City of Palo Alto
City Council Informational Report

Report Type: Meeting Date: 6/6/2011

Title: World Music Day

Subject: World Music Day Update

From: City Manager

Lead Department: City Manager

Background

Since 2009, the World Music Day event has been gaining momentum in Palo Alto. Held on Father’s Day in downtown the World Music Day event features between 40- 50 musical groups with performances representing many genres. The performances take place on sidewalks, street corners, and plazas along University Avenue. Jazz, classical, pop, rock, choral, and many other types of music feature sounds from around the world. All performances are free and open to the public.

The response from merchants, shoppers, and visitors over the years has been largely positive, including several requests to close University Avenue during the event to create even more of a pedestrian-friendly and festival environment, and to enhance the overall experience.

Due to the enormously positive feedback and instructive thought received after the recent collaborative success of the Parade of Champions in January, the City Manager thinks that testing the closure of University Avenue could be useful if given the right type of event and an effective outreach strategy. In this case, success would be determined by attracting the Palo Alto and greater community to spend time walking around downtown, visiting our shops and restaurants, having an enjoyable experience, thereby raising the visibility and awareness of the charm and character of our Downtown.

As such, the City Manager has approved the use of this year’s World Music Day as a test case for a University Avenue closure, and will help to defray the additional expenses (mostly additional staff costs) through the City Manager’s Contingency Fund if the police and public works budgets are unable to easily absorb the staff costs in their end of the year budget projections. There will be a particular focus on outreach/ inclusion to the merchants, as well as a plan to gauge the overall success of the street closure through a count of visitors as well as a random survey.
In the past, the closure of University Avenue for events during the weekday commute hours has caused a number of traffic issues and complaints. Having an event on a weekend mitigates many of those concerns. An effective outreach strategy to merchants, visitors, and travelers, as well as a coordination of City Departments and their efforts should further mitigate issues caused by a closure.

As of May 31, 2011, every ground floor business in the affected area has been notified in-person at least once by the City, volunteers from the World Music Day and Downtown Business and Professional Association. The focus of the outreach is not just to inform the merchants of the street closure, but also to invite them to get involved through the placement of tables/chairs or merchandise along University Avenue. The City has also developed a plan to provide some merchants/restaurants with tables and chairs if they need extras.

In regards to this current outreach, the response from merchants thus far has been extremely positive, and the City Manager hopes that many will decide to use the street closure as an opportunity to promote their businesses during the event. The City and volunteers plan to reach them again at least once more in-person. As outreach to the many above ground and surrounding units, a letter has been prepared and is being mailed to every parcel in the downtown. The City also plans to put out an updated press release and use social media to get the word out to the general public. The Alert SCC system will also be activated to inform the area of the street closure. With a great event, a targeted outreach and inclusion campaign, and hopefully great weather, staff expects that this year’s World Music Day can provide valuable insights for the feasibility of future events along University Avenue.

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City Manager Approval: James Keene, City Manager