



## Item No. 14 Town of Atherton

### **CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT – REGULAR AGENDA**

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL  
GEORGE RODERICKS, CITY MANAGER**

**FROM: ROBERT OVADIA, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR**

**DATE: FEBRUARY 20, 2019**

**SUBJECT: DISCUSS AND, IF APPROPRIATE, ADOPT AMENDMENTS TO THE TOWN’S RAIL POLICY; PROVIDE DIRECTION AND FEEDBACK TO STAFF REGARDING A RESPONSE TO THE CALTRAIN BUSINESS PLAN; AND ESTABLISHMENT OF AD HOC SUBCOMMITTEE TO WORK WITH STAFF REGARDING TRANSIT ORIENTED DEVELOPMENT AND TO MEET WITH LEGISLATORS REGARDING HOUSING ALONG RAIL CORRIDORS AND POTENTIALLY MEET WITH CALTRAIN REPRESENTATIVES REGARDING THE ATHERTON STATION**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Discuss, and, if appropriate, adopt amendments to the Town’s Rail Policy; provide direction and feedback to staff regarding a response to the Caltrain Business Plan; and establish an Ad Hoc Subcommittee regarding Transit-Oriented-Development and to meet with Legislators and other elected officials regarding housing along rail and transit corridors, and potentially meet with Caltrain representatives regarding the Atherton Station.

### **BACKGROUND**

On January 9, 2019, the Council held a joint study session with the Town Rail Committee to discuss the Caltrain 2040 Business Plan (currently under development) and the desired future level of service at the Atherton Station, potential housing legislation, and the Town Rail Policies.

#### **Caltrain Business Plan**

Caltrain initiated the development of its Business Plan in 2018 with a schedule that calls for adoption in early 2020. Caltrain is currently working on developing their long-range service vision (Part 1) which includes ridership projections, a description of the level of train service desired in 2040 (including the number and length of trains needed for that service), the infrastructure improvements needed to provide the desired level of service, as well as how they will effectively

connect to other rail and transit providers. Caltrain is also assessing the community-corridor interface and the Caltrain organization. Caltrain has presented the ridership projections and various service options they have been reviewing to the Local Policy Maker Group (LPMG) which meets monthly.

Caltrain projects a demand of up to 240,000 riders per day in 2040, including approximately peak passenger ridership of 8,000 – 10,000 for the northbound AM/southbound PM commute. To meet this demand, Caltrain forecasts that they would need to operate eight 10-car trains or twelve 8-car trains per hour, per direction. This projection does not include High-Speed Rail capacity to serve the demand. Caltrain presented seven service concepts ranging from twelve (12) to sixteen (16) trains per hour per direction, inclusive of four (4) HSR trains per hour per direction. Previous presentations indicated a headway of a little as two minutes in each direction during peak periods.

Though the various service scenarios show the Atherton Station, Station service levels are denoted as TBD (to be determined) through further analysis. Caltrain has indicated that service to the Atherton Station, in these forecasts, would be via transferring stops from either Redwood City or Menlo Park.

Caltrain is continuing to dialogue with project partners and local jurisdictions to understand interests and concerns with service options.

### Rail Policy

At its December 4, 2018, meeting, the Rail Committee recommended the modifications to the “Town Priorities Regarding Caltrain Line” included in Resolution 18-11, which rescinded and replaced Resolution 15-10 titled “*A Resolution of the City Council of the Town of Atherton Establishing and Governing Town Committees*” including an attachment of the City Council’s adopted Rail Related Policy Issues.

### Housing Legislation

California and the San Francisco Bay area are experiencing a shortage in housing and affordable housing. According to the League of California Cities, State housing officials estimate that 180,000 homes need to be built each year to keep pace with population growth. Over the past decade, on average, less than half that number have been constructed annually. Legislation has passed and continues to be discussed at the State level and more recently at the regional level to encourage housing, particularly high-density housing, along transit corridors and near transit stations.

SB 50, “Planning and zoning: housing development: equitable communities’ incentive,” introduced in December 2018, proposes that local governments shall, upon request of a development proponent, grant an equitable communities incentive waiving maximum controls on density and maximum parking requirements greater than 0.5 spaces per unit. It would further incentivize affordable housing within one-half mile of a major transit stop by waiving maximum heights less than 45 feet and FAR requirements less than 2.5. It would also incentivize affordable housing within one-half mile of a major transit stop by waiving maximum heights less than 55 feet and FAR requirements less than 3.5.

The Committee to House the Bay Area – CASA – has developed the “CASA Compact,” a ten-element regional housing implementation plan to increase housing production and protect affordable housing in the bay area. Both the MTC and ABAG have voted to sign on to the CASA Compact. The CASA recommends establishing a Regional Housing Enterprise (RHE) to coordinate and lead implementation of the CASA Compact. Indicating that State law should establish an independent board, with broad representation from MTC, ABAG and key stakeholder groups that helped develop the CASA Compact. They would like the RHE to be formed through an act of legislation that gives it authority to collect new revenue (through fees or taxes); disburse the revenue to programs and projects in the expenditure plans (consistent with the CASA Compact); purchase, lease and hold land; and provide direct assistance. These various measures are intended to remove various aspects of local land use control.

On January 9, 2019, after input from the public and discussion by the Council and Rail Committee, the Council requested that the Rail Committee review service options for the Atherton Station, including potential closure, and provide a recommendation to the Council regarding a desired level of service. The Council further requested that the Committee review the rail policy along with additional feedback provided and provide a recommendation with any suggested changes to the policy.

## **ANALYSIS**

### *Rail Service Levels*

The Rail Committee, at its February 5, 2019 meeting received public comment and discussed various levels of rail service for the Atherton Station. Several members of the public spoke at the meeting and suggested that the Committee consider a recommendation to close the station.

Though a couple of the members of the public acknowledged an historic and sentimental attachment to the station, they suggested that the station may have outlived its purpose. The residents suggested that closure would reduce train horn impacts and would assist with extension of the quiet zone. They suggested that the station area could be incorporated into the Town Center greenspace, with the Town potentially taking ownership of the station building. Other items raised include a comment regarding operational efficiencies, that removal of a low use station would further the overall efficiency of the system and that even if service were resumed, there would be pressure from neighboring communities to close the station due to growth around their stations.

The Committee discussed the various impacts of resuming weekday service, including noise, security, limited access to the station, parking loss associated with the Civic Center project, gate down times and associated traffic impacts, and potential housing legislation including SB 50. There was also a suggestion that Caltrain’s desired capacity increases will ultimately necessitate closure of low-ridership stops and that the Town could potentially leverage anticipated expenditures that would be needed for platform upgrades and service costs towards safety improvements at Watkins and other Town benefits.

Following the discussion of impacts, the Committee focused on potential service levels. The following options for discussion purposes were included in the associated staff report:

- 1) Retention of weekend only service (+/- every 1.5 hours each way)
- 2) Add weekday service hourly all day
- 3) Add weekday peak hour service only either 30 minutes or hourly
- 4) Add weekday service every 30 minutes during peak plus hourly during non-peak
- 5) Closure

The Committee members felt that the current level of service, weekend only, was the worst option. The current level of service provides the drawbacks of having a station, without any real service benefits. The Committee indicated that the approximate 90-minute interval between trains made it impractical for most weekend trips to San Francisco and that value was relegated to game days where a local train would stop in Atherton on the return trip. The Committee ultimately voted on two options – 1) closure of the station and 2) resumption of full weekday service. The Committee believed that Caltrain would ultimately decide on the service level, but if service were desired, the Town should seek as much service as it could obtain.

The final Committee vote was 4 in favor of full service, 3 in favor of closure, 2 abstentions. One member of the Committee was absent.

### Rail Policy

In consideration of the deliberations associated with the level of service and input received at the joint meeting with the Council on January 9, 2019, the Committee recommended that the Council update the Town Priorities Regarding Caltrain as follows:

#### Town Priorities Regarding Caltrain Line

The Town recognizes that successful implementation of the Town's rail corridor priorities with Caltrain require a partnership with Caltrain. To that end, the Town will endeavor to work with Caltrain to address the following priorities for the Atherton Station and Rail Corridor:

- Caltrain must restore *full* weekday service.
- Caltrain must complete a capital project to remove the “hold out station” in Town.
- *Ensure any long term corridor rail plan limits two tracks through Atherton.*
- Modernization of the rail system must minimize and fully mitigate any environmental impact to the Town.
- ~~The Town seeks to perfect the Quiet Zone within the Town through the addition of Quad Gates at the Watkins Avenue crossing and upgrading the Atherton Station. These measures require the support and partnership of Caltrain.~~
- *Caltrain must take all necessary steps to make rail transit through the rail corridor as safe as possible including the maintenance of Quad Gates at Fair Oaks Lane and the establishment of Quad Gates at the Watkins Avenue crossing.*

- *Caltrain must continue to enforce the compliance requirements for the Fair Oaks Lane Quiet Zone.*

### *Ad Hoc Subcommittee*

With the various efforts underway to address housing needs in our surrounding communities, and at the Regional and State levels, it may be beneficial to designate two Councilmembers to take the lead with staff on discussing housing issues, concerns and solutions with elected officials from neighboring jurisdictions and within the region, as well as County Supervisors and State Representatives. These discussions would allow the Town to better understand the needs and positions of our neighbors and work to advocate for solutions that consider the needs of the local communities. Such advocacy could include an emphasis on bottom-up rather than top-down solutions and encouraging communities to balance job growth with housing growth within their boundaries. Staff recommends the Mayor designate an Ad Hoc Committee to work with staff on these issues. The Committee would help craft a written response to the Caltrain Business Plan and ultimately work with staff to meet with legislators regarding the development of affordable housing around transportation corridors and the impact on communities like Atherton, and, depending on the direction of Council, meet with Caltrain representatives in regard to the Atherton Station.

### **POLICY FOCUS**

The policy focus for the Council is the proposed service levels, ridership, and other projections within the Caltrain Business Plan; the Town's Rail Policy, and the potential impact of State legislation on local zoning in and around the station.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

None at this time.

**COMMISSION/COMMITTEE FEEDBACK/REFERRAL**

This item  X  has or   has not been before a Town Committee or Commission.

- Audit/Finance Committee (meets every other month)
- Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee (meets as needed)
- Civic Center Advisory Committee (meets as needed)
- Environmental Programs Committee (meets every other month)
- Park and Recreation Committee (meets each month)
- Planning Commission (meets each month)
- X  Rail Committee (meets every other month)
- Transportation Committee (meets every other month)

**ATTACHMENTS**

None.