



**TOWN OF LOS GATOS
COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT**

MEETING DATE: 10/01/2019

ITEM NO: 12

DATE: September 26, 2019
TO: Mayor and Town Council
FROM: Laurel Prevetti, Town Manager
SUBJECT: Provide Feedback and Direction on the Downtown One-Way Pilot Project

RECOMMENDATION:

Provide feedback and further direction on the Downtown One-Way Pilot Project.

BACKGROUND:

On May 7, 2019 the Town Council approved a project for conversion of North Santa Cruz Avenue to a one-way street between Bachman Avenue and Elm Street as a four-month pilot program. The project included restriping for the one-way street, the addition of angled parking, and the addition of seven parklets along North Santa Cruz Avenue.

The pilot began with the idea that wider sidewalks would provide a functional improvement to the downtown, allowing for a more comfortable walking experience and for programming of spaces along the sidewalks for activities like sidewalk dining. To achieve wider sidewalks, the potential pilot widening would need to obtain space from either existing parking or from a travel lane, reducing those areas by the space needed for more sidewalk. The pilot was designed to allow for exploration of these ideas and to illustrate the tradeoffs associated with the component parts. Wider sidewalks and reductions in parking were simulated through the installation of parklets.

The installation of angled parking towards the northerly end created an overall small net increase in parking, offsetting the decrease due to the temporary parklets. The reduction of a travel lane allowed for all of the changes and provided a real experience for residents, businesses, and visitors on the possible benefits of widening the downtown sidewalks and sidewalk dining.

PREPARED BY: Matt Morley
Parks and Public Works Director

Reviewed by: Town Manager, Assistant Town Manager, and Town Attorney

BACKGROUND (continued):

On July 8, 2019, the one-way pilot was installed. The direction from Council included removal of the pilot program at the end of October.

DISCUSSION:

Staff has monitored the pilot throughout the course of the pilot program. The following sections highlight observations through the course of the program.

Public Outreach and Feedback

Leading up to and during the pilot, staff conducted significant public outreach, including postings on social media and attending meetings of business and community groups. The Town also established a dedicated web page with more information, including FAQs:

<https://www.losgatosca.gov/2529/NSC-One-Way-Street-Pilot>. The pilot also garnered much attention through television media outlets, several of whom carried news stories in print and on television. Despite extensive efforts to get information out about the purpose of the pilot, the biggest challenge was countering the idea that the one-way pilot was meant to address beach cut through traffic.

The Town marketed the summer event season through a new branding called ExperienceLG. Through this effort, a separate email address (experiencelg@losgatosca.gov) was developed and provided an opportunity to gather specific input. From emails and phone calls on the one-way pilot specifically, 70 communications were generally against the pilot and 54 communications were generally in support through September 26. Public comments are provided as Attachment 1. The Chamber of Commerce is also currently conducting a poll of businesses and will provide that information prior to the Town Council meeting.

Over the course of the pilot, when cost effective, staff adjusted initial elements to address some concerns that were brought up. Adjustments included programming more active cleaning of the parklets and furniture, providing umbrellas for shade, and adding interactive features such as a piano, tic tac toe, and a giant chess set.

During the week of September 23, everyone who submitted an email with feedback on the pilot received an email from the Town with the October 1st Town Council meeting information, including how to download this report and the Town Council agenda. In addition, a post on Nextdoor, What's New, and other social media will provide similar information to those community users.

DISCUSSION (continued):

Roadway Configuration and Traffic

Over the course of the pilot program, staff observed the roadway configuration to ensure the pilot was safe and functional. A major concern early on was ensuring that drivers did not turn the wrong way given the new configuration. Signage was designed to achieve this, and although a few wrong way instances occurred at the beginning of the program, no accidents have resulted to date.

The capacity of Main Street at University Avenue to handle the additional traffic was another concern. The left turn pocket from Main Street to University Avenue is very short and therefore has little capacity to hold vehicles waiting to turn onto University Avenue. Any significant increases in traffic at the intersection has the ability to quickly create congestion all the way through the intersection of Main Street and Santa Cruz Avenue. Designing the one-way to start at Elm Street instead of Main was meant to provide some relief to the University Avenue and Main Street intersection and seems to have achieved that goal. Extending the one-way in potential future configurations to Main Street would not be recommended by staff.

Other observations included that traffic on University Avenue grew significantly during the course of the pilot. The impact from this increase is especially noticeable during the morning and afternoon school drop-off and pickup times, and during busy lunchtime periods. Stop signs along University Avenue kept speeds slow, but also added to congestion as vehicles were unable to move through the intersections efficiently enough to reduce backups. The intersection of University Avenue and Highway 9 appeared to manage the load, clearing traffic on University Avenue with each cycle. Staff believes that the change in traffic on University Avenue associated with the pilot put that street at its maximum capacity. Some of the information provided through traffic analysis included:

- During the summer (when school is out), traffic on University Avenue increased 51% per day compared to previous years in the same timeframe.
- With school in session in September, traffic on University Avenue increased by 39% per day compared to previous years in the same timeframe.
- Northbound Massol Avenue traffic increased 130% during the morning school commute and 58% over a 24 hour period.
- Northbound Tait Avenue traffic counts are in progress and will be provided prior to the Council meeting.
- Southbound Santa Cruz Avenue traffic did not change as a result of the one-way pilot.
- Approximately 70% of the previous traffic on northbound Santa Cruz Avenue was rerouted to University Avenue. The remaining 30% was distributed to local streets or remained on Highway 17.

DISCUSSION (continued):

Parklets

The parklets received mixed reviews over the course of the pilot program. Although used less frequently during the heat of the afternoons, the parklets had more use in the evenings. The addition of interactive activities including a piano and a giant chess set provided a positive change and attracted more involvement.

Staff reviewed the initial criticism on the visual appearance of the parklets. In general, given the many changes in driver behavior the pilot introduced, the concrete barrier approach provided a high level of protection to parklet users. In addition, given cost considerations and the short-term aspect of the pilot program, the barriers provided an efficient and safe way to illustrate a parklet concept. Staff does regret not using a more vibrant design for the vinyl wrap on the barriers as initially considered. Costs for planters, higher end furniture, and/or more elaborate barriers do not seem warranted given the short-term nature of the pilot program.

Much feedback came in the way of suggesting the parklets be placed in front of restaurants for their use. Given the challenge with selecting the restaurants and modifying alcohol and food service permits, the decision on locations seemed to have provided good spacing and equal benefit. Independent of the one-way pilot, the Town has also received a number of applications from businesses and property owners to install parklets through the separate Parklet Pilot and did not want to interfere with the progress on those efforts. Staff did consider moving one parklet; however, the logistics with moving the heavy barriers proved difficult and the decision was made not to do so.

Angled Parking

The use of angled parking provided a good opportunity to try a change and assisted in ensuring that the pilot program did not negatively impact the overall parking space counts. Because of the efficiencies of angled parking, the pilot program saw a net gain of six parking spaces, even accounting for those lost to parklet use.

Feedback on angled parking included the ease of use in comparison to parallel parking and the traffic calming effect of cars backing out into the travel lane. Some feedback did highlight that the angled parking changed the look of the downtown too much and provided obstructions to the visibility of storefronts.

CONCLUSION AND NEXT STEPS:

The pilot project is set to complete at the end of October. To that end, staff has begun planning for the return to the previous two-way configuration including the removal of angled parking and parklets.

The original plan had included the application of a pavement slurry seal to ensure the temporary improvements are fully removed and to address current pavement maintenance needs. However, the estimated costs for this work have come in extremely high due to the small size of this part of the project. In addition, this type of work requires warmer temperatures and can be challenging in the fall when weather is less reliable. The work should be completed at night, to prevent interference with downtown businesses, and lower nighttime temperatures in October could prevent the material from hardening, delaying the road from reopening. As an alternative, staff would like to remove the existing striping and black out the marks temporarily. North Santa Cruz Avenue will then be included in next year's pavement maintenance program to fully address the roadway's maintenance needs. This should maximize cost effectiveness and minimize disruption to businesses. The concrete barriers are rented and will be returned to the vendor. The Town purchased the furniture and will use some of it in the Plaza and surplus what is not needed.

Given the overall information garnered from the pilot program, staff recommends the Council provide feedback or direction in several areas:

1. Should any element of the pilot project remain in place past the end of the pilot program? Staff will compile costs associated with ongoing efforts for future funding decisions by the Council.
2. Was the one-way portion of the pilot successful given the changes in traffic patterns that were created? If so, how should staff plan for future configurations?
3. Was the diagonal parking successful? If so, should this element be considered in a future design of North Santa Cruz, noting the limitation that angled parking can only be achieved in a one-way format?
4. One approach to create wider sidewalks is the reduction of on-street parking. Should the existing parking study incorporate an analysis of the impact on parking quantities if some or all on street parking is removed?
5. What other input and/or direction would the Council like to provide regarding the overall pilot and its elements? This input would be useful in the preparation for future capital improvement projects.

COORDINATION:

This project has been coordinated with the Economic Vitality Manager.

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FISCAL IMPACT:

The following fiscal table shows expenditures and commitments to date. Operational costs to date and through the end of the pilot are forecast at \$10,000 for maintenance by Parks and Public Works staff and have been absorbed in the Department budget. Extension of the timeline for any portion of the project will increase costs and may require additional funding.

One-Way Downtown Street Pilot Expenditures to Date Project 813-0234		
	Budget	Costs
Project Budget	\$238,686	
Striping		\$153,376
Design Consultant		\$13,000
K Rail Rental		\$19,200
K Rail Wrapping		\$19,500
Furniture		\$6,359
Outreach		\$1,214
Total Expenditures		\$212,649
Balance		\$26,037

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT:

This is a project as defined under CEQA but is Categorical Exempt (Section 15301c). A Notice of Exemption will not be filed.

Attachment:

1. Public Comment received through September 26, 2019 at 11 a.m.