



City Council Agenda Report

Meeting Date: April 9, 2024

Initiated By: City Council

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Approved By: Gabriel Engeland

Subject:
Downtown Park

COUNCIL PRIORITY AREA

- Business Communities
- Circulation Safety and Efficiency
- Environmental Sustainability
- Housing
- Neighborhood Safety Infrastructure
- General Government

RECOMMENDATION

Direct City staff to continue exploring the possibility of a Downtown Park through design and community outreach.

POLICY QUESTION(S) FOR COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

Does the City Council wish to direct staff to continue exploring the possibility of a proposed downtown park with underground parking on Plazas 1 and 2 through community outreach and design?

FISCAL IMPACT

City staff will determine the total project costs as part of the next phase that will return to City Council for consideration.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The City Council action authorizing the review of the proposed project is exempt from review under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA Guidelines Section 15061(b)(3). Subsequent action taken during the review of the proposed project will be analyzed separately under CEQA.

PREVIOUS COUNCIL CONSIDERATION

January 9, 2024

SUMMARY

- City Council directed City staff to explore the possibility of a downtown park with underground parking in the City-owned parking plazas.

- City staff has completed an initial analysis of the downtown parking plazas and created initial renderings of the identified location.
- City staff will continue engaging with the community in order to solicit feedback while working on a formal design.

PURPOSE

Explore the possibility of a downtown park with underground parking in the City-owned parking plazas.

BACKGROUND

As part of their Annual Retreat, the City Council directed City staff to explore the possibility of a downtown park with underground parking in the City-owned parking plazas. City staff initiated the exploratory research process to identify which parking plazas have the desirable characteristics and initial feasibility for the necessary project components.

DISCUSSION/ANALYSIS

The map below illustrates the name for each of the downtown parking plazas for ease of conversation.



The map below is an aerial view of the same map as above.



Plaza #1 and Plaza #2 are one-acre rectangular parcels that would provide a clean development space for underground parking and park space which would meet all ideal criteria for both elements of the project. A portion of Plaza #2 has been designated as a potential site for the Downtown Theater through a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding while they continue to work through their capital campaign analysis.

Plaza #3 is an irregularly-shaped plaza that presents unique challenges for underground parking due to the long narrow entryway and its adjacency to a major corridor in San Antonio which could provide unsafe conditions for the park space.

The Central Plazas (Plaza #4, Plaza #5, and Plaza #6) are all ideal for a central paseo space that would allow pedestrians to meander through our central downtown core. However, these parcel shapes are less than ideal for underground parking because it would be difficult to build enough underground parking that would offset the lost at-grade parking.

Plaza #7 and Plaza #8 have been identified as housing sites in the Housing Element that may be converted into housing.

The City only owns one-quarter of the parcel that is Plaza #9 with three-quarters of the parcel owned by a private property owner.

Plaza #10 is an irregularly-shaped plaza that is directly adjacent to Village Park across Edith.

Due to the conditions mentioned above in the parking plazas, City staff recommends that Plaza #1 and a portion of Plaza #2 may provide the best conditions for an at-grade park space with two levels of underground parking for three major reasons.

First, these plazas are the only remaining rectangular-shaped parking plazas that have not been assigned another purpose that would provide ideal underground parking. The other parking plazas are less than ideal for underground parking due to the irregular shapes.

Second, these plazas provide a large enough space that would allow for an alley behind the existing parcels along Main Street and yield a quality green space. The Central Plazas would become very tiny or need to be entirely paved over in order to meet existing requirements for emergency vehicle access to the parcels along Main and State Street.

Finally, a park in this location would potentially provide high-quality parking for downtown employees on the second level of underground parking that would allow vehicles to remain protected from the elements and keep these vehicles out of the main parking corridors for visitors and residents along Main Street, State Street, and in the Central Plazas.

There would be a number of benefits provided by a beautiful new park space with underground parking as compared to the existing at-grade parking in Parking Plazas #1 and #2. This project would further the City Council Strategic Goals #1 through #4:

- Business Communities – Provide a benefit to the downtown business community through a new community space that will allow new visitors to spend their time and money in our main commercial district. It will provide high quality park space and parking spaces along with protected, secure underground parking for employee vehicles.
- Circulation Safety and Efficiency – Improve circulation safety of the downtown by calming this portion of the downtown parking plazas from solely vehicular traffic in at-grade parking. Parking plaza efficiency will significantly increase with a new flow of traffic that is oriented to maximum benefit.
- Environmental Sustainability – Enhance from the existing asphalt parking to green space with state-of-the-art sustainable amenities in addition to the new trash enclosures that will ensure trash is well-maintained and not entering the public right-of-way.
- Housing – Utilize portions of the Housing Element which identify integration of public park facilities with or nearby multi-family housing.

This is what Parking Plaza #1 looks like on a normal Tuesday afternoon as of March 2024.



Below are draft renderings that were created in order to help facilitate the conversation with both the City Council and community surrounding this initiative. These renderings illustrate what a downtown park space would look like with underground parking that run from 1st to 3rd Street.

This rendering shows what the space would look like on an ordinary day with a new Downtown Park and passive use of the green space and activity nodes.



This additional rendering shows what the space would look like when activated for an event with many residents and visitors gathered on the green space.



City staff plans to take these renderings and map to a number of community engagement events in order to educate the community about this Council priority and solicit feedback while working through a design.

City staff has presented this concept in theory to several community stakeholder groups with initial positive feedback. These included a Bagels & Business Presentation to the Los Altos Village Association on February 27 and a Presentation to the Los Altos Community Coalition on March 22.

Furthermore, staff plans to present to the Los Altos Chamber of Commerce Government Affairs Committee and Los Altos Property Owners Downtown. City staff will coordinate a Community Meeting co-sponsored by various organizations and is exploring the possibility of hosting educational booths at downtown special events, such as First Friday and the Los Altos Farmers Market.

Moving forward, City staff is presenting these renderings in order to confirm that staff is proceeding in the correct direction based upon initial Council direction and should continue to facilitate community feedback on this project while exploring the financial feasibility for the project.

City staff will present this item as a Capital Improvement Project in the FY25 budget to expend Park-in-Lieu funds on a Design that will allow staff to explore the formal layout of the space, true cost of this project, and potential funding sources. Initially, City staff believes that the costs for the park space and replacement parking for the park space could be covered by Park-in-Lieu fees, the costs for sewer improvements could be covered by Sewer Funds, and the remaining costs could be covered by grants or General Fund.

At this point in time, the total cost and funding sources will need to be formalized through the next steps that would return to City Council for review.

ATTACHMENTS

- 1. Presentation**