

## **Downtown Monterey Road Traffic Calming Working Group Meeting #4 October 22, 2021**

### **Meeting Objective**

The October 22<sup>nd</sup> Working Group will be used to summarize the feedback we have received from various community outreach efforts, findings from the information shared at the Working Group meetings, and develop recommendations for how to best implement the Lane Reduction & Place-Branding Beautification Project.

### **Background**

May 19, 2021, the City Council approved moving forward with the first step in implementing the Lane Reduction Program and associated Place-Branding and Beautification effort. The Lane Reduction Project should improve accessibility, increase safety, create additional space for community members, and businesses. The Place-Branding and Beautification Project should use trees, planters, and other elements to support beautification and consistency throughout the Downtown, in conjunction, or separate from the parklets. Here is the [link](#) to the staff report, presentation, and background documents. The design recommendations will be brought to the City Council on December 15, 2021 and will include feedback and guidance from this Working Group and a variety of community workshops.

The recommendations being brought forward have been developed over the course of the last three months through a downtown parking survey, individual business visits, three Working Group meetings, a downtown residents Pizza Night at the Community Center, two downtown walking tours, town hall meetings, along with several Morgan Hill Chamber Commerce, Morgan Hill Downtown Association and Downtown Restaurant Meetings.

Parklets, parking, traffic, lane reduction, and beautification have all been topics of previous meetings and discussions. The following narrative is meant to capture the essence of those discussions and potential considerations moving forward.

### **Parking**

Downtown includes both private lots and public parking lots with approximately 2,575 parking spaces total, or approximately 1,837-stalls if we do not include the VTA parking lot and Courthouse Parking. The City hired Hexagon Transportation Consultants, Inc. to analyze and prepare the Parking Conditions Study in 2016. Staff has presented updates to the Council in 2017 and in 2018 with the adoption of the [Station Area Master Plan](#), both concluding adequate capacity of parking supply at those times. Since the updates to City Council, the City has purchased property at Depot Street and 1st Street that is currently providing additional temporary parking and incorporated new accessible stalls in central downtown (5-minute walk) on Block-3 and in the Parking Structure on Block-4. During recent community discussions we have heard a desire for more accessible parking stalls to ensure accessibility for all blocks in Downtown.

The restaurants have expressed a specific need to increase the number of short-term and accessible parking spots, as well as designating areas for loading and unloading both people and goods/services. Specific delivery hours and locations could be implemented in the Downtown District. The short-term parking spaces could also support customers that wish to let people out of the car near their destination before parking the car. Parking management is an ongoing effort that will eventually require enforcement to ensure premium spaces are not being taken by employees that should be parking at the

4<sup>th</sup> Street Parking Garage or at the VTA lot. Long term, the City should continue to encourage usage of the VTA parking lot, ensure this parking lot remains available, and find ways to add more parking, especially in the North side of town.

### **Parklets**

In 2018, the City Council approved the pilot Parklet Program to encourage outdoor dining. It was not until the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting indoor dining restriction that restaurants were urged to operate outdoors. The City's AI Fresco Program allowed numerous businesses to expand their operations outdoors. Today, five businesses are operating under the temporary AI Fresco Program and three under the Parklet Program. Parklet and AI Fresco activations have impacted 20 parking spaces.

Morgan Hill's adoption of parklets, AI Fresco dining, and the utilization of public space for business activation is not unique. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, cities across the region, state and country were beginning to activate the public space adjacent to businesses to create a sense of place, gather as a community, and to drive increased sales tax revenue from increased business activity. Ultimately, the City benefits from these activations as a result of the sales tax paid by residents and visitors alike, while simultaneously creating a vibrant Downtown District that adds to Morgan Hill's unique quality of life. Regardless of the lane reduction, we need to plan for the "new normal" which is an increased desire for outdoor dining and activations.

The **Parklet Program** requires a full parklet build out, installation of traffic safety barricades, an encroachment permit, insurance, and a 10-day public noticing.

The AI Fresco Program is a streamlined and simplified temporary version of the Parklet Program. This program has been very successful in great part because the City provided the water-fillable barricades.

The questions before the Working Group are that formal parklet build-outs are costly. A formal parklet build-out can cost \$40,000 to \$60,000 depending upon the materials used.

How do we make parklets affordable and accessible to those who want to build out?

Do we require a specific design to create consistency, or do we allow unique designs for each business?

How do we finance, activate, and maintain a public parklet?

### **Traffic**

City staff recognizes that traffic and traffic congestion are the most significant concerns being expressed by the community. Both current and future conditions are a concern. These concerns are legitimate. We recognize that as more jobs are created in the North and more housing is built to the South, traffic is only going to increase. However, to protect Morgan Hill's Downton District from the pressures of increasing traffic; traffic mitigation efforts must be implemented. The most significant improvement to reduce "drive through" traffic in Downtown Morgan Hill is to widen Highway 101 through Morgan Hill to Gilroy. The City and our residents must more actively advocate for this significant infrastructure improvement, including expansion of Highway 101, with the Valley Transportation Authority, Caltrans, and our State elected leaders. Second, we recognize the significance of the Hale Avenue extension and the potential positive mitigating factors that infrastructure improvement will have on Downtown traffic patterns.

Staff has identified a significant traffic management strategy to improve the Butterfield Corridor by increasing its efficiency through traffic signal upgrades allowing synchronization of the entire corridor, signal prioritization for drivers using Butterfield at the Cochrane and Monterey Road intersection, and physical improvements to specific intersections. These enhancements will require financial resources. And when coupled with educational signage and increased enforcement, these enhancements could mitigate Downtown lane reduction traffic congestion.

### **Lane Reduction**

The main goal of the lane reduction is safety. One lane in each direction will slow down traffic and make the Downtown core more pedestrian and bicycle friendly. The tradeoff to make Downtown safer and protect nearby neighborhoods, means that the community will need to drive slower when driving through Downtown or use the bypass route. The lane reduction design should consider if a protected bike lane through the entirety of the corridor is appropriate. The current design allows for flexibility to keep as much parking and or to create parklets.

### **Beautification**

At the start of the project, a beautiful rendering of a grove of lit olive trees presented a possible vision for the beautification project and the interface between the bike lane and the parklets. This approach is not currently being pursued as olive trees may be appropriate within the parklet footprint but not in the bike lane for emergency access. Additionally, the cost and ongoing maintenance of the olive trees may be prohibitive. AP+I rendered some parklet designs that could provide consistency and elevate the quality of the current parklets. Three design options were offered using agricultural, historical, and industrial themes. The use of bollards was also proposed as a safety mechanism next to the planters.

Recognizing that parklets can range in cost from \$40,000 to \$60,000, it is important to recognize that most of the businesses will not be able to afford and fully build out a parklet as proposed by AP+I. Therefore, the beautification piece becomes more challenging to implement. Taking a step back, we have repeatedly heard that the Downtown sidewalks and streets seem cluttered. We have also heard the need to support retail businesses and create community space. Given the City's limited financial resources, what are the highest priority projects the City could implement? The following suggestions should be discussed and prioritized:

1. Removing Clutter
  - a. Remove large concrete/brick benches in 3 locations
  - b. Replace Honey Locust trees and planters
  - c. Remove kiosks that are no longer used
2. Install bollards on corners to protect pedestrians (same as installation on 3<sup>rd</sup> St and Monterey)
3. Paint bike lanes green to increase safety and awareness
4. Explore Parklet Assistance (Loan/Lease) Program
5. Have City build a Community Parklet to be shared by retailers and programmed by community
6. Create a Gateway Art Installation
7. Light Building Rooflines

### **Summary:**

Staff is scheduled to present to City Council on December 15, 2021 the implementation plan for the lane reduction and beautification project. Recommendations may include traffic mitigation efforts that will require additional financial investment by the City. The timing or staggering of the various elements should also be considered. The beautification component may require additional investment by the Downtown businesses and/or property owners and should be reviewed with their input. Staff will finalize recommendations based on feedback received by Working Group as well as other community meetings.

The next community meeting will be a Town Hall meeting to discuss potential traffic mitigation solutions on November 4, 2021.