



City Council Supplemental Report

CITY OF
**PALO
ALTO**

From: Ed Shikada, City Manager

Meeting Date: June 10, 2024

Item Number: AA1

Report #:2406-3126

TITLE

Pre-Approved Parklet Designs and Proposed Revisions to Adopted Ongoing Parklets Standards

BACKGROUND/ANALYSIS

This item originally appeared on the consent calendar for Monday, June 3, 2024. This supplemental report transmits additional information and clarifications.

1. Revisions to Interim Ordinance and Resolution regarding the area of Ramona Street closed to vehicles

Issue: Ramona Street Car-Free Status – On November 6, 2023, Council directed staff to maintain the portion of Ramona Street between Hamilton Avenue and the Ramona Street/University Avenue garage as a car-free street. Permanent closure to traffic will require an additional formal action by the City Council following environmental review, including evaluation of alternatives. This work is underway (though sequenced to follow current activities), and no recommendation to reopen Ramona Street to traffic is being made through the pending actions.

Issue: Applicability of Ongoing Parklet Standards to Ramona Street – To best use space on a car-free street, staff will need to engage stakeholders and consultants to develop effective outdoor dining standards for car-free streets (as opposed to parklets which are designed to be sited next to vehicular traffic). Thus, staff is seeking Council approval to extend the Interim parklet program on the car-free portion of Ramona Street through March 2025. This will maintain status quo and ensure that parklet operators on the car-free street portion of Ramona will not have to rebuild their parklets to comply with standards meant for streets with vehicular traffic.

Issue: Applicability of License Fees to Ramona Street – If Council does not approve the recommended changes to the interim ordinance, parklets on this portion of Ramona Street will nonetheless be required to pay the license fees for using the public right of way consistent with the Ongoing Parklets Program Regulations on July 1, 2024. They would also be required to redesign/modify their existing parklets to comply with standards meant for

parklets on streets with vehicular traffic, which may not be appropriate nor necessary for a car-free street. Staff does not recommend this because it would require complying with standards designed for vehicular traffic and then another round of alterations to comply with potential future standards for outdoor dining on car-free streets. However, staff recommends proceeding with implementation of license fee requirements for the use of public space on Ramona Street. These funds will support the enhanced cleaning and enforcement requested by stakeholders as well as maintain consistency with other downtown businesses occupying public spaces.

2. Refinements to the Ongoing Parklet Program Design Standards, including changes regarding the use of planters on parklets.

Issue: Time-Sensitivity of Parklet Design Standards – Parklet design requirements are time sensitive to provide parklet operators time to incorporate these requirements into their “ongoing” parklet designs. Ongoing program deadlines come into effect this Fall.

Per Council direction in September 2023, staff engaged with the Architectural Review Board (ARB) on parklet standards. Based on input from the ARB and a stakeholder engagement process, staff is recommending some changes to the ongoing parklet program standards adopted by Council in September 2023. These standards can be changed administratively; however, staff is bringing forward key changes for Council approval given the level of specificity previously reflected in Council direction. There are seven proposed changes, the most significant one being the addition of planters.

Planters are currently prohibited, based on safety concerns about planters constructed from brittle materials that could splinter upon impact. The use of planters was a high priority for the stakeholders and the ARB; staff has worked with the consultant engineer to develop recommendations that allow planters constructed with non-brittle materials. Some of the other changes are related to clarifying access and setbacks, removing requirements related to furnishings, and not requiring gutters and leaders. These changes are described in detail in the staff report from June 3, 2024.

3. Pre-approved Parklet Designs and Associated User Guide

Issue: Time-Sensitivity of Pre-Approved Parklet Designs – Pre-approved parklet designs are time-sensitive to provide parklet operators a streamlined path, with options for designs and materials, for compliance with Ongoing Parklet Program requirements.

Through an engagement process over several months, staff received support in May 2024 from the ARB for pre-approved parklet designs and user guide. With Council approval of the design on June 10, shop drawings for the designs can be completed and available for use in August.

The pre-approved designs offer flexibility in terms of materials and finishes, and the use of these designs is voluntary. The benefit of the pre-approved designs is a streamlined and expedited design and approval process. Parklet operators using the pre-approved design

will expend less time and money on designers and structural engineers. Additionally, they will be able to take advantage of an expedited approval process through the City's Public Works department.

Issue: Coordination with Emerson Street Parklet Operators - The City has worked with parklet operators along Emerson Street to coordinate a long-overdue paving project scheduled for July. Based on feedback from parklet operators, staff altered the timeline for the project and worked with the contractor to phase the project into two parts. If Council defers action on the pre-approved designs and ongoing parklet standards, the parklets on Emerson Street would still be removed but the parklets might not be rebuilt as quickly because parklet operators will not be able to take advantage of the pre-approved parklet designs and corresponding expedited review by the Public Works Department.

4. Project Timeline

Staff presented a comprehensive timeline for parklets with the City Council on March 11, 2024¹. That timeline included full phase-in of ongoing parklet standards by November 1, 2024. The timeline was developed to balance multiple interests regarding parklets, including the desire for immediate implementation and enforcement of an ongoing parklet program to address safety and aesthetic concerns, allowing existing parklets to maximize outdoor dining in the summer months, and avoiding ongoing drainage issues caused by existing parklets during another rainy season.

The only change from the timeline presented to Council on March 11, is the extension of the Interim ordinance to allow parklets on the car-free portion of Ramona Street to continue to operate until standards are developed for outdoor dining on car-free streets. This was done in response to feedback from stakeholders and will minimize disruption to parklets on this portion of Ramona Street.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Considerations for Council Action

APPROVED BY:

Ed Shikada, City Manager

¹ <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/v/1/public-works/engineering-services/parklet-program/sr2401-2483-3.11.2024-extend-interim-ordinance-for-parklets-to-7.31.2024.pdf>