



**CITY OF PALO ALTO**  
**Architectural Review Board**  
**Regular Meeting**  
**Thursday, April 17, 2025**  
**8:30 AM**

<b>Agenda Item</b>
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3. Architectural Review Board's (ARB) Draft Annual Report and Work Plan



## Architectural Review Board 2025-2026 Workplan

**Staff Liaison:** Steven Switzer, Historic Preservation Planner

**Lead Department:** Current Planning, Planning and Development Services Division

### About the Board

The Architectural Review Board is composed of five members, at least three of whom are architects, landscape architects, building designers or other design professionals. Terms are for three years. See Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Chapter 2.21. Residency is not required. For the ARB webpage go to [bit.ly/paloaltoARB](https://bit.ly/paloaltoARB).

### Boardmembers

- Peter Baltay
- Kendra Rosenberg (Chair)
- Mousam Adcock
- Yingxi Chen (Vice Chair)
- David Hirsch

### Mission Statement

The Architectural Review Board reviews and makes recommendations to the Planning Director on the building design, site planning, landscape planning, massing and facades, material selection, lighting, signage and other related issues for most major new construction including additions and renovations that alter the exterior building face. The type of buildings reviewed include commercial, industrial, and multiple-family residential. In addition, the ARB is a resource as knowledgeable observers of many varied urban environments, to assist Palo Alto as it develops area plans to accommodate additional housing.

The ARB Scope of Review is fully noted in Title 18 of the Municipal Code, Chapter 18.76 under Section 18.76.020 as well as in Chapter 18.77 under Section 18.77.073.

### Prior Year Accomplishments

- See attached summary for more information.

<b>PROJECT/GOAL 1:</b>	Review Planning applications for conformance with ARB Findings and Objective Standards			
<b>BENEFICIAL IMPACTS</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESOURCES NEEDED</b>	<b>MEASURE OF SUCCESS</b>	<b>STATE MANDATED / LOCAL LAW / COUNCIL-APPROVED</b>
This is the Board's main mission and serves to ensure the City develops high quality projects	On-Going	Planning staff prepare staff reports, packets and presentations. They ensure paper plan sets and material boards are ready for ARB review. Other departments, such as, City Attorney, Urban Forestry, Transportation, etc., may be required from time to time. Consultants, including CEQA consultants, may also be required.	Issuance of recommendations on projects and high-quality architecture throughout the City.	Yes
<b>HIGH PRIORITY</b>		<b>LOWER PRIORITY</b>		<b>COUNCIL-DIRECTED POLICY UPDATE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Projects that include new housing units that will help with City reach its regional housing needs allocation (RHNA)</li> </ul>				N/A

<b>PROJECT/GOAL 2:</b>	Assist the City as it considers modifications to Objective Standards; Provide feedback based on research from projects as they go through the objective standards ministerial processes. Suggest ways to better address different housing typology.			
<b>BENEFICIAL IMPACTS</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESOURCES NEEDED</b>	<b>MEASURE OF SUCCESS</b>	<b>STATE MANDATED / LOCAL LAW / COUNCIL-APPROVED</b>
Streamline the objective standard review process and ensure that projects using the streamlined review process/objective standards conform to the City's Comprehensive Plan, Goals and Policies, including its high-quality design standards	Provide high level modifications to objective standards to Council by the end of FY 2026; If directed by Council, work with staff to propose specific code language for Council adopted by the end of FY 2026	Additional staff at Planning so that the quality and completeness of the work is maintained.	Council Approval	No
<b>HIGH PRIORITY</b>		<b>LOWER PRIORITY</b>		<b>COUNCIL-DIRECTED POLICY UPDATE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modifications to South of Forest Area Coordinated Area Plan (SOFA) subjective development standards with objective standards consistent with Housing Element Program 3.7.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Modifications to address objective standards (18.24) based on review of several projects using the standards at Council's direction.</li> </ul>		Yes

<b>PROJECT/GOAL 3:</b>	Discuss specific Coordinated Area Plans/ streetscape improvements and provide comments that the ARB would recommend exploring/implementing.			
<b>BENEFICIAL IMPACTS</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESOURCES NEEDED</b>	<b>MEASURE OF SUCCESS</b>	<b>STATE MANDATED / LOCAL LAW / COUNCIL-APPROVED</b>
This project would enhance implementation of the City's Comprehensive Plan.	On-going	Planning staff to help research policies and programs; coordination with long range planning section staff.	Increased adherence to Comprehensive Plan policies	Yes
<b>HIGH PRIORITY</b>		<b>LOWER PRIORITY</b>		<b>COUNCIL-DIRECTED POLICY UPDATE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>San Antonio Road Area Plan</li> <li>Downtown Housing Plan</li> <li>California Avenue streetscape improvements</li> <li>University Avenue streetscape improvements</li> </ul>				Yes

<b>PROJECT/GOAL 4:</b>	Provide feedback to staff and Council on the creation of new guidelines, ordinances, and/or streetscape, including but not limited to wireless communication facility regulations and innovative housing structures.			
<b>BENEFICIAL IMPACTS</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESOURCES NEEDED</b>	<b>MEASURE OF SUCCESS</b>	<b>STATE MANDATED / LOCAL LAW / COUNCIL-APPROVED</b>
The ARB has unique feedback to provide as a stakeholder as they have interest in approving the aesthetic environment of the City while also understanding constraints that architects/developers may come across when implementing standards being considered	Anticipated to return to the Board in spring/summer 2025	Staff time.	Council Approval	Yes
<b>HIGH PRIORITY</b>		<b>LOWER PRIORITY</b>		<b>COUNCIL-DIRECTED POLICY UPDATE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wireless communication facility regulations restoring subjective standards.</li> <li>Innovative housing structures (e.g., micro-units, intergenerational housing, aging adults, students and lower-income units, etc.) consistent with Housing Element Program 6.5.</li> </ul>				Yes

<b>PROJECT/GOAL 5:</b>	Improve Coordination between the Architectural Review Board and other boards, commissions, and Council.			
<b>BENEFICIAL IMPACTS</b>	<b>TIMELINE</b>	<b>RESOURCES NEEDED</b>	<b>MEASURE OF SUCCESS</b>	<b>STATE MANDATED / LOCAL LAW / COUNCIL-APPROVED</b>
Improved coordination between boards/commissions and council to get feedback from colleagues on other boards. Provide more coordinated feedback from the City for developers.	On-going	Staff time.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Have staff continue to provide updates in the pending projects attachment on development proposals.</li> <li>The ARB can appoint a representative to attend Council and provide feedback on reviewed projects.</li> </ul>	No
<b>HIGH PRIORITY</b>		<b>LOWER PRIORITY</b>		<b>COUNCIL-DIRECTED POLICY UPDATE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create liaisons between boards/commissions.</li> </ul>				No

**ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW BOARD ANNUAL REPORT  
PRIOR YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND ARB RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025**

**ITEMS OF NOTE**

- The ARB reviewed roughly 100 eligible projects for the 2025 Design Awards and selected six winners to recognize their contributions to Palo Alto. While not included in the work plan, this initiative aligns with Comprehensive Plan Program L6.1.1, which promotes award programs that celebrate architectural excellence and projects that positively impact the community. The ARB Design Awards recognize outstanding built projects every five years beginning in 2005.
- The ARB provided a comprehensive review and made recommendations on updates to the objective standards to better address townhome style designs and modifications to SB 9 objective standards. This work was consistent with Goal 2 of the 24/25 Work Plan.
- The ARB provided valuable feedback to assist Council with respect to Car Free Streets Implementation Plan, specifically for California Avenue Signage. Although not explicitly identified in the work plan, this work was consistent with Goal 3 of the 24/25 Work Plan.
- The ARB provided valuable feedback to assist Council with respect to the Lighting and Bird Safe Glazing Ordinances, Parklet designs, El Camino Real Focus Area, and Housing Incentive Program (HIP) consistent with Goal 4 of the 24/25 Work Plan.
- The ARB reviewed around 20 projects, including multi-family housing with below-market units, mixed-use developments, master sign programs, and retail modifications at Stanford Shopping Center, aligning with Goal 1 of the 24/25 Work Plan.

**APPLICATION REVIEW**

The ARB prides itself on its collaborative review process, where board member's diverse perspectives enhance proposed projects and improve Palo Alto's built environment. Our oversight has made a significant impact, as shown in the renderings section of this report, comparing initial proposals to final designs.

ADDRESS/PROJECT	DESCRIPTION
4075 El Camino Real	Assisted Living
Lighting Standards (PAMC 18.40.250)	Ordinance
Bird Friendly Design (PAMC 18.40.250)	Ordinance
525 University Avenue	Master Sign Program
530 Lytton Avenue	Master Sign Program
180 El Camino Real	The Melt Façade
3000 El Camino Real	Office Conversion
4335-4345 El Camino Real	Housing (with inclusionary units)
Housing Incentive Program (HIP)	Ordinance
3150 El Camino Real	Housing (with inclusionary units)
70 Encina Ave	Housing (with inclusionary units) -Townhomes
3265 El Camino Real	Affordable Housing
824 San Antonio	Mixed Use (Retail and Assisted Living)

ADDRESS/PROJECT	DESCRIPTION
3950 Fabian Way	Private Middle School
660 University Avenue	Mixed Use (Office with Housing)
El Camino Real Focus Area	Ordinance
Architecture Review Board Awards	Award Program (Occurs every 5 years)
640 Waverley Street	Mixed Use (Office with Housing)
164 Hamilton Avenue	Façade
180 El Camino Real	Delarosa Façade
California Ave Signage	Car Free Street improvements
City Parking Garages	Signage Exceptions
TBD	TBD

Additionally, several projects were submitted for preliminary review to gather early feedback from the ARB. This early input helped incorporate key programming and design changes, streamlining the formal application process. These projects including 540 University Avenue and 640 Waverley Street.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Palo Alto Municipal Code (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, focusing on individual development proposals rather than broad policies. However, we evaluate each project in its physical and regulatory context—considering its impact on the neighborhood and its alignment with City policies, from the Comprehensive Plan to the various design guidelines. Because the ARB looks at many projects each year, and its 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 around 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 years were townhouse type developments (3200 Park Boulevard, 739 Sutter Avenue, 420 Acacia, and 70 Encina). 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: The San Antonio Avenue area 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, city services, pedestrian/bicycle pathways, and integration with nearby developments in Mountain View as this area transforms.
- Downtown Housing Plan: To increase housing, the downtown area needs revised standards to accommodate redevelopment of parking lots as to encourage housing additions while maintaining the vibrancy of the downtown area and its pedestrian friendly streetscape.
- California Avenue: With State requirements as outlined in AB 2097 and Builder's Remedy, the California Avenue area will experience more development than in the past. This area should have a coordinated area plan to better scope future development.
- Encina Avenue: The Encina Avenue area, 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. Review Aesthetic Standards for Wireless Communication Facilities.** The ARB should provide feedback to the planning staff, PTC and Council regarding upcoming Wireless Communication Facilities (WCFs) regulations. The ARB previously reviewed WCFs standards in years past. ARB feedback on the upcoming permanent amendment to the WCFs Ordinance will improve the aesthetic compatibility of WCFs with their surrounding settings.

## **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.

- Have staff continue to provide updates in the pending projects attachment on development proposals.
- 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.
- Appoint HRB, PTC and Council liaisons to the ARB to facilitate open communication between boards and commissions and city council. ARB liaisons will provide a clear channel for passing information between reviewing bodies, enabling all board and commission and council members, as well as the general public, direct access to relevant information on a project-by-project basis.

## **RENDERINGS**

Below are renderings of approved projects, showcasing the evolution from their initial proposal to designs with the incorporated ARB feedback. A summary of key design modifications made based on ARB feedback is also provided.



**70 Encina Ave - Initial Proposal**



**70 Encina Ave – Incorporated Feedback Design**

- Encouraged more usable landscaped area.
- Encouraged the design to better address privacy between units, including views from the public parking lot into the units.
- Consideration of material choices and how the project would be visually compatible to the adjacent Town and Country.



**164 Hamilton Ave - Initial Proposal**



**164 Hamilton Ave - Final Design**

- Revised the second-floor window mullion pattern for consistency with the rest of the windows and provide natural ventilation to the upper floors.
- Clarified the control joints at the brick and stucco.
- Recessing the windows in the stairwell for more three-dimensional expression.





**3265 El Camino Real - Initial Proposal**



**3265 El Camino Real - Final Design**

- The ARB encouraged for a window or decorative reveal and extended around to the back of the building and for the rooftop terrace to be more engaging.
- The ARB provided feedback on the internal programing and suggestions for the vehicles utilizing the stacking stalls.
- The applicant incorporated feedback and added an additional floor to the development to increase density.



**824 San Antonio Rd- Initial Proposal**



**824 San Antonio Rd - Final Design**

- Consideration of material choices and how the selected colors and materials contrast with each other. In particular, the initial selected white was too bright and contrasted with the other materials.
- The ARB encouraged the drop-off area to be redesigned in a way that did not impede the front entrance.
- The ARB encouraged more simplified balcony designs in relation to their usage by residents.



**4335-4345 El Camino Real - Initial Proposal**



**4335-4345 El Camino Real - Final Design**

- The initial roof forms were complex and recommended to be reevaluated, while still maintaining separate roofs for each unit. This involved the removal of the third story balconies and fake roof dormers for a more simplified rooftop.
- The ARB encouraged accenting the doors for more variation, but overall approved the color scheme with its subtle differences in color.



**180 El Camino The Melt- Initial Proposal**



**180 El Camino The Melt - Final Design**

- The Melt came to the ARB with a comprehensive design. The ARB had some recommendations on the detailing of exterior materials, but generally approved the design as proposed.