



CITY NOTES

November 27, 2014

WILL THE DOWNTOWN STREETScape PROJECT (PHASE 4) BE SCRAPPED?

The City Council is engaged in a dialogue with downtown businesses and property owners about the design features and potential impacts of the proposed Main Street Merge Lane Relocation & Streetscape Project. If constructed, the project will be the fourth phase of the Downtown Streetscape Project. The 35' high cobra head street lamps on Main Street would be replaced with pedestrian-scaled, "historic" street lamps to match those on Franklin Street and the east-west streets in the central business district. Main Street sidewalks would be upgraded and corner bulb-outs installed to meet Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) requirements. The bulbouts and stamped asphalt crosswalks would create safe pedestrian crossings to match the existing streetscape improvements at the Main and Laurel Street intersection. Lastly, the traffic lanes on Main Street between Alder and Laurel Street would be reconfigured to move the merge lane one block south (between Alder and Redwood). The merge lane relocation is intended to calm traffic on the Redwood to Laurel block of Main Street which is the heart of downtown. The City has been awarded nearly \$2.7 million in State transportation funds for the Main Street project. The project is slated for construction to begin in 2015.

Opinions expressed by local stakeholders are varied. Some think the downtown streetscape improvements will help to create a charming and aesthetically unified shopping district and shop owners will reap economic benefits in the future. Others worry that local businesses might close as a result of construction impacts. Some dislike the corner bulbouts and think Main Street is funky and charming just the way it is. Most people seem to understand the importance and necessity of the ADA improvements. Opinions are divided about whether relocation of the merge lane is worthwhile. Virtually no one supports the loss of on-street parking. With regard to impacts related to construction of the project, everyone shares concerns about potential loss of customers and revenues during the construction period.

At last week's City Council workshop on the Main Street Merge Lane Relocation & Streetscape Project, City staff and the project design engineer explained how the layout of the project had evolved over time in response to Council direction and Caltrans' review of the project. Regardless of local sentiments, Fort Bragg's Main Street is a State Highway facility and Caltrans has the ultimate say over any changes to its roadway. Based on feedback received at the workshop, City staff and the design engineer are pursuing the following:

- Work with Caltrans on design modifications to retain as much on-street parking as possible. Suggestions included modifying sidewalk design on west side of Main Street immediately south of Alder Street intersection to retain parking; modifying sidewalk design on west side of Main Street in front of Guest House museum to retain parking; eliminating all painted parking "Ts" on Main Street.
- Investigate opportunities for additional and/or enhanced off-street parking adjacent to the project area. Suggestions included Bank of America parking lot, Chief Celeri Drive, GP lot

behind the Company Store, GP training center parking lot, fire house parking lot, Guest House property, Skunk Train parking lot.

- Confirm that raised medians south of Redwood Avenue can be replaced with painted medians.
- Check with Caltrans to see if median south of Redwood Avenue can be replaced with dual left-turn lane.
- Ensure that bulbout at northeast corner of Redwood and Main does not interfere with loading zone at Coast Hardware.
- Evaluate feasibility of an off-season construction schedule, preferably one with sidewalk work occurring in winter and early spring months.
- Investigate some nighttime construction, as appropriate, to minimize disruptions to traffic during the street and intersection work. For daytime work, maintain a minimum of one lane of travel in each direction for duration of construction period.
- Prepare construction specifications with explicit performance standards that require that pedestrian access to businesses be maintained during construction except when work is happening directly in front of an entry door.
- Establish a local "liaison" who will ensure plentiful and clear communication with business owners, be a go-to person when problems arise, and work on promotional campaigns to help shopkeepers weather the construction period.
- Install improved temporary and permanent directional signage to public parking lots and establish enhanced parking enforcement both during and after project construction.

The funding allocation for the Main Street Merge Lane Relocation & Streetscape Project is on the California Transportation Commission's December 10, 2014 agenda. Once the funding is allocated, the project can be put out to bid. If the project moves forward, staff and the design engineer will work with Caltrans to finalize the plans and specifications and, ideally, the project would be put out to bid this winter or early spring in order to get the most competitive bid prices.

The intersection work, including installation of drainage improvements and bulbouts at the Oak, Alder and Redwood intersections, will need to be completed first with one-half of an intersection done at a time. This is necessary in order to maintain a functional drainage system, and it will also minimize the extent of construction-related disruptions. In all, the intersection work will take about 10-12 weeks to complete. It will need to be timed to avoid the rainy season. To maintain an off-peak schedule, we would aim to start the intersection work in September 2015 and move from Oak to Redwood. After the intersection work is done, the sidewalk work can begin. We expect each side of a block will take 1 to 1.5 weeks from start to finish. Pedestrian access and ramps to building entries can be maintained while the work is done, and blockage of driveways can be minimized. In total, the sidewalk work is estimated to take 8 weeks to complete. Assuming an early spring 2016 start date, the sidewalk work will be staged from north to south. Once all of the intersection and sidewalk work is done, the contractor would install the streetlamps, signals, and street furnishings and put final striping on the roadway. With this scenario, the Main Street Merge Lane Relocation & Streetscape Project would be implemented in the fall of 2015 and completed in the early of 2016.

The question remains, will the Council decide to scrap the project?

City Notes is published on the second and fourth Thursday of each month. If you have questions or suggestions regarding the column, feel free to contact City Manager Linda Ruffing at (707) 961-2823, ext. 118 or L.Ruffing@fortbragg.com.