



City Council Economic Development Subcommittee

MINUTES (DRAFT)

Conference Room A
City Hall, 501 Primrose Road – Burlingame, California
Thursday, May 28, 2020 – 8:00 a.m.

ATTENDANCE

Members Present: Vice Mayor Ann O'Brien Keighran, Councilmember Ricardo Ortiz

Members Absent: None

Staff Present: City Manager (CM) Lisa Goldman, Community Development Director (CDD) Kevin Gardiner, Economic Development Specialist (EDS) Joseph Sanfilippo, Senior Civil Engineer (SCE) Andrew Wong, Streets, Storm Drains and Sewer Division Manager (SSDSDM) Mike Heathcote and Public Works Director (PWD) Syed Murtuza

Members of the Public Present: Jenny Kelleher (President of the Downtown Burlingame Business Improvement District), Terry Horn

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Discussion of Pedestrian Zones and Outdoor Dining Options

CM Goldman mentioned that this item will likely be brought to the full City Council on June 15, so this Special Meeting was called to gauge the Economic Development Subcommittee's input and receive a recommendation that staff can present to the full Council. She noted that businesses are not actually allowed to have outdoor or indoor dining under the current County Health Order. As of this meeting, San Mateo County is in phase 2a of reopening, but the County is not meeting criteria even for phase 2b.

EDS Sanfilippo gave a brief rundown of a conference call that was held by fellow members in the Silicon Valley Economic Development Alliance (SVEDA) and their approaches to pedestrian zones and outdoor dining. Many are opting for parklets or using barricaded parking spaces rather than sidewalks, while others are fully closing streets. Terry Horn noted that the City of San Carlos is considering closing certain blocks in their Downtown for parklets to maintain fire access and outer block access. Traffic would be closed other than for emergency vehicles.

Jenny Kelleher reintroduced the proposal to close Burlingame Ave from El Camino Real to California Drive for an extended period of time for logistics (manpower, money, and time for barriers) and fears that short-term closures would make the closure feel like a visitor destination or special event. A long-term closure would promote a sense of normalcy and allow for safe social distancing.

Ms. Kelleher noted that the survey results were largely positive in favor of a Burlingame Avenue closure, with the majority favoring a closure "until it gets cold", which would likely be October.

Restaurants raised concerns with the loss of parking space for curbside pickup, as well as losing ADA compliance by the loss of disabled-accessible parking spaces. Comments noted that traffic on Burlingame Avenue is increasing, and parking is already in higher demand.

Business owners are supportive in that this is a short-term event for a limited span of time. Councilmember Ortiz said he hopes to pursue at minimum a pilot because of the overwhelming support.

Ms. Kelleher shared her perspective as a business owner and advocated in favor of the closure, specifically because of their previous success in other areas and their tangible financial benefits to all sales tax generators. Though this is being done to promote safe social distancing, it is a successful business model even in non-pandemic times.

She also noted concerns with closing specific blocks (as opposed to the full Burlingame Avenue) because of potential crowding issues. She proposed that cross-traffic across Burlingame Avenue may help with curbside pickup and accessibility.

PWD Murtuza suggested closing the entire Avenue, even for cross-traffic. Instead, he proposed a detour with other cross-street closures. He noted that a complete closure is the safest method due to concerns with a potential lack of awareness from pedestrians. This recommendation comes despite concerns that customers or businesses may have with parking further away from Burlingame Avenue. He also noted a concern over Hatch Lane's single-lane, one-way configuration. The businesses will still need access to a street in the event of a closure; one possibility would be to allow an entrance from a parking lot on Howard Avenue.

PWD Murtuza also noted potential issues with Recology trash pickup, but he still thought closing the entire Avenue would be the best option. He advocated that the City parking lot nearest El Camino Real remain open during the closure, to allow easy access to essential businesses in the vicinity.

He also noted sanitation concerns with outside tables and chairs. He acknowledged that Burlingame Avenue has wide sidewalks; as such, he proposed that the parking lane be accommodated for tables and chairs, leaving the sidewalk free for pedestrians. The unoccupied center area of the street would offer additional pedestrian access, as well as emergency vehicle access when necessary. Allowing pedestrians to have sidewalk access should solve any ADA compliance issues that would otherwise arise, specifically because the accessibility ramps at the intersections would remain open..

Councilmember Ortiz advocated for the cross-streets to be open to provide additional options for curbside pickup and traffic circulation, but PWD Murtuza noted there will be a higher volume of pedestrians during the closure, and this may make traffic on cross-streets more dangerous than in normal conditions. PWD Murtuza said the Department will study the idea further.

Terry Horn suggested there may be additional pushback from businesses that benefit from curbside pickup. Vice Mayor O'Brien said a potential compromise could be to close only several side streets (rather than all). She agrees that there is a concern for safety, however, as pedestrians may not be as careful if they believe the street is entirely closed to vehicular access.

PWD Murtuza also noted that there is a policy issue for carrying alcohol in the street. There will need to be some sort of indemnification to protect the City from liability. Ms. Kelleher asked if it will be allowed in outdoor dining spaces; PWD Murtuza believes alcohol service is allowed by outdoor permits, but open carry (i.e. a person not dining at an establishment) is typically not allowed.

Vice Mayor O'Brien noted that City Attorney Kathleen Kane will need to review the liability issues associated with a street closure.

Vice Mayor O'Brien asked if a pilot would be for a few days or if it would be for a full week. CM Goldman said that she hoped the Subcommittee would develop a recommendation on the pilot program that could be brought to the full City Council at the June 15 meeting.

Councilmember Ortiz mentioned his vision was a pilot that closed the Avenue between Primrose Road and El Camino Real on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, but acknowledged issues with fairness. He is still hoping to allow key cross-streets (Lorton Avenue and Primrose Road) to remain open, but also wants to ensure safety. He said a closure could be potentially explored next summer if this initial pilot is successful.

PWD Murtuza noted logistics and monitoring would be much easier if a longer pilot phase is deployed, particularly for a better study of traffic flow; he requested a minimum of a week or a month-long closure. Ms. Kelleher advocated for the entire summer but noted this could just be the peak months in July and August. Vice Mayor O'Brien said a shorter period can be extended but a longer one may have difficulties if the duration needs to be shortened.

Vice Mayor O'Brien agreed with a month-long pilot, Thursday-Sunday. Depending on the response, she said she could be persuaded to extend this closure to a full week. She noted the need to be sensitive to both retail and restaurants, specifically in curbside pickup allowances. She mentioned the closure may cause issues for the Fresh Market, but Councilmember Ortiz noted that the Park Road closure would not be an issue if that side street is proposed to be closed regardless.

Ms. Kelleher noted that salons and retail actually experience boosts in sales because of pedestrian access. Restaurants have anecdotally been texting customers when their order is ready, allowing pedestrians to meander to other stores.

CM Goldman noted there is a general preference for pilot programs to make sure things are working. She is concerned over ADA access if the side streets are closed to through traffic.

Councilmember Ortiz posited that this could eventually lead to a more long-term (or even permanent) closure, and he would like to proceed with a small-scale pilot. He agreed that it is easier to expand an existing program than contract. He expects the closure to be successful and anticipates long-term viability.

PWD Murtuza noted the necessity of additional pedestrian warning signage and a switch to flashing stoplights for stop signs if the side streets remain open.

Both Subcommittee members agreed to a one-month pilot program in which Burlingame Avenue is closed Thursday-Sunday, while Primrose and Lorton remain open.

CM Goldman noted there are logistical issues, and staff has to check on issues related to liability, Recology, and alcohol allowances. She also noted that restaurants have to be responsible for cleaning up their own areas each night to minimize food on the ground, and they have to regularly sanitize their tables and chairs.

CM Goldman noted some community members are advocating for a similar closure of Broadway, but both Subcommittee members disagree with pursuing a Broadway closure because of its utility as a main thoroughfare to the freeway.

PWD Murtuza mentioned that parking meters will begin charging on July 1. Even though the City Council originally directed that the City turn the meters off until two weeks after the shelter-in-place was lifted, the current County Health Order does not include an expiration date. As in-store and curbside retail pickup are now allowed, Public Works will seek Council approval to turn the parking meters on to recoup some meter revenue on the days the Avenue is open for parking.

Future Agenda Topics

EDS Sanfilippo will reach out to John Hutar to inquire if there is interest in another meeting with the hoteliers at the June meeting.

Miscellaneous Discussion

Ms. Kelleher noted that the DBID usually works with a local Boy Scout Troop to put up flags on the Avenue on Memorial Day and other holidays. The DBID decided not to put the flags up this year because of health concerns, but a kind business owner took on the task independently.

Action Items

- PWD Murtuza, SCE Wong, and CDD Gardiner will work on a staff report for the Burlingame Ave pilot closure recommendation. EDS Sanfilippo will contact John Hutar and the hoteliers to gauge interest in a follow-up meeting in June.

FUTURE AGENDA TOPICS

- June 10, 2020 - Potential meeting with John Hutar and hoteliers

PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no public comments.

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 9:19 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Joseph Sanfilippo
Economic Development Specialist