TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER
DEPARTMENT: PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

DATE: NOVEMBER 14, 2005

SUBJECT: EVALUATION OF SECOND TRIAL, AND RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING NEXT STEPS FOR DOWNTOWN NORTH TRAFFIC CALMING PLAN

RECOMMENDATION
The Planning and Transportation Commission and staff recommend to Council the following actions:

1) Conduct a public hearing regarding the results of the second Downtown North traffic calming trial project and
2) Approve the permanent retention of the second Downtown North Traffic Calming trial project, with additional work outlined in this report. However, of the proposed items, staff does not recommend landscaping traffic circles since it adds to unfunded maintenance backlog.

BACKGROUND
On March 29, 2004, Council directed staff to remove most elements of the first trial plan for Downtown North traffic calming, installed in June 2003, including six of the seven street closures. Council also directed staff to implement a second trial plan (Attachment A), including two traffic circles on Everett (at Emerson and at Webster), one traffic circle at Hawthorne (at Cowper), a speed table on Hawthorne (near High), and a speed table on Palo Alto Avenue (between Alma and Emerson). Council further directed staff to implement right turn restrictions between 7 AM to 10 AM from Middlefield onto Hawthorne and Everett and left turn restrictions between both 7 AM to 10 AM and 3 PM to 6 PM from Alma onto Hawthorne and Everett (CMR 180:04). The second traffic calming trial began with completion of construction of the three new traffic circles during September 2004.

A set of performance measures was established as part of the second Downtown North traffic calming trial plan evaluation. These measures include the following:

1. Reduction in Downtown North cut-through traffic
2. Threshold for traffic diversion onto other local streets
3. Threshold for level of service at nearby signalized intersections
4. Queue length at Lytton and Middlefield
5. Vehicle speeds in Downtown North
6. Injury crashes directly attributable to traffic calming devices
7. Emergency services response time
8. Fire Department access to Lytton Gardens and Webster House
9. Turn restriction compliance
10. Impact on other service providers
11. Neighborhood acceptance

Staff completed the above assessments, conducted a public meeting of residents of Downtown North and environs, and on September 28, 2005 presented recommendations in a staff report to the Planning and Transportation Commission (Attachment B). This staff report presents findings of the staff analysis and the basis of staff’s recommendations to the Commission.

BOARD/COMMISSION REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS
On September 28th, the Planning and Transportation Commission voted unanimously (six in favor and Commissioner Bialson not present) to recommend to the full Council retention of the second Downtown North traffic calming trial as permanent, with a list of desirable secondary actions and follow-up evaluations. These included:

a) Landscape the traffic circles with preference to be given to use of plant materials rather than paving materials or other “hardscape” approaches.

b) Consider replacement, as may be feasible, of the single handicapped ramp at each corner of intersections containing traffic circles with two perpendicular (to the street being crossed) handicapped ramps.

c) Evaluate the need for and feasibility of a new traffic signal at Everett and Middlefield.

d) Consult with Kipling residents regarding desirability of an additional traffic calming measure on that street to mitigate higher traffic volumes on that street due to implementation of the Downtown North project.

e) Make exemption of emergency vehicle explicit on the turn prohibition signs on Alma and Middlefield.

f) Evaluate the desirability and feasibility of additional measures for pedestrian and vehicular safety in the vicinity of Johnson Park.

g) Add landscaping at the Palo Alto closure.

h) Evaluate the desirability and feasibility of any additional traffic safety measures in the vicinity of Webster and Hawthorne.
Commission discussion focused on landscaping the three traffic circles and the existing closure of Palo Alto Avenue at Middlefield, traffic safety at Everett and Middlefield, ensuring emergency vehicle access to the neighborhood around the clock, shortening crossing distance from handicapped curb ramps on the corners of intersections with traffic circles, pedestrian safety in the vicinity of Johnson Park, and ways to reduce the potential safety effects of stop sign violations at Hawthorne and Webster. Minutes of the Planning and Transportation Commission meeting are contained in Attachment C. Despite these additional considerations, Commissioners expressed broad support for the measures installed with the current trial plan.

**RESOURCE IMPACT**

There is approximately $60,000 remaining in the Downtown North project budget for the changes/enhancements to the existing traffic calming features as recommended in this report. Transportation Division would coordinate with Public Works staff to implement the installation/retrofit of the curb ramps, if feasible, through the sidewalk replacement or street resurfacing programs using Downtown North project funds.

The remaining project budget could be used for the landscape/hardscape treatments to the traffic circles and median island. The use of plant materials rather than hardscape, would increase the Public Works and/or Community Services maintenance backlog. For this reason, staff does not recommend use of vegetation for the permanent landscaping.

Public Works Department staff has consistently raised the concern that the existing roadways and traffic control devices cannot be maintained to the level that is needed with existing contract and staff resources. The cumulative impact of the addition of new roadway features adds to this deficit in maintenance resources. Additional operational costs of maintaining these structures would need to be included in the annual operating budget.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

On March 22, 2004, the City Council approved Resolution No. 8415 adopting a mitigated negative declaration (MND) for the Modified Mixed Measures Plan, which included plans with similar or less impact, including the elements of the second Downtown North trial. No new information has been received or project element proposed that would require further environmental review. Accordingly, the adopted MND covers retention of the second trial project and the additional project elements including landscape, hardscape and curb ramps and no further environmental review is required.

**ATTACHMENTS**

A. Map of Second Downtown North Traffic Calming Plan
B. September 28, 2005 Planning and Transportation staff report
C. Minutes of the September 28, 2005 Planning & Transportation Commission meeting
D. Correspondence from Steve Kutner, Joe Durand, and James Markevitch dated November 8, 2005
E. Correspondence from John Guislin submitted November 8, 2005
F. Correspondence from Dan Lorimer dated November 10, 2005

COURTESY COPIES
Second Downtown North Traffic Calming Trial Plan Informal Input Group (“The Roundtable’)
Alan and Bonnie Luntz, Lytton neighborhood representatives
Palo Alto Bicycle Advisory Committee members
City of Menlo Park Transportation Division

PREPARED BY: Gayle Likens, Acting Chief Transportation Official

DEPARTMENT HEAD:______________________________________________
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Director of Planning and Community Environment

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