



City of Palo Alto

City Council Staff Report

(ID # 5048)

Report Type: Informational Report

Meeting Date: 9/15/2014

Summary Title: Cal Ave Streetscape Improvements Update

Title: California Avenue Streetscape Improvements Project Update

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Planning and Community Environment

Recommendation

This is an informational report and no Council action is required.

Executive Summary

The California Avenue Transit Hub Corridor Project (Capital Improvement Project PL-11002) includes streetscape and infrastructure improvements between El Camino Real and the Park Boulevard Plaza. Construction began in March 2014, with a construction schedule that would continue through December 2014. This Informational Report provides an updated project completion schedule, which has been extended to March 2015, and summarizes current and upcoming construction activities.

Background & Discussion

The California Avenue Transit Hub Corridor Improvements project provides for streetscape and utility improvements along California Avenue between El Camino Real and the Park Boulevard Plaza. Utility improvements include new waterline and service lateral connections to California Avenue businesses. These elements were added onto the project during the design phase to replace an aged waterline that had exceeded its useful life and to avoid future demolition of the new street. Streetscape improvements include new landscaping and irrigation facilities, decorative streetlight standards and underground conduit networks, streetscape furniture, improvements to the Park Boulevard Plaza, and public art elements. The project also includes roadway infrastructure improvements such as wider sidewalks and intersection bulb-outs. These elements will activate the streetscape and enhance the pedestrian experience. A new 2-lane configuration also adds 5 additional parking spaces on California Avenue.

Redgwick Construction was selected as the most responsible low-bidder for the project and a Notice to Proceed was issued on March 3, 2014, formally beginning the construction phase of the project.

Waterline Reconstruction

Construction began in March 2014 with the waterline reconstruction as the first element of work to avoid conflicts with planned streetscape and roadway infrastructure improvements.

The water line construction was delayed due to the need for a redesign to position the water line away from conflicting underground facilities and to change the waterline material selection. The original design specified the use of High Density Polyethylene (HDPE) pipe material, but as a result of additional soil testing, it was recommended that the material be changed to Ductile Iron material instead, which is a better and stronger material and would work better in the existing soil conditions. The waterline reconstruction is now complete along with new lateral connections to California Avenue businesses. The design and material change in the waterline element of the overall project impacted the schedule by approximately 6 weeks (30 working days).

Streetscape Construction - Sidewalks

The streetscape portion of the project officially began in May. Several street blocks are now complete including: Caltrain Station and Park Boulevard (south side), Birch Street to Park Boulevard (south side), and El Camino Real and Ash Street (north side). Improvements in these areas include new wider sidewalks, intersection bulb-outs, decorative sidewalks with glass jewels, trench drain facilities, curb & gutter work, and underground irrigation and streetlight facilities. Streetscape and landscaping improvements will follow on these block segments as additional street blocks are improved to help ensure efficient construction and mobilization of the project.

The new decorative sidewalks segments with decorative glass jewels are located at key pedestrian dwelling areas such as midblock crossing locations, intersection bulb-outs and plaza areas. The first batch of decorative sidewalk segments built for the project resulted in a 2 week delay to address supply issues of the decorative glass jewels. The glass jewels supplied during the material approval process did not match the glass jewels installed at the first field installation sites near Park Boulevard. Additional decorative sidewalk segments were delayed while the supplier modified their fabrication process to ensure a more uniform material size. The initial two installations in front of Kinko's and Baume Restaurant were removed and replaced in July. With the glass jewel fabrication issues addressed, decorative sidewalk installations continued in August but a 2 week delay was realized (10 working days).

Current Construction Activities

City anticipates both daytime and nighttime construction activities to expedite the construction schedule and to minimize business impacts from the project. The City maintains pedestrian access to the businesses in the project area at all times during construction with contractor doing work on one side of the street at a time. Furthermore, the construction management team from Ghirardelli Associates provides area merchants with regular updates to the surrounding community and is available to address any concerns.

The following schedule represents the project’s current construction staging activities:

**California Avenue
Current Construction Schedule**

2014										2015		
Mar	Apr	May	Jun	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar
COMPLETE				Active Streetscape Construction								
Water Line				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plaza to Birch South Side • Ash to ECR North Side 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ash to ECR South Side • Ash to Birch South Side 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Park Blvd to Plaza & vicinity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ash to Birch North Side • Landscaping Streetlights Furniture and Paving 					

Palo Alto Department of Planning & Community Environment, August 2014

Public Outreach

Staff has been providing weekly email updates to a growing list of over 750 interested area residents and businesses. A project website is also available at: www.cityofpaloalto.org/calave.

The weekly email updates and website provide businesses and the surrounding community detailed information on the construction work scheduled for the week as well as work anticipated in the near future. In addition, door to door visits to the entire business district have updated the merchants with specific details of upcoming work and how it will affect them. These visits have also been effective in signing-up dozens of additional businesses for the weekly emails. Printed flyers are also given out on a regular basis.

Recently, an email survey was sent to approximately 225 area merchants and other businesses. The survey questions were designed to determine the level of knowledge concerning the project as well as the effectiveness of the City’s outreach in reaching the businesses. After two weeks of in-person follow-ups and visits to businesses not on the email list, staff received a total of 41 complete responses to the survey. Although not scientific in nature, staff was able to glean a general sense that most businesses are at least “moderately informed” about the project. Most merchants on California Avenue acknowledged having been visited by staff or the contractor, and found that the outreach methods had generally been at least somewhat helpful in aiding the understanding of the project details. The survey results will be released very soon.

Staff also attends monthly meetings with the California Avenue Business Association (CABA), to discuss construction progress and to respond to any questions and comments on the construction. Staff continues to work with the California Avenue merchants to develop and implement advertising and marketing plans to increase patronage during construction

activities. This includes project information signs and project banners along the avenue, changeable message signs along El Camino Real, advertising on Utility bills and Citywide mailings, and special event planning.

Through the monthly meetings, door-to-door visits, and weekly emails noted above, staff has communicated to area merchants that the timeline has been delayed. Businesses are generally aware of the schedule change, and understand that the delay is mainly due to unforeseen challenges relating to the water line replacement.

Timeline

Construction for this project was anticipated to be completed by the end of the calendar year (December 2014). The project is now expected to be completed at the beginning of March 2015, barring unforeseen circumstances or major storms.

Staff anticipates that the contractor will continue work in the vicinity of the plaza area during the holiday season, since this area is outside of the business assessment district and is not included in the City's holiday season construction moratorium. Staff will continue to discuss this plan with area merchants, and work to address their concerns. Obviously, the overall schedule would be further delayed if construction ceased entirely during the holidays.

Resource Impact

The California Avenue Streetscape project is being implemented by Redgwick Construction via a \$6,211,311 construction contract with a 10% contingency. A portion of the contingency will cover the unanticipated costs of the redesign and relocation of the water line discussed earlier in this report. As part of the outreach to California Avenue merchants, a number of community members (primarily merchants) have requested additional sidewalk replacements to fill in the gaps, especially on the south side between Birch and Park Blvd, where there is currently new sidewalk proposed. Staff recommends considering this additional scope later in the process, once it is clear whether the remainder of the 10% contingency is sufficient to include this additional sidewalk work.

Policy Implications

This report does not represent any changes to existing City policies

Environmental Review

This is an informational report and is not a project under the California Environmental Quality Act.