural resources; hydrology and water quality; land use and planning; community impacts; traffic and transportation; and cumulative impacts as a result of planned, programmed, and reasonably foreseeable growth in the area and including capital improvement projects in the San Francisquito Creek corridor, may occur as a result of Project implementation. The City will prepare a Draft EIR pursuant to Section 15060(d) of the State CEQA Guidelines. An EA will be prepared as a joint document with the EIR (an EIR/EA), in accordance with NEPA, as Caltrans has determined that the significance of environmental impacts is not clearly established.

Notice of Scoping Meeting:

Pursuant to CEQA Guidelines section 15082(c) (Notice of Preparation and Determination of Scope of EIR), the City will conduct a scoping meeting for the purpose of soliciting input on the scope of the analysis in the EIR from bordering cities, responsible agencies, agencies with jurisdiction by law, trustee agencies, interested parties requesting notice, and interested members of the public, concerning the appropriate scope and content of the EIR. Although there is no formal scoping requirements for an EA under NEPA, comments received on the scope and content of the EIR for the proposed Project will be incorporated into the joint EIR/EA environmental document.

The scoping meeting will be held on **Thursday, September 3, 2015, at 6:30 p.m.** in the Palo Alto City Hall Council Chambers, 250 Hamilton Avenue, Palo Alto.

For further information, please contact the City at the address below or visit the Project website provided below:

Newell Road/San Francisquito Creek Bridge Replacement Project
Notice of Preparation of an EIR/EA
August 12, 2015
Page 6 of 6

Address:

City of Palo Alto
Public Works Department
Attention: Joe Teresi, Senior Engineer
RE: Newell Road Bridge
250 Hamilton Avenue
Palo Alto, California 94301

OR

Project Website:

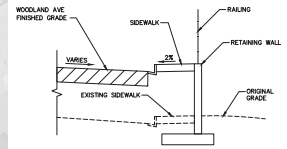
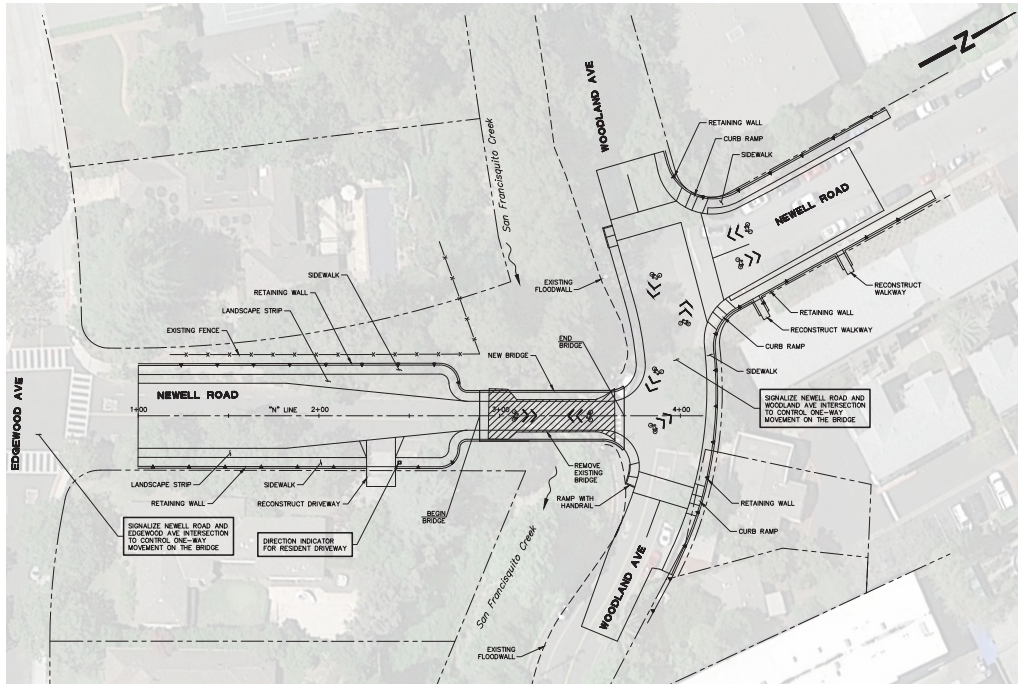
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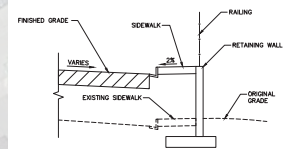
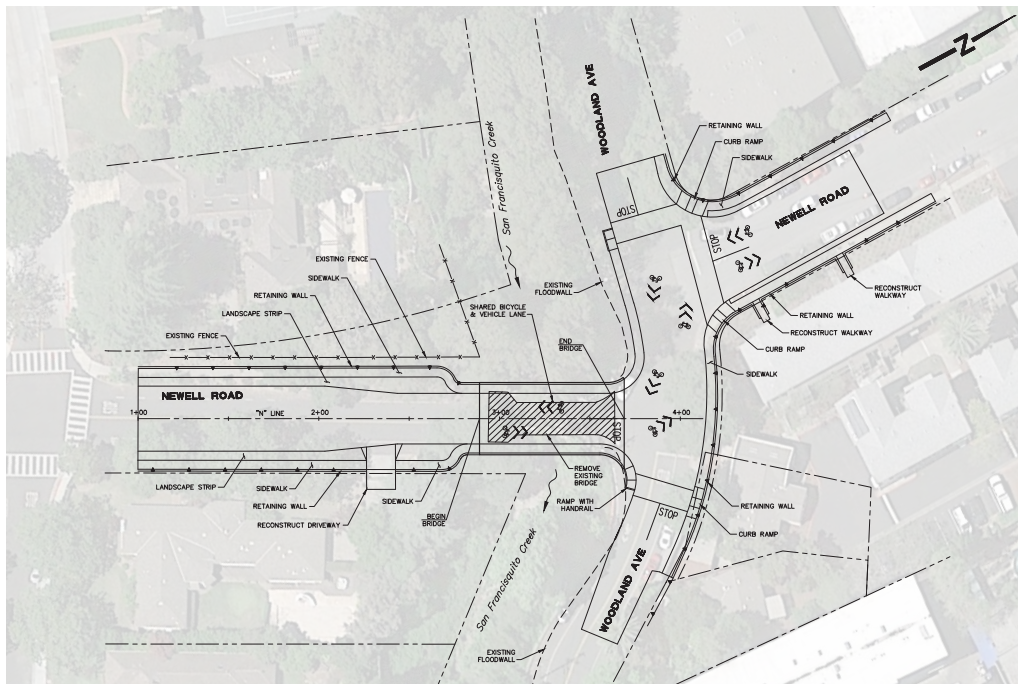
Figure 1
Project Vicinity Map
 Newell Road Bridge Replacement Project



Figure 2
Project Location Map
 Newell Road Bridge Replacement Project



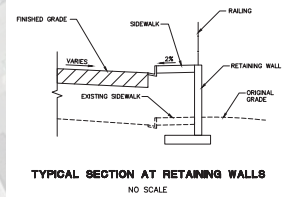
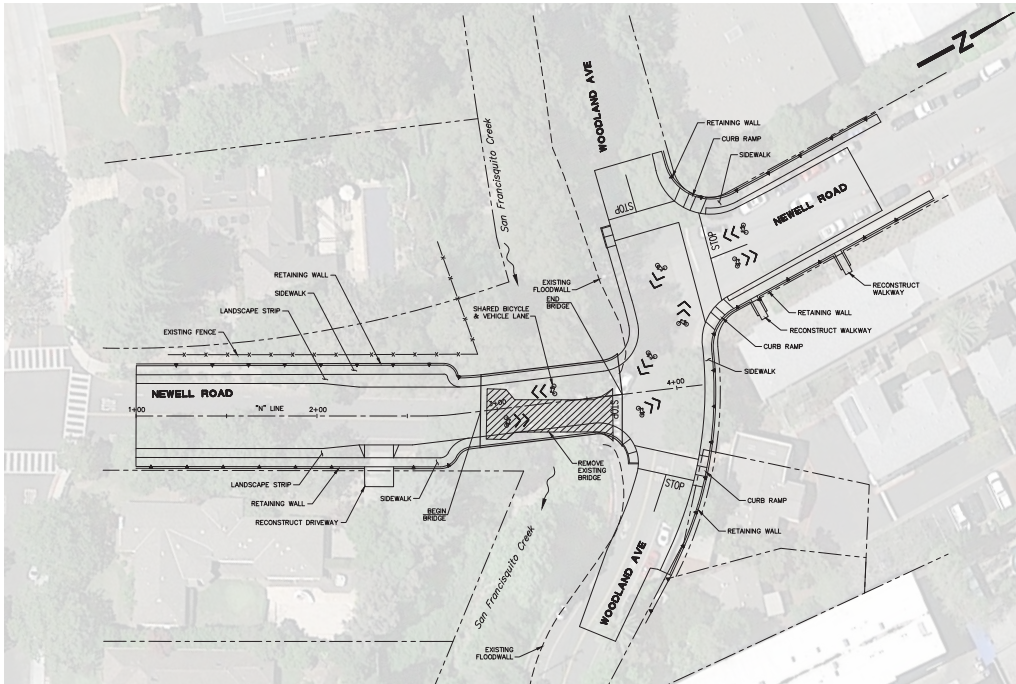
Alternative 1: A one-lane bridge with two-way traffic (under signal control) on the existing alignment of Newell Road.



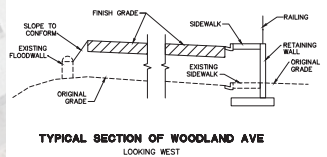
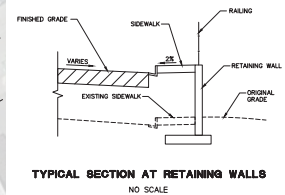
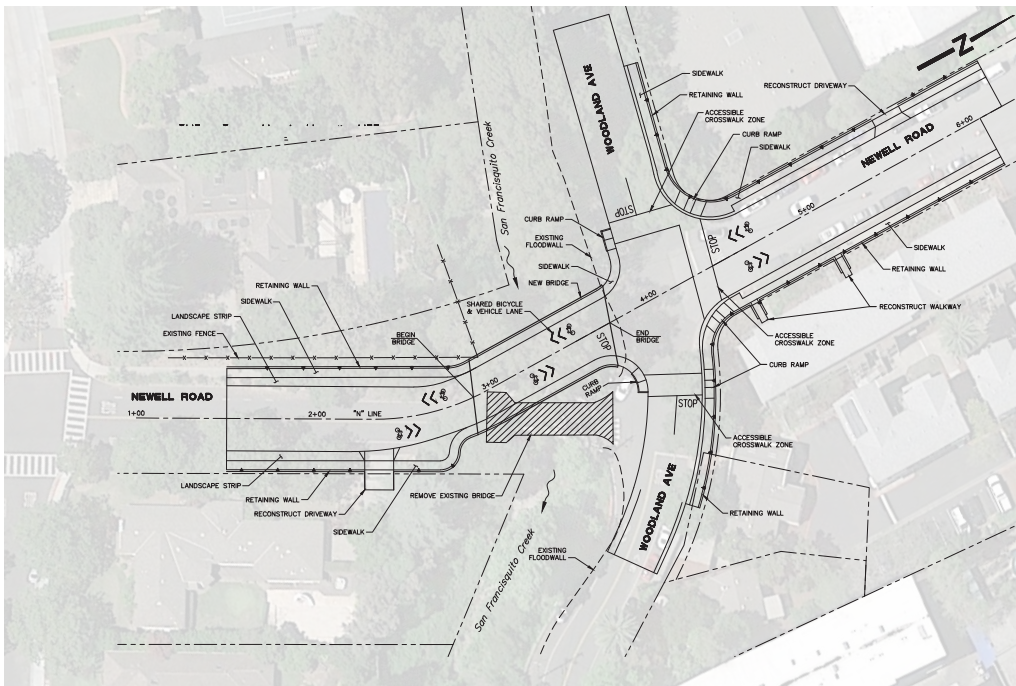
Alternative 2: A two-lane bridge on the existing alignment of Newell Road.

Source: NV5, 2014.

Figure 3a
Build Alternatives 1 and 2



Alternative 3: A two-lane bridge on a partial realignment of Newell Road.



Alternative 4: A two-lane bridge on a full realignment of Newell Road.

Source: NV5, 2014.

Figure 3b
Build Alternatives 3 and 4