



REQUEST FOR COUNCIL ACTION

Title: Six-Month Trial Period Closure of 1st Avenue

Preferred Agenda: August 27, 2024

Submitted By: Jason Ogden, Chief of Police/Interim City Manager

Reviewed By: Cecily Hope Pretty, Assistant City Manager

Type of Action: Resolution Motion Roll Call Other

Relevant Code/Policy: SHMC 10.04.030

Towards Council Goal: Goal 3: IMPROVE PUBLIC SAFETY AND INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Enhance pedestrian and traffic safety.
2. Implement solutions based on community feedback and data analysis.
3. Foster a safer environment for residents and visitors.

Attachments: Resolution No. 21 for 2024; 1st Avenue Motor Vehicle Crashes

Purpose of this RCA:

Council decision and approval of a six-month trial period to close 1st Avenue to vehicular traffic, allowing the city to assess the impact on safety, traffic flow, and community satisfaction.

Background/Context:

1st Avenue has long been identified as an area of traffic concern due to a combination of heavy traffic, pedestrian activity, and a history of speeding incidents. Over the years, residents on 1st Avenue have consistently voiced concerns about speeding and the number of large commercial motor vehicles using the road to travel between Highway 228 and Highway 20, causing unease among residents.

These issues were discussed by the Public & Traffic Safety Committee on September 27, 2023 and in a subsequent meeting, it was recommended that the issue be referred to the City Council for review. It was brought before the City Council during a Traffic Safety Work Session on March 26, 2024. During this session, Public & Traffic Safety Committee Chair Frank Gallagher presented the complaints related to speeding and the heavy commercial traffic on 1st Avenue. At that time, City Manager Kelcey Young indicated that the committee recommended a six-month closure of 1st Avenue at Clover Park to conduct traffic impact studies. The Council requested the city to return with various options, including temporary closure, one-way traffic, and traffic calming measures, to address these concerns.

A significant contributing factor to these issues is the unique positioning of 1st Avenue, which is bookended by Highway 228 to the south and Highway 20 to the north. This configuration funnels a considerable amount of through traffic onto 1st Avenue, a primarily residential street, creating

a challenging environment for both residents and motorists. These traffic patterns are the result of historical planning decisions made many years ago, at a time when traffic volumes and residential safety considerations were likely very different.

Adding to the problem is the fact that 1st Avenue, with a width of only 30 feet from curb to curb, was designed as a residential street but is now functioning as an arterial street. For comparison, Foothills Drive, which is clearly a residential street, has a curb-to-curb width of 45 feet. The narrow width of 1st Avenue contributes to the difficulties in managing the volume and speed of traffic, further exacerbating safety concerns.

A review of traffic crash data from January 2019 to June 2024 underscores these concerns, highlighting several incidents that have resulted in significant property damage and injuries. Notable examples include:

- **January 28, 2022:** At the intersection of 1st Avenue and Main Street, a vehicle pulling onto Main Street collided with another vehicle already on the road, causing over \$2,500 in damage.
- **August 11, 2022:** At the intersection of 1st Avenue and West Holley, a rear-end collision occurred after a vehicle suddenly braked at a stop sign, leading to injuries and damages exceeding \$2,500.
- **September 11, 2023:** Another rear-end collision occurred at the same intersection (1st Avenue and West Holley), with similar damage estimates and resulting injuries.
- **December 26, 2023:** A vehicle traveling on West Holley missed the turn onto 1st Avenue and struck a telephone pole, causing over \$2,500 in damage.
- **March 8, 2024:** A vehicle backing out of a driveway on the 1000 block of 1st Avenue collided with a northbound vehicle, resulting in an injury and an estimated damage of over \$2,500.
- **May 18, 2024:** At the intersection of West Holley and 1st Avenue, a southbound vehicle turning onto West Holley struck a vehicle traveling west, resulting in citations for careless driving and over \$2,500 in damage.
- **June 28, 2024:** A distracted driver left the roadway while eating and struck two parked vehicles in the driveway at 1255 1st Avenue, causing over \$2,500 in damage and resulting in a citation for careless driving.

These incidents, among others, demonstrate a pattern of traffic-related issues on 1st Avenue, particularly at intersections and driveways, which further justifies the need for the proposed temporary closure to assess its impact on improving traffic safety.

The Public & Traffic Safety Committee, after extensive review and consultation with these concerned residents, has recommended a temporary closure of 1st Avenue to throughway traffic. This closure is intended to address the persistent speeding issue, enhance pedestrian safety, and reduce traffic-related incidents in the area.

Alongside the proposed temporary closure, several alternative traffic calming measures have been explored to address the safety concerns on 1st Avenue.

As part of our due diligence, we engaged in discussions with the local fire district to evaluate the potential impact of the proposed closure on emergency response times. The fire district reviewed the proposed closure and confirmed that they do not foresee any issues with emergency vehicle access. Their input supports the feasibility of the temporary closure from a public safety standpoint.

Option 1: Implement Speed Tables

In response to the Council's request for alternative traffic calming measures, the option of installing speed tables on 1st Avenue was explored.

- **Speed Tables:** Speed tables, which are essentially flat-topped speed humps, offer a smoother ride with a typical length of 22 feet, allowing vehicles to maintain speeds of 25 to 30 mph. Additionally, their installation requires significant engineering to accommodate drainage and prevent street flooding. The cost for each speed table ranges between \$10,000 and \$15,000.

Considerations: This option could reduce vehicle speeds on 1st Avenue, but the street's physical constraints, the need for professional installation, and ongoing maintenance, as well as trying to find proper placement in between residential driveways make this option not optimal.

Option 2: Partially Restrict Southbound Access on 1st Avenue at Highway 20

- **Description:** This option proposes a partial restriction on 1st Avenue at the intersection with Highway 20. Southbound traffic would be blocked from entering 1st Avenue from Highway 20 by installing a barricade or "pork chop" on the west side of the intersection. Vehicles traveling on 1st Avenue would still be able to head northbound and southbound; however, at the intersection with Highway 20, only a right-hand turn would be allowed onto Highway 20. The rest of 1st Avenue would remain open to two-way traffic.
- **Considerations:**
 - **Safety Risks:** This option may reduce through traffic from Highway 20 onto 1st Avenue, but there is a risk that some drivers may still attempt to use 1st Avenue as a shortcut or ignore the restriction, particularly at night. This could create safety concerns, especially if drivers make illegal turns or enter the street in the wrong direction.
 - **Resident Concerns:** While this option may limit access from Highway 20, it does not fully address residents' concerns about preventing 1st Avenue from being used as a through street. Traffic flow may still continue from the south, leading to continued concerns about safety and traffic volume.
 - **Effectiveness:** The partial restriction may help to some extent in reducing traffic, but it may not be sufficient to resolve the core problem of through traffic on 1st Avenue. Additionally, it could introduce enforcement challenges and potential confusion for drivers.

Option 3: Approve the Six-Month Trial Period to Close 1st Avenue

- **Description:** This option involves temporarily closing 1st Avenue to vehicular traffic for a six-month trial period. The purpose of this closure is to assess its impact on safety, traffic flow, and overall community satisfaction. By eliminating through traffic, the trial period aims to reduce speeding, decrease traffic-related incidents, and improve the quality of life for residents.
- **Considerations:**
 - **Comprehensive Evaluation:** The trial period provides an opportunity to gather valuable data on traffic patterns, accident rates, and community feedback, which will be critical in determining whether a permanent closure should be pursued.
 - **Community Feedback:** Engaging with residents throughout the trial will ensure their concerns are heard and addressed, fostering a collaborative approach to finding a long-term solution.
 - **Feasibility:** The temporary nature of this option allows the city to evaluate its effectiveness without making permanent changes, reducing the risk of unintended consequences.
 - **Enhanced Livability:** A closure of 1st Avenue will allow for better community access to Clover Park due to the traffic calming and potential temporary parking, enhancing its use and value to the community.

- **Emergency Access:** Discussions with the local fire district have confirmed that emergency vehicle access will not be compromised during the closure, ensuring public safety is maintained.
- **Detour Impact:** The Traffic Safety Committee found that the average amount of time it takes to take the detour from either side of 1st Avenue to the opposite side is approximately 45 seconds. This minimal delay is expected to have a negligible impact on overall traffic flow while significantly improving safety on 1st Avenue.

Option 4: Deny the Request and Maintain Current Traffic Flow on 1st Avenue

- **Description:** This option would involve denying the request for a trial closure and maintaining the current traffic flow on 1st Avenue. Under this option, no immediate changes would be made, and traffic conditions would remain as they are.
- **Considerations:**
 - **Status Quo:** Maintaining the current traffic flow means that the existing safety risks, such as speeding, heavy traffic, and frequent accidents, will continue to affect residents and pedestrians on 1st Avenue.
 - **Resident Concerns:** This option may not address the longstanding concerns raised by residents, potentially leading to further dissatisfaction and calls for action.
 - **Opportunity Missed:** By not implementing the trial period, the city may miss an opportunity to explore a potential solution that could significantly improve safety and quality of life on 1st Avenue.

The Challenge/Problem:

The current traffic conditions on 1st Avenue pose significant safety risks to pedestrians and motorists alike. High traffic volume, combined with narrow lanes and limited visibility, has led to an increased number of accidents and near-misses. The committee's analysis indicates that a temporary closure could mitigate these risks, but a trial period is necessary to gather data and community feedback before considering a permanent change.

Stakeholders:

- Residents on 1st Avenue – Potential impact on accessibility
- Broader Community - Potential effects from traffic being diverted to neighboring streets, impacting traffic flow and safety in other areas.
- Pedestrians – Increased safety and reduced risks of accidents
- Local Law Enforcement – Monitoring the diversion and enforcement of the closure
- Council – Responsible for approving the trial and evaluating its success

Issues and Financial Impacts:

The closure will require temporary signage and barriers, which can be sourced within the current budget allocated for traffic management.

Elements of a Stable Solution:

A stable solution includes a comprehensive evaluation of the trial period, with specific metrics to assess the effectiveness of the closure and its impact on public safety, traffic flow, and community satisfaction.

Options:

1. *Implement a plan to put in speed tables.*
2. *Partially Restrict Southbound Access on 1st Avenue at Highway 20.*
3. *Approve the six-month trial period to close 1st Avenue.*
4. *Deny the request and maintain current traffic flow on 1st Avenue.*

Recommendation:

Staff recommends **Option 3** – Approve the six-month trial period to close 1st Avenue. This option provides the most direct and effective approach to improving safety, reducing through traffic, and addressing the community's concerns. While Options 1 and 2 present alternatives, they come with significant drawbacks, including high costs, potential safety risks, and the likelihood of not fully resolving the issues identified by residents and stakeholders.