



Architectural Review Board

Staff Report (ID # 14120)

Report Type: Study Session **Meeting Date:** 3/17/2022

Summary Title: California Avenue Street Improvements / Parklets

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From: Jonathan Lait

Recommendation

Staff recommends the Architectural Review Board (ARB):

1. Review and provide informal comments. No formal action is requested.

Report Summary

Council has requested the ARB explore streetscape design options for the California Avenue right-of-way.

Background

On June 22, 2021, Council directed staff to return to the City Council for further discussion regarding additional elements on the California Ave street closure, referring to the area closed through June 2022 for outdoor retail and dining ([CMR 12354](#)). Specifically, Council directed “Staff to include in its workplan for streetscape design on California Avenue, have Staff return with a process recommendation to pursue a pro-bono design expertise such as AIA, ARB or others, and to include an evaluation of potential sites for permanent performance stages in other potential areas such as downtown.”

On February 28, 2022, City Council discussed and approved the continued closure of California Avenue as further discussed in the motion below.

February 28, 2022 Approved Council Motion

- A. Direct Staff to issue a Request for Information (RFI) and/or Request For Proposals (RFP) to obtain a consultant to conduct a feasibility study to define the scope and understand the impact of the proposed permanent closure(s) on portions of California Avenue from El Camino Real to Park Blvd. and the section of Ramona Street between Hamilton Avenue and University Avenue
- B. Direct Staff to return to Council for approval of the contract for the feasibility study and to

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 Planning & Development Services
 250 Hamilton Avenue
 Palo Alto, CA 94301
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provide a schedule

C. Include into the RFI, in addition to items mentioned in the staff report:

- i. Evaluate option to close Cal Ave from Friday afternoon to Sunday afternoon in addition to permanent closure
- ii. Consider methods to value rents for use of public spaces and evaluate if revenues could be used as partial funding of the process
- iii. Suggest approach to improve aesthetics and maintain open sidewalks so that the pedestrian traffic is near the windows
- iv. Include proposed guidelines on hours of use of public spaces and noise control
- v. Evaluate displaced traffic impacts, particularly on residential streets
- vi. Bring the budget request as part of the 2023 Budget process

D. Direct staff to come back with an item on Action to extend the street closure through December 31, 2023

Video of Council's deliberations can be found here - <https://midpenmedia.org/city-council-152-2282022-2/> (see item #13). The staff report can be found here - <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/city-council-agendas-minutes/2022/20220228/20220228pccsm-amended-ga-and-item-12-presentation.pdf>

Actions on Similar Street Closures in Other Nearby Cities

As the Council considers whether or not to pursue longer-term closures, the actions of nearby cities may provide insightful. The following summary was provided to Council.

- **City of Mountain View:** On October 12, 2021, the City Council of Mountain View conducted a study session to review the Castro Street Pedestrian Mall Feasibility Study. The City was considering closure of Castro Street prior to the pandemic and was authorized to conduct a feasibility study on December 10, 2019 ([link to City of Mountain View staff report](#)).
- **City of San Mateo:** On September 20, 2021, City Council adopted a resolution to establish pedestrian malls on B Street between 1st and 2nd Avenues and on B Street between 2nd and 3rd Avenues and introduced an Ordinance to amend the San Mateo Municipal Code to establish rules and regulations governing pedestrian malls ([link to City of San Mateo staff report](#)). The public hearing for resolution of intent to establish a pedestrian mall was conducted on June 21, 2021.
- **The City and County of San Francisco** has considered making some residential low-volume streets as "Slow Streets" in post-pandemic times. The information about San Francisco's Slow Street program can be found at San Francisco Municipal Transportation Agency (SFMTA) [Post Pandemic Slow Street Program](#).

Discussion

As noted in the Council's February 28th staff report, the experiment with closed streets proved to be very popular with Palo Alto residents, with thousands corresponding to Council requesting the street closures continue. The potential new normal could also provide economic benefits to local businesses, especially restaurants. Not only because it creates an enhanced opportunity for al fresco dining, but also because the closed portions of streets contribute to a strong sense of place that attracts diners and shoppers alike, helping generate businesses activity (that in turn generates tax revenue).

The ARB can help in this matter by providing Council with ideas for a more permanent solution to establish California Avenue as a potential pedestrian mall.

ARB¹ Liaison & Contact Information

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