

## Transcript for February 10, 2026, City Council Meeting (Edited)

City Planning Staff information update on the three RFPs submitted for the proposed housing and public parking development on parking Plazas 1, 2, 3. The update includes a tentative schedule for the Project. (City Council Meeting, February 10, 2026)

YouTube Video. This council meeting video is here. The session starts at minute 55:00 and lasts about 17 minutes.

Edited Transcript of YouTube Meeting Video: Grammatical edits were made to improve the readability of councilmember comments.

Original unedited transcript of councilmember comments.

### Referenced Staff Report:

<https://www.menlopark.gov/files/sharedassets/public/v/2/agendas-and-minutes/city-council/2026-meetings/20260210/20260210-city-council-regular-agenda.pdf>

### COUNCILMEMBER DISCUSSION

**Councilmember Combs:** I want to share my general feedback and thoughts about the timeline for the development of the downtown parking lots.

**1.** I am generally opposed to the idea of the Council giving direction on a particular proposal before the election, and therefore, am obviously opposed to the idea of the staff report asking for Council to give a direction or a recommendation.

**2.** I think at the end of the day the referendum will pause the process. That's just part of what I think is clear. And so, accepting that (the Council) must pause the process. I feel that it would create unnecessary, resentment for the city to proceed as if the referendum is not an issue. It doesn't bias anything to pause because we're going to have to pause anyway. I think that the Council proceeding to a position of providing direction would engender a lot of unnecessary ill will, leading up to the election.

**3.** Also, I just want to be clear, I would view the council going in that direction as another misstep. Ultimately, nothing can happen here until there's some clarity about the results of the referendum. And nothing will happen unless, to be clear, the referendum fails. And I think voters should be making a decision on is the measure, not a specific proposal. The other thing that would happen if the council made a specific proposal, then the election becomes about that proposal. And I think that's not what it should be about. I think it should be about the measure which would apply to all three proposals. So, we have time until there is some clarity from the voters IF they want the Council to retain the authority to

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repurpose the lots.

4. So, again, I wanted to make my thoughts clear on my position, since the staff report provides a recommendation and asks Council for direction.

**Councilmember Nash:** I will state an opposite opinion. I think it's very important for us to continue to stay on the current path, fully realizing that a decision by the voters would certainly impact the Project. If the referendum wins, then, the city will need to backtrack. And I think that, as is outlined in the report, we will take one step at a time as we move down this path. But I believe that there are a lot of reasons to move forward. I have heard from numerous people who are very happy that we are moving forward, and I have heard from other people who are very unhappy that we are moving forward. But I think that staff has outlined, a very reasonable, very transparent process.

**Councilmember Combs:** I'll just add that I accept the process but not the schedule. The City will still need to have a conversation with HCD, no matter what. So, this idea that somehow there is any timelines with real consequences, doesn't make sense - to be honest with you. HCD is not incentivized to enact some sort of nuclear option (decertifying the City Housing Element) because there isn't really time between now and the November election to do that. And what would that achieve for them or for us? The ballot measure is part of a process which voters in California can avail themselves of. The voters in Menlo Park have done so, and we, as members of local government must let that process play out. If the council is proceeding, then obviously, it's the decision of most of the council. I have expressed my concern that keeping to some timeline doesn't achieve anything, because the timeline is not real, to be honest, because there's already going to be a need to pause. And again, (proceeding) would engender a lot of ill will that's unnecessary, especially with what I expect will be a divisive November election.

**Councilmember Schmidt.** I am more in agreement with the mayor, because I think there's a lot of speculation that the timelines aren't real. As I understand the past milestones of the Project and the way the process works, we're already a couple of years behind. The election is 10 months away, so to say that any agency like HCD would ignore another year of being behind and not start some kind of process, in my opinion is just speculation. And so, I'm not willing to reduce our safety zone buffer and risk the decertification of the City housing element, especially if we can take steps to continue to hit our milestones. I think I'm going to feel differently when it comes to Menlo Park making firmer commitments but feel like putting this off for another 10 months, if I was in HCD's position, I would react to that. But we're all just speculating, But what would be your reaction? I'm not speculating. Would HCD decertify our housing between now and November? I think that's a possibility.

## Transcript for February 10, 2026, City Council Meeting (Edited)

**Councilmember Combs:** I don't think that's a possibility at all. Friendly people can disagree, right? Is there any example you can present where HCD has decertified a housing element because there was going to be a similar ballot measure in the months ahead? There is not a single example of them acting that way. Decertifying a housing element takes many steps; it is not an edict that just happens. It's a process that takes lots of time. And so, again, we're talking about, like, November. I must be straight with the residents in Menlo Park and say, let's look at the history, let's look at the facts, let's look at the logic on the ground. And the idea that there would be some substantive action taken by the state agency between now and the November election, one that pulls back the city's planning authority and decertifies the housing element in some way, doesn't comport with logic.

**Councilmember Schmidt:** I think we're both speculating, right? Until we understand the State process and HCD has a chance to weigh-in in a definitive way we're both guessing, right? So, that's my only point.

**Councilmember Nash:** I guess I would add one other point. I do think it's very valuable for residents, business owners and businesses to see what this Project could look like and see and hear about what the developers are proposing because I think that people either will or may react differently to this Project and sway some people. Then, some may think it's better than they had thought, and some may think it's worse. But I think more information is a benefit, regardless of what HCD does. I just think the more information people can have, about what they're voting on., i.e., what is being proposed, what's possible, what is the funding, all are information that will go into a voter's decision.

**Councilmember Combs:** I had promised myself I wouldn't say anything else, but I just don't want my opinion to be misunderstood. What I said was I am opposed to the Council giving clear direction on a specific proposal. I was not opposed to the collection or presentation of information about the projects or proposals. I am very supportive of, and historically, have said I am supportive of that, so people could have some idea of what they are voting for or against. So, again, I am very much supportive of the idea of developer presentations to Council, even a study session on this item. Again, what I object to is Council taking action and providing clear direction about a singular proposal, I am very supportive of all information about these proposals being reviewed.

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### ONLY TWO PUBLIC COMMENTS

**I'm Tony Drager**, I live in Menlo Park. I vote in the elections, and I, have been here for 50 years. Been in business at Draeger Supermarkets for more than that, working as a bagger, a checker, a stock clerk. And I'd like to see that business continue. I feel without parking lots, we won't continue as a good business. We commit ourselves to function as a democracy. That's what we commit ourselves to in this country. We have a process has certain parameters and, we work within those parameters. And when those parameters are usurped, You create a sentiment of distrust and a questioning of motives.

That's not what I'm here to say. I'm here to ask you to let that process go, and work. We put a proposition on the ballot. It's supposed to be voted on by the public. And I ask you to put off any of these decisions on these parking lots until that election is held, and the people speak. Maybe the people will want developments in those parking lots. But maybe not. But your job is to let them speak. Not to try to do something behind the back, ahead of time, to prevent the process. Thank you.

**I'm Karen Grove**. I live in Menlo Park as well, and I vote in Menlo Park, too. I'm speaking, just to say thank you. I really appreciate that we are moving forward with the proposal to build hundreds of deeply affordable homes on our downtown surface parking lots, while also Improving downtown parking, the pedestrian and biking access, beautifying it with little parklets and paseos. I'm really, really excited after reading the three proposals. And I appreciate the timeline that was put out with all the different steps. I look forward to the very first one, which would be an open house where everybody in the community can come and see displays of what each developer has in mind, and can ask questions and make suggestions. And then, you know, it goes from there. And I appreciate our public processes. I believe that ideas improve when they are informed by multiple perspectives. And the process that we have now allows for that in a very public, transparent and governed way. And I appreciate that, so I'm glad that we're moving forward, because housing delayed is housing denied. So, anything we can do to reduce the delay is much appreciated. Thank you and have a good evening.