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Planning & Transportation Commission Staff Report

From: Jonathan Lait, Planning and Development Services Director
Lead Department: Planning and Development Services

Meeting Date: June 14, 2023
Report #: 2304-1381

TITLE

Review the Permanent Installation of the Traffic Calming Pilot Project in the Crescent Park Neighborhood and Recommend to the City Council for Approval.

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) reviews and recommends to the City Council for approval of the permanent installation of the traffic calming pilot project in the Crescent Park Neighborhood.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2018 residents of the Crescent Park area neighborhood raised traffic concerns regarding cut-through traffic, congestion, and speeding in their neighborhood. In response to these community concerns, the Office of Transportation staff initiated the Crescent Park Traffic Calming Project study to evaluate the project area. A pilot project with temporary improvements was developed by Consultants, Fehr and Peers, and City staff. With the approval of the Planning and Transportation Commission (PTC) and City Council in 2020, temporary improvements were installed in the summer of 2021. The temporary installation as a pilot program allowed staff to observe the traffic pattern and the potential changes.

In 2022, the pre-pilot and post-pilot data were analyzed to find the effectiveness of the traffic calming treatment. The analysis performed by City's consultant shows a reduction in speed as well as cut-through traffic in most segments. Staff also conducted the neighborhood survey to seek feedback from the residents. The majority of the residents voted in favor of making the treatments permanent. Therefore, staff recommends that PTC review and recommend City Council approval of the traffic calming project in the Crescent Park Neighborhood for permanent installation.

BACKGROUND

In January 2018, residents of the Crescent Park area neighborhood raised traffic concerns to the Office of Transportation staff. The residents cited ongoing cut-through traffic, congestion during

the peak hours and speeding in the off-peak hours as recurring issues in this neighborhood. In response to these community concerns, Office of Transportation staff initiated the Crescent Park Traffic Calming Project to study the project area and evaluated the neighborhood for potential traffic calming elements to be placed. Staff retained the services of Fehr & Peers Engineers (Consultant) to assist with the project study and traffic calming evaluation for the neighborhood.

Following the request, comprehensive traffic speed and volume data were collected in the neighborhood. Staff in coordination with the City's consultant developed initial concepts to implement traffic calming measures. Based on the comments received from the residents through neighborhood outreach and community meetings, the concepts were further refined. The final improvements included in the pilot project were: 1) curb extension improvements with three-way stop signs at Southwood Avenue & East Crescent Drive and 2) an oval-shaped traffic circle at the intersection of Hamilton Avenue, Center Drive & Southwood Drive, and 3) a 50 foot of protected bikeway on University Avenue eastbound direction at West Crescent Avenue.

The PTC conducted a hearing on the project on September 9, 2020 (Staff Report ID 11517)¹. At this meeting, PTC recommended the approval and implementation of a pilot traffic calming project trial in Crescent Park Neighborhood, to the City Council. The project was then approved by the City Council to proceed with the design and installation of temporary improvements on November 9, 2020 (Staff Report 11603)². The recommendation also included that staff would return to the City Council one-year after the implementation of the pilot program for direction on whether to make the improvements permanent or modify the alternatives.

The project elements were implemented in the summer of 2021. A year after the installation, traffic data was collected to review the effectiveness of the temporary traffic calming measures at these locations. The protected bikeway improvements on University Avenue are consistent with standard installation at other locations in the City and provide bicycle markings in accordance with the California Manual of Traffic Control Devices. Therefore, staff believes that such bike lane improvements should be continued as a permanent installation irrespective of the traffic calming project.

DISCUSSION

The comparison of the pre-pilot and post-pilot data was analyzed with a focus on travel speeds and traffic volume at key locations. The post-pilot analysis showed the volume on all street segments was reduced and the speeds also reduced on most street segments. The detailed data showing changes to the volumes and speeds of various street segments are depicted in Figures 2 and 3 of Attachment A. The data indicates that the temporary traffic calming measures have been effective in addressing the volume of cut-thru traffic as well as the speeding concerns in the

¹ <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/agendas-minutes/planning-and-transportation-commission/2020-agendas-minutes-and-staff-reports/ptc-9.9-transportation.pdf>

² <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/files/assets/public/agendas-minutes-reports/reports/city-manager-reports-cmr/yr-archive/2020-2/id-11603.pdf?t=49846.12>

neighborhood. Staff, however, also believes that some of the traffic volume reduction is likely attributed due to the impact of the COVID pandemic and remote work, on traffic circulation. Attachment A to this report provides the Crescent Park Neighborhood Traffic Calming Post Pilot Memorandum compiling study analysis and results.

Following the review of field conditions, staff conducted a neighborhood survey in early 2023 to seek feedback and gain community input before proceeding with permanent improvements. The survey requested feedback from the neighborhood on the specific improvements at the two locations. The majority were in favor of converting the temporary improvements to permanent improvements at these locations. The results from the survey are as follows:

Project Location 1: Southwood Drive & East Crescent Drive: Curb Extensions and Stop Signs

- 74% of the neighborhood household voted YES to permanently install these calming measures
- 26% of the neighborhood household voted NO to permanently install these calming measures

Few residents in the immediate vicinity of this intersection raised concerns about the temporary improvements. Therefore, staff conducted an additional review of the survey results in the immediate geographic vicinity of Project Location 1 to determine the neighborhood response. This focused review also yielded 75% favor to continue with permanent improvements results at this location.

Project Location 2: Hamilton Avenue, Southwood Drive, and Center Drive: Oval-Shaped Traffic Circle

- 78% of the neighborhood households voted YES to a permanent installation of the oval-shaped traffic circle
- 22% of the neighborhood households voted NO to a permanent installation of the oval-shaped traffic circle

Based on the post pilot study and neighborhood feedback, staff supports these improvements to be implemented on permanent basis. Therefore, staff recommends that PTC recommends City Council approve the permanent installation of the traffic calming pilot project in the Crescent Park Neighborhood.

NEXT STEPS

Following PTC approval, the Office of Transportation will seek City Council approval to permanently install these traffic calming measures. Upon the Council's approval, staff will initiate the design for permanent improvements. During the design process, staff will outreach the community and seek feedback in planning and designing the permanent improvements consistent with planning and engineering standards. In the meantime, the temporary improvements will remain in place.

RESOURCE**IMPACT**

The project will be funded from the existing Transportation and Parking Improvement Capital Improvement Project (PL-12000) that supports the neighborhood traffic calming projects. After the Planning and Transportation Commission recommendation as well as City Council approval, the design of the permanent construction will begin.

ENVIRONMENTAL**REVIEW**

The proposed modifications are minor upgrades to an existing residential street right-of-way and would not result in any new impacts on the existing environment. This project is considered as a minor alteration to the existing street system, and therefore categorically exempt (Class 1 Exemption, Section 15301) from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION, OUTREACH & COMMENTS

All of the households in the project area were notified by mail of the PTC meeting and the availability of this staff report.

Report Author & Contact Information**PTC Liaison³ & Contact Information**

Chirag Panchal, Associate Engineer

Amy French, Chief Planning Official

(650) 329-2106

(650) 329-2336

chirag.panchal@CityofPaloAlto.org

amy.french@cityofpaloalto.org

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A: Crescent Park Neighborhood Traffic Calming Post Pilot Memorandum

AUTHOR/TITLE:

Chirag Panchal, Associate Engineer

³ Emails may be sent directly to the PTC using the following address: planning.commission@cityofpaloalto.org.