

**Architectural Review Board of the City of Palo Alto**  
**Annual Report of Prior Year Accomplishments and ARB Recommendations for Fiscal Year 2025**

Following is a review of the ARB's accomplishments over the past year and the Board's recommendations to Council regarding areas of work that should be prioritized in next fiscal year and opportunities for better coordination.

- **Application Review.** The ARB takes prides in its collaborative process of review, where members meld their individual opinions and experience into one democratic summary that improves proposed projects and therefore the quality of the Palo Alto built environment. This past year, the ARB reviewed approximately 20 projects including two major public projects, multi-family housing projects with inclusionary below market rate units, and commercial projects as well as larger retail modifications in Stanford Shopping Center, meeting Goal 1 of the 2024 annual work plan. Our review and oversight of the following projects has made a real and significant difference. Below are renderings of some of these projects showing the initial proposal and final design.

<u>Address/project</u>	<u>Building type</u>
3001 El Camino Real	Affordable Housing
3200 Park Boulevard	Development Agreement
420 Acacia Ave	Housing (with inclusionary units)
739 Sutter Avenue	Housing (with inclusionary units)
3600 Middlefield Road	Fire Station
180 El Camino Real	Arhaus Facade
180 El Camino Real	Sushi Roku Facade
180 El Camino Real	Restoration Hardware Facade
123 Sherman Avenue	Office
2501 Embarcadero	Advanced Water Purification System
800 San Antonio Road	Mixed Use (Office and retail with inclusionary units)
660 University Avenue	Mixed Use (office and housing with inclusionary units)
SB 9 Objective Standards Review	Ordinance/Plan
Objective Standards for Townhomes	Ordinance/Plan
North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan	Ordinance/Plan

The number of projects came in as a preliminary review to obtain early feedback from the ARB. The ARB's early review of these projects and boardmember feedback prior to formal application will help to incorporate key programming modifications and design changes in the early stage of development, helping to streamline the formal application. These included 640 Waverley Street, 616 Ramona Street, 70 Encina.

- The ARB provided valuable feedback to assist Council with respect to updating SB 9 standards. They also provided a comprehensive review and made recommendations on updates to the objective standards to better address townhome style designs. This work was consistent with Goal 2 of the fiscal year 2024 work plan.
- The ARB provided valuable feedback to assist Council with respect to Preapproved Parklets Design. Although not explicitly identified in the work plan, this work was consistent with Goal 2 of the fiscal year 2024 work plan.
- The ARB provided valuable feedback to assist Council with respect to the Dark Skies and Bird Safe Glazing Ordinance as well as the North Ventura Coordinated Area Plan consistent with Goal 3 of the

fiscal year 2024 work plan. Additional work on this effort is expected in the next few months to further assist with these efforts prior to a final Council decision.

### Recommendations

PAMC Section 2.21.030 directs the Architectural Review Board to report annually our “concerns... with respect to the city’s plans, policies, ordinances and procedures as these affect the projects which the board reviews.” Our reviews are site specific – we look at individual development proposals, not broad policies. At the same time, we are directed to look at each project in both its physical and regulatory context – how it will enhance its neighborhood (or not) and how it will implement the City’s policies, from the Comprehensive Plan to the various design guidelines the City uses. Because we look at many projects each year, and because many board members have years of experience in Palo Alto, patterns emerge and specific areas of concern have been identified. Our comments this year are centered the increasing importance of housing projects to the city.

1. **Objective Design Standard Refinements.** In our continuing response to recently enacted state legislation, Palo Alto previously adopted objective design review standards for housing projects, effectively eliminating architectural review on residential and mixed-use projects where objective standards can be met in order to streamline review of those applications.

Several residential projects over the past year were townhouse type developments (3200 Park Boulevard, 739 Sutter Avenue, 420 Acacia). In our review, it was noted that some of the current standards focused more on larger multi-family buildings. Therefore, some aspects of townhouse style design were not fully addressed/accommodated for in the standards. Through an Ad Hoc committee we studied many local townhouse developments and have provided the planning department with recommendations to modify the Objective Design Standards to address townhome designs as well as larger multi-family designs.

The ARB recommends that refinements be made to the objective standards based on implementation of the standards for a series of projects as well as with the recommendations from the ARB regarding modifications for townhome designs.

2. **Coordinated Area Plans to encourage housing development and better planning**
  - San Antonio Avenue. San Antonio Avenue is experiencing increasing residential development but our zoning regulations for the area are outdated and focused on commercial development, resulting in applicant uncertainty and long entitlement processes. The existing one-story light industrial and commercial buildings will be substantially replaced in the coming decade. A coordinated area plan will allow us to consider larger issues such as transportation, neighborhood parks and integration with nearby developments in Mountain View as this area transforms.
  - Downtown. To increase housing the downtown area needs revised standards to accommodate redevelopment of lots as to encourage housing additions while maintaining the vibrancy of the downtown area and its pedestrian friendly streetscape.
  - Encina Avenue. Encina Avenue between El Camino and the railroad is an excellent location for higher density housing. However the adjacent Town and County shopping center, a low lying and historically significant facility, must be protected. Parking considerations are also paramount in this area. A coordinated area plan offers an efficient path towards increased density while protecting a much loved shopping area.

3. **Bird safe glazing and dark sky regulations.** The ARB should provide feedback to the planning staff, PTC and Council regarding upcoming bird safe glazing and dark sky lighting regulations.
4. **City Council/Planning Commission communication.** The Architecture Review Board has very little formal interaction with the City Council, the Planning Commission and the Historic Resources Board. Board members are forced to act on individual initiative to gain input from council members and other commissioners. Joint meetings with full boards are rarely productive; yet uncoordinated serial meetings leave commissioners unaware of feedback from colleagues on other boards. Applicants often feel that they are 'running a gauntlet' of approvals rather than facing a coordinated review.
  - Request staff to provide summary reports from PTC, ARB and HRB meetings promptly following each meeting.
  - Take direct feedback from the ARB on reviewed projects up for council approval where Council approval is required. The ARB can appoint a member to represent the board directly to the council.
  - Request staff to schedule joint preliminary discussions between the ARB, PTC and HRB chairs/vice-chairs on projects of common interest. These 'preliminary meetings' would not be to review specifics of a project; rather they would serve to coordinate the review process between boards and planning staff.

**Example Renderings of approved projects from Initial proposal to Final Design from list of reviewed projects**



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**739 Sutter Avenue - Initial Proposal**



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**739 Sutter - Final Design**



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**3001 El Camino Real - Initial Proposal**



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**3001 El Camino Real - Final Design**



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**123 Sherman Avenue - Initial Proposal**



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**123 Sherman Avenue - Final Design**




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**3200 Park Boulevard- Initial Proposal**




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**3200 Park Boulevard - Final Design**




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**180 El Camino Arhaus- Initial Proposal**




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**180 El Camino Real Arhaus - Final Design**




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**180 El Camino Sushi Roku- Initial Proposal**




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**180 El Camino Real Sushi Roku - Final Design**