

April April 7th Planning and Transportation Commission Meeting on Downtown Streetscape Master Plan

Transcript of Commissioner Questions & Comments and Staff & Consultant Responses

On the Downtown Core:

Commissioner Castaneda asked, concerning the 700 block of Laurel, whether umbrellas would be an option given that there would be outdoor dining, and if there would be any continuity in the canopies.

Lisa Porras responded that awnings and umbrellas would be allowed to provide shade and cover for diners. She clarified that such guidelines would be outlined in the Downtown Specific Plan regulatory document, which would include regulations for materials and design. The Streetscape Master Plan provides the space for outdoor dining to occur.

Commissioner Castaneda inquired about how parking spaces would be marked on the curbside 600 and 800 blocks of Laurel.

Jim Stickley responded that at the street, parking spots would be marked by striping and that at the sidewalk, demarcation would be in the form of tactile pavers.

Commissioner Castaneda added that she was satisfied with the tree strip also serving to protect pedestrians from traffic.

Commissioner Anand asked if a protected bike lane meant a physical, vertical barrier.

Jim Stickley clarified that on El Camino Real and San Carlos Avenue, the protected bike lane referred to a 3-foot buffer without a vertical barrier. He added that during the construction process, further protection could be provided, such as at intersections. On Brittan, where there is not sufficient space to provide a horizontal buffer, the design would include flexible pylons.

Commissioner Anand asked if green paint on the bike lanes would be possible.

Jim Stickley responded that this would be possible.

Commissioner Anand asked what the markings would look like on street segments where the roadway is shared between bikes and cars.

Jim Stickley responded that the standard “sharrow” symbol would be used.

Commissioner Anand asked whether there could be accommodation for further signage, for example, reading “Share the Lane,” citing recent collisions between vehicles and bikes.

Jim Stickley responded that the city would be able to add such signage.

Commissioner Anand asked whether there could be a canopy to go above the plazas to protect from rain, citing that downtown sees less activity during rain.

Jim Stickley clarified that the two plazas at Harrington Park and on the 600 block of Laurel would have pavilion structures that are impermeable, protecting visitors to downtown from the rain.

Commissioner Bundy asked for an explanation of how the design of the entrances to the 700 block plaza provide a safe transition between cyclists on the roadway to the slower pace of the pedestrian promenade.

Jim Stickley explained that the 700 block is a dismount zone, which would require enforcement. Dismounting would be encouraged by design in the form of signage or painted logos reading “dismount zone.” This design and enforcement would also apply to the entrance to Harrington Park from the adjacent alley.

Commissioner Bundy asked how drainage would be managed during heavy storms, particularly concerning the curbless design of the streets.

Jim Stickley responded that the staff and consultant team is working with the City’s civil engineer to manage rainwater on Laurel Street. Runoff would be directed toward the permeable rain gardens via the use of trench drains. He clarified that this system requires appropriate sizing for each element to ensure that they work efficiently.

Commissioner Bundy raised a concern that vehicles might accidentally turn into the former Wheeler Plaza parking area due to the pavers which continue from the street to the new plaza. She asked if there was a different configuration for Wheeler Plaza during “business as usual” compared to during festivals and farmer’s markets.

Jim Stickley clarified that the plaza would have design that prevents cars from driving into the plaza with a row of bollards, and that parking on Laurel Street adjacent to the plaza could still be allowed during normal operations.

Commissioner Bundy asked how the design ensured ADA-compliant access for people with disabilities to access downtown.

Jim Stickley stated that accessibility was implemented into the design, such as in the curbless design of the street. Every element of the design will follow ADA standards for accessibility.

Vice Chair Garvey asked for an explanation of how retractable bollards work.

Jim Stickley explained that the bollards retract below the surface of the plaza using hydraulics. He added that retractable bollards are currently in use in Redwood City, which shares a Fire District with San Carlos. Staff and the consultant team are working with the Fire Department to assess their preferences for the bollards.

Vice Chair Garvey asked if there was still a plan to integrate electric vehicle charging into light poles on the 600 and 800 blocks.

Jim Stickley explained that smart poles would incorporate EV charging and power sources for festivals and other uses and added that similar poles could be incorporated into the alleys.

Vice Chair Garvey asked how the driveway at US Bank would be reworked to allow for the fully pedestrianized plaza.

Jim Stickley explained that the team is working actively with the US Bank branch to reconfigure the site's circulation to loop back to the alley, allowing for a full pedestrian plaza on the 700 block.

On Mid-Laurel and South Laurel Street

Commissioner Castaneda commented that she would like to see bikes routed away from the block between El Camino and Laurel on Brittan, citing heavy traffic coming from 101, 280, and onto adjacent alleys. She added that Arroyo might be a safer alternative.

Jim Stickley agreed that this corridor presented a challenge and added that the Downtown Streetscape Master Plan follows the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan. The team plans to ensure that the redesign of Brittan Avenue improves safety for cyclists.

Vice Chair Garvey asked if rain gardens would be added on the Mid- and South Laurel segments.

Jim Stickley stated that the plan will include rain gardens on these segments and that current tree strips could be retained.

On the Alleys

Vice Chair Garvey asked why the 700 block alley would be reconstructed after the 600 block alley, given that the city will be reconstructing Harrington Park on the 700 block.

Jim Stickley stated that the 600 block alley was chosen to be reconstructed sooner because the 600 block will be losing parking spaces, and this could be mitigated by improved parking conditions in the 600 block alley.

Vice Chair Garvey recommended that the council consider looking at the phasing order. She asked where the short-term parking would be placed for delivery and pick up services and if any such spaces would be in the alleys.

Jim Stickley confirmed that the alleys are an option for short-term parking, adding that the consultant team is developing a comprehensive parking strategy and that parking resources will continue to be part of management of the Downtown core.

Commissioner Castaneda added that the alleys being completed could help ensure access to merchants when the Laurel Street segments are being reconstructed.

Jim Stickley stated that the plan can be tailored to the community's needs as implementation occurs and need not be static.

Commissioner Bundy asked how the rollout of improved secondary entrances and trash facilities facing the alley would take place.

Jim Stickley stated that secondary business entrance and trash improvements would be their own discreet project and that the objectives are that dumpsters are enclosed and that deliveries can happen efficiently, with parking being a shared resource.

Vice Chair Garvey asked about the location of utility lines.

Jim Stickley stated that all utilities would be underground, including power.

Vice Chair Garvey suggested that undergrounding all utilities at once rather than as part of the phasing may be more cost-efficient.

On Materials, Public Art, Green Infrastructure, Parking, and Wayfinding

Commissioner Castaneda asked about the use of oak trees, and if any would be on Laurel.

Jim Stickley stated that the species are undergoing some changes as the plan gets more specific. He stated that the rain gardens will have oak trees but that the street trees on Laurel would be the western sycamore, with crape myrtle at the alley entrances.

Commissioner Anand asked how the current bus stops on El Camino Real and San Carlos Avenue are being addressed.

Jim Stickley confirmed that the bus stops would be retained and that they use an island design, allowing for continuous safe bike lanes that do not conflict with the bus right of way.

Commissioner Bundy asked whether local tribes have been or will be consulted as part of the rollout of artwork honoring cultural influences.

Jim Stickley responded that tribes will be consulted as the public art rollout takes place.

On Implementation

Commissioner Castaneda asked whether it is feasible to implement infrastructure and utility upgrades one block at a time.

Jim Sticklely said that making the upgrades while the street is already undergoing reconstruction is likely to be cost-efficient, but that this plan is being made in consultation with the civil engineer and that they will pursue best practice.

Vice Chair Garvey commented that pursuing grant funding to help pay for the project may require reordering the implementation plan to work within the required timeframes of grants that are made available. She expressed that the City Council should be open to these considerations to maximize the use of grant funding, such as those supporting bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure.

Jim Sticklely agreed, stating that the plan is able to be agile and work around available funding.

Public Comment

A member of the public commented that programming that occurs only during rain would be a good way to encourage the downtown to remain active during those times, such as windchimes, musical elements, or serving hot cocoa. She added that the screens would need to block wind coming down from the north, given the north-south orientation of Laurel Street. She added that the armory in Redwood City incorporates a tactile barrier that requires bikes to stop and dismount, and something similar could be implemented at the 700 block plaza. She also suggested that the needs and interests of teenagers need to be incorporated into downtown.

Jennifer Rossi commented that she and her family experience safety issues crossing El Camino at Cherry, Arroyo, and San Carlos Avenue, and she said that the plan looks like it will help with bike and pedestrian safety. She asked when El Camino would be implemented, as it is not in the implementation plan. She agreed that teens need options for activities, food, and services downtown.

Lisa Porras explained that the team has worked with the Parks and Recreation Department to accommodate activities for residents and visitors of all ages, and that programming could be rotational and dynamic. The team has also reached out to the Youth Advisory Council to assess what they want to see downtown. The team is also looking closely at ground floor land uses to allow and encourage uses that serve teens.

Lisa Porras added that the reconstruction of El Camino Real is governed by Caltrans and SamTrans and requires coordination with Belmont and Redwood City. San Carlos is working with SamTrans to submit a unified plan to upgrade the El Camino Real Corridor throughout San Mateo County as part of the Grand Boulevard Initiative.