

Resolution No. _____

Resolution of the Council of the City of Palo Alto Closing a Portion of Ramona Street between Hamilton Avenue and University Avenue and California Avenue between El Camino Real and Birch Street to Vehicular Traffic Pursuant to the Amended Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan and Adopting Certain Rules for those Streets

R E C I T A L S

- A. On June 23, 2020, the Council adopted Resolution No. 9909 approving the temporary closure of portions of California Avenue, University Avenue and certain other Downtown streets through Labor Day 2020 to allow for outdoor dining and retail on those streets, consistent with the Santa Clara County Public Health Order in effect. The street closures were part of a Summer Streets Program initiated by the City to accommodate outdoor uses at a time when indoor dining remained prohibited in the County and the growing scientific evidence showed a lower risk of COVID-19 transmission outdoors compared to indoors. At that time, the City anticipated that indoor dining would be allowed to resume in the County, as had been allowed in neighboring counties, and sought to address the immediate needs of the community including residents, workers and businesses that had been severely impacted by loss of business activity and revenue.
- B. Through Resolution No. 9909 the Council also approved a temporary pilot parklet program to allow parklets to be installed in on-street parking spaces on an expedited and temporary basis to provide more space for outdoor dining.
- C. On July 2, 2020, the County Public Health Officer issued a revised Shelter in Place Order, to become effective on July 13, 2020, that allowed certain additional activities to resume if specified strict across-the-board risk reduction measures were followed. The objective was to allow activities that were already allowed in surrounding jurisdictions, which had reopened more quickly than Santa Clara County, so long as the prescribed risk reduction measures were followed.
- D. On July 7, 2020, the State approved Santa Clara County’s requested variance that allowed the revised Shelter in Place Order to go into effect on July 13, 2020.
- E. However, with the number of COVID-19 cases dramatically increasing again in the State, on July 13, 2020, the Governor announced a sweeping roll back of the reopening that the State had allowed. The State mandated that all counties close certain indoor operations, including in-restaurant dining. For counties on the State’s monitoring list for 3 consecutive days (and thus placed on the State “watchlist”), the State required the closure of additional industries or activities unless they could be modified to operate outside or by pick-up; these included gyms and fitness centers, places of worship and cultural ceremonies, personal care services, hair salons and barbershops, and shopping malls.
- F. Through the summer, the United States including “hot spots” like California continued to hit new highs in confirmed cases and deaths, as the loosening of shelter-in-place restrictions had precipitated a resurgence of the virus in many states, including California. As of July 27, 2020, the

State was averaging nearly 10,000 new COVID-19 cases per day, and hospitals and their intensive care units were filling up. Thirty-seven counties representing 93% of the State's population were on the State's watchlist, and California had 460,550 confirmed cases of COVID-19, resulting in 8,445 deaths.

- G. On August 10, 2020, the Council adopted Resolution No. 9911, which amended Resolution 9909, to extend until December 31, 2020 the temporary closure of portions of California Avenue and University Avenue and certain intersecting streets to allow for continued use of these areas in the heart of the City's commercial districts to allow for outdoor dining and potentially other activities as may be allowed by State and County Public Health Orders. Resolution No. 9911 also extended the temporary parklet program to September 7, 2021.
- H. Since August 2020, the County Public Health Officer issued a Risk Reduction Order on October 5, 2020, which coincided with the County moving into the orange tier under the State's "Blueprint for a Safer Economy" tiered restriction system.
- I. However, on November 16, 2020, the State moved Santa Clara County two steps from the orange/moderate tier to the purple/widespread tier (the highest risk tier) due to a sharp increase in COVID-19 cases statewide. On that date, the County reported 388 new cases of COVID-19, bringing the cumulative total to 28,686. As of November 17, 2020, California reported 1,029,235 confirmed cases of COVID-19, resulting in 18,263 deaths, and 94.1% of the State's population was now in the purple tier (according to the Governor's Office). The State's rules for the purple/widespread tier mandate that restaurants and gyms cannot have indoor service and retail stores may only have 25% capacity indoors.
- J. On December 14, 2020, the Council adopted Resolution 9933, which amended Resolution 9909, to extend until May 31, 2021 the temporary closure of portions of California Avenue and University Avenue and certain intersecting streets to allow for continued use of these areas in the heart of the City's commercial districts to allow for outdoor dining and potentially other activities as may be allowed by State and County Public Health Orders.
- K. On March 3, 2021, the State moved Santa Clara County one step down from the purple/widespread tier to the red/substantial tier. As of March 16, 2021, the County reported a cumulative total of 112,909 COVID cases and 1,867 deaths.
- L. On May 10, 2021, the Council adopted Resolution 9954, which further extended until October 31, 2021 the temporary closure of portions of California Avenue and University Avenue and certain intersecting streets to allow for continued use of these areas in the heart of the City's commercial districts to allow for outdoor dining and potentially other activities as may be allowed by State and County Public Health Orders.
- M. M. On June 7, 2021, the Council adopted Resolution 9962. Resolution 9962 amended and restated Section 4 of Resolution 9909 regarding the pilot parklet program on a nonemergency basis.
- N. On June 15, 2021, the State of California eliminated the Blueprint for a Safer Economy system of COVID-related rules and restrictions (also known as the color-tier system) amidst improvements in public health data and increasing availability of the COVID vaccine. The City of Palo Alto rescinded its declaration of local emergency on July 1, 2021.

- O. However, since the rollback of restrictions and initial decrease of COVID cases, the number of COVID cases had increased. Since July 2021, the number of COVID Cases in the County of Santa Clara had moved upward, from fewer than 30 cases per day to more than 300 cases per day on many days in August 2021. As of September 1, 2021, the 7-day rolling average new cases is 361 in the County. On August 2, 2021, the County issued a requirement to wear face coverings indoors, regardless of vaccination status.
- P. According to the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC), the Delta variant of COVID-19 was the dominant strain of virus in the United States as of August 2021. The CDC founds that the Delta variant was more than 2x more contagious compared to previous variants, and fully vaccinated people with the Delta variant breakthrough infections can spread the virus to others.
- Q. In the midst of the continued COVID-19 pandemic, the City of Palo Alto continued to take measured steps to allow businesses to resume activities in outdoor settings. As a key part of those efforts, the Uplift Local Program (formerly known as the Summer Streets Program) created an attractive pedestrian environment on the closed streets resulting in increased foot traffic. A number of restaurants took advantage of the program and created outdoor seating in the streets, on sidewalks, and on parklets. Residents and visitors who have come to University Avenue and California Avenue have expressed delight and reported having a highly enjoyable experience.
- R. The increase of COVID cases across the State and the high likelihood that the pandemic will continue through the end of 2021 increases the chances that outdoor dining remains a key tool to reduce the risk from the spread of COVID-19 while allowing restaurants to continue some operations. Even if indoor dining is allowed, patrons may be unwilling to participate, or the opportunity may be rescinded if indoor restrictions return.
- S. On September 13, 2021 the Council voted to extend the street closures of portions of California Avenue and Ramona Street through June 30, 2022 to allow for the continued use of these streets for outdoor dining and other activities as may be allowed. The Council voted on each street separately and Resolution 9988 extended the closure of Ramona Street only; a separate resolution (no. 9987) extended the closure of California Avenue.
- T. On May 16, 2022 the Council voted to extend the street closures of California Avenue and Ramona Street through December 31, 2023 to allow for the continued use of these streets for outdoor dining and other activities as may be allowed and adopted Resolutions 10039 and 10040.
- U. On November 6, 2023 Council directed staff to return with the necessary actions to maintain California Avenue and Ramona Street as a car-free street with current areas of street closure to be made permanent and adopted Resolutions 10129 and 10130 allowing for the continued temporary closure of California Avenue and Ramona Street through December 2024.
- V. On December 16, 2024, the Council adopted Resolutions 10207 and 10208 to extend the street closures of California Avenue and Ramona Street through December 31, 2025.
- W. California Vehicle Code section 21101(g) allows the City to adopt a resolution to prohibit entry and exit to any street to implement the circulation element of a general plan.

- X. The Planning and Transportation Commission, after a duly noticed public hearing on February 12, 2025, recommended that the City Council amend Map T-5 of the City of Palo Alto Comprehensive Plan.
- Y. The City Council considered said recommendation after a duly noticed public hearing held on _____, 2025 and Amended Map T-5 of the Transportation Element and the glossary through Resolution _____ and now desires to close a portion of Ramona Street between Hamilton Avenue and University Avenue as well as a portion of California Avenue from University Avenue to Birch Street to vehicular traffic, as set forth below.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Council of the City of Palo Alto RESOLVES as follows:

SECTION 1. The City Council finds that the public interest, health, safety and welfare of Palo Alto and the surrounding region would be furthered by the street closures. With adoption of Resolution _____, which amends Map T-5 of the Comprehensive Plan to amend the classification of these two street segments from residential/collector to Community Streets and Pedestrian Only Streets for California Avenue and Ramona Street, respectively, the closures are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan as a whole. In particular, it furthers the following goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan:

<i>Table 1: Comprehensive Plan Policy Consistency</i>	
<i>Natural Element</i>	
Goal N-5: Clean, healthful air for Palo Alto and the San Francisco Bay Area.	The proposed closure of two street segments to motor vehicles prioritizes alternative modes of transportation, consistent with these policies that encourage reduction in emissions from automobiles.
Policy N-5.2: Support behavior changes to reduce emissions of particulates from automobiles.	
<i>Transportation Element</i>	
GOAL T-1: Create a sustainable transportation system, complemented by a mix of land uses, that emphasizes walking, bicycling, use of public transportation and other methods to reduce GHG emissions and the use of single-occupancy motor vehicles.	The proposed closure of these two street segments to motor vehicles encourages a transportation system that emphasizes alternative modes of transportation to single-occupancy motor vehicles and supports bicycling and walking.
Policy T-1.3: Reduce GHG and pollutant emissions associated with transportation by reducing VMT and per-mile emissions through increasing transit options, supporting biking and walking, and the use of zero-emission vehicle technologies to meet City and State goals for GHG reductions by 2030.	
Policy T-1.19: Provide facilities that encourage and support bicycling and walking.	

<p>Policy L-4.1. Encourage the upgrading and revitalization of selected Centers in a manner that is compatible with the character of surrounding neighborhoods, without loss of retail and existing small, local businesses.</p>	<p>The project facilitates the creation of a community center in two retail areas that are intended to support the vibrant retail environment surrounding these areas.</p>
<p>Policy L-4.4. Ensure all Regional Centers and Multi-Neighborhood Centers provide centrally located gathering spaces that create a sense of identity and encourage economic revitalization. Encourage public amenities such as benches, street trees, kiosks, restrooms and public art.</p>	<p>The proposed closure of two street segments provide an opportunity to make these spaces central gathering places that create a sense of identity and encourage walkability and a vibrant retail area on both California Avenue and Ramona Street.</p>
<p>Policy L-8.4: Create facilities for civic and intellectual life, such as better urban public spaces for civic programs and speakers, cultural, musical and artistic events.</p>	
<p>Policy L-4.7 Maintain and enhance the University Avenue/Downtown area as a major commercial center of the City, with a mix of commercial, civic, cultural, recreational and residential uses. Promote quality design that recognizes the regional and historical importance of the area and reinforces its pedestrian character.</p>	
<p>Policy L-7.5 To reinforce the scale and character of University Avenue/Downtown, promote the preservation of significant historic buildings.</p>	<p>The City conducted consultation with tribes that are geographically and culturally affiliated with the area in accordance with Senate Bill 18 regulations and incorporate the tribe’s recommendations as part of the proposed project to ensure the protection of tribal cultural resources, if uncovered.</p>
<p>Policy L-7.16 Continue to consult with tribes as required by California Government Code Section 65352.3. In doing so, use appropriate procedures to accommodate tribal concerns when a tribe has a religious prohibition against revealing precise information about the location or previous practice at a particular sacred site.</p>	<p>The project does not include any proposed street modifications that would have the potential to impact adjacent historic buildings, which would be preserved as part of the proposed project. The project adds vitality to the areas around these historic buildings, enhancing pedestrian access to these areas.</p>
<p>Policy L-7.17 Assess the need for archaeological surveys and mitigation plans on a project-by-project basis, consistent with the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Historic Preservation Act.</p>	

<p>Policy L-7.18 Require project proponents to meet State codes and regulations regarding the identification and protection of archaeological and paleontological deposits, and unique geologic features.</p>	

SECTION 2. Street Closures. Pursuant to Resolution _____, which amended the Comprehensive Plan transportation Element to re-classify the streets from residential/collector to “Pedestrian Only Streets” and “Community Streets”, the City Council hereby closes the following segments of Ramona Street and California Avenue to vehicular traffic, subject to the following provisions:

The portion of Ramona Street between Hamilton Avenue and University Avenue (as indicated in the Transportation Element of the Comprehensive Plan) is hereby reclassified as a Pedestrian Only Street, which is defined as:

Streets that are restricted to pedestrians, emergency vehicles, and utility and maintenance vehicles only. Outdoor dining and retail displays are encouraged on pedestrian only streets.

California Avenue between El Camino Real and Birch Street is hereby reclassified as a Community Street, which is defined as:

Streets that are restricted to pedestrians and bicycles. Emergency, utility and maintenance vehicles are allowed, and commercial vehicles are allowed on a restricted basis. Outdoor dining, retail displays, and community events are encouraged on community streets.

SECTION 3. Additional Rules.

3.1. As determined by the City Manager, emergency vehicles shall be permitted access only during an emergency or if needed during a non-emergency to provide for public health and/or safety. This includes the staging of emergency vehicles during special events or other times when deployment is necessary to ensure public health and/or safety.

3.2 Utility and Maintenance vehicles that are operated by the City, a publicly or privately-owned utility, or contractors operating on behalf of the City or such utilities, may be allowed access if there is no other practicable method to access the location needing service. Utility and maintenance vehicles operating on behalf of other parties, including businesses, building owners, tenants, may be granted access by the City if there is no other practicable method to access the location needing service. Utility and maintenance vehicles do not include vehicles making routine deliveries to companies or persons.

3.3. Special Events. The City Manager or designee may authorize vehicles to access the closed street for special events.

3.4 The City Manager or designee may promulgate regulations to ensure the orderly and safe functioning of these rules. This includes time, place, and manner restrictions, as well as limiting the number of vehicles on these streets at any given time.

SECTION 4. Supersedes Resolutions 10207 and 10208. This Resolution shall supersede Resolutions 10207 and 10208, which are rescinded as of the effective date of this Resolution.

SECTION 5. CEQA. In conformance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), the environmental impacts of this Resolution were evaluated in an Environmental Impact Report Addendum entitled “City of Palo Alto Car Free Ramona Street and California Avenue Addendum to the Comprehensive Plan EIR” dated February 2025. This addendum supplements the analysis in the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the 2030 Comprehensive Plan (SCH #2014052101), which the Council considered and adopted, together with the related Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan (MMRP) on November 13, 2017 in accordance with City Council Resolution 9721 and 9722. The addendum did not disclose any new significant impacts that were not previous evaluated and mitigated in the Comp plan EIR, for which a statement of overriding considerations was previously adopted.

SECTION 6. This resolution shall be effective upon adoption.

INTRODUCED AND PASSED:

AYES:

NOES:

ABSENT:

ABSTENTIONS:

ATTEST:

City Clerk

Mayor

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

APPROVED:

Assistant City Attorney

City Manager

APPROVED:

Chief Transportation Official