

CITY OF SANTA ROSA
CITY COUNCIL

TO: MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
FROM: ROBERT M. SPRINKLE, DEPUTY DIRECTOR - TRAFFIC
ENGINEERING
TRANSPORTATION AND PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT
SUBJECT: ELLIOTT AVENUE PILOT CLOSURE PROJECT

AGENDA ACTION: RESOLUTION

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended by the Transportation and Public Works Department that Council, by resolution, approve the temporary road closure of Elliott Avenue between the West Emeritus Driveway and East Emeritus Driveway to enhance pedestrian connectivity for students across Elliott Avenue, for the duration of 16 months beginning in Summer 2022 as a pilot project to evaluate the impact a permanent closure may have.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Santa Rosa Junior College (SRJC) has requested that the City of Santa Rosa close a segment of Elliott Avenue between the West Emeritus Driveway and East Emeritus Driveway to vehicle traffic in order to enhance the pedestrian connectivity for students across Elliott Avenue (Attachment 1). The 600-foot roadway segment of Elliott Avenue would link the campus by creating a vehicle free environment and eliminating vehicle-pedestrian conflicts on this segment of roadway. A 16-month pilot project would evaluate the impact this closure may have.

In addition to the proposed street closure, the SRJC has reconfigured their Emeritus parking lot to allow two-way traffic at the westerly driveway and will open a new two-way access driveway onto the Clement Avenue. This connectivity does allow for vehicle traffic to pass through the parking area to access either side of the closed section of Elliott Avenue.

The SRJC Board of Trustees hired a consultant to prepare an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) environmental document to evaluate the impacts of the closure of Elliott Avenue to vehicle access. This document was brought to SRJC Board of Trustees on February 8, 2022, for adoption.

Although the circulation element was evaluated with the closure of Elliott Avenue in the IS/MND, the SRJC and City staff are proposing a pilot project with the closure being

implemented to allow residents, staff and the SRJC to evaluate the operations and impacts over the course of a 16-month period.

BACKGROUND

The SRJC has been contemplating measures to provide enhanced pedestrian connectivity between their main campus to the south of Elliott Avenue to Emeritus Hall, the Race Building, and Plover Hall to the north of Elliott Avenue. Their 2016 Facilities Master Plan and Guidelines suggested a concept of traffic calming including the reduction of vehicular traffic on Elliott Avenue as part of their "Vision Plan" recommendations.

Over the past 10 years, crosswalks have been added on Elliott Avenue to increase the channelized locations where pedestrians are encouraged to cross, as well as channelizing fencing directing student to those crossing locations.

Currently there are three crosswalks providing pedestrian links from Emeritus to the main campus: one with a traffic signal and two with high visibility markings and signing. The school has expressed their desire in providing a stronger pedestrian link in concert with eliminating the vehicle conflict crossing the roadway to provide a high level of comfort for pedestrians.

To evaluate the potential closure, the SRJC had an IS/MND prepared to analyze the potential impacts of a closure to Elliott Avenue. This environmental document specifically reviewed the circulation impacts relating to closing Elliott Avenue. This full document can be found as an attachment to this staff report as Exhibit A.

PRIOR CITY COUNCIL REVIEW

There has been no prior council review of this proposal.

ANALYSIS

Prior to initiating the ISMND, the SRJC hosted a meeting with the City of Santa Rosa and the neighborhood to present the pilot project concept, ensure that what items of interest to the neighborhood were included in the study, and to hear concerns from the residents regarding the potential closure. The meeting was held on November 14, 2019, and 9 residents signed the attendance sheet.

The neighbor's concerns included:

- inconvenience of having to use Steele Lane verse Elliott Avenue to access Mendocino Avenue when Steele Lane is already busy
- noting that 3 PM is a peak period with heavy Junior College and High School traffic
- request to install more stop controls on Elliott Avenue instead of closing Elliott Avenue
- consider the aesthetics with the temporary and permanent closure

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- possibly connect the Emeritus parking lot to the north side of Salem Avenue
- provide a location to pick up and drop off students
- determine the impact on delivery truck access to the Junior College

After receiving the initial comments, a Circulation Study for the Elliott Avenue Pilot Closure Project was prepared as part of the IS/MND. The data for the study was collected pre-COVID such that the volumes were not influenced by students practicing distance learning. Fifteen intersections were included in the analysis including the major intersections of Steele Lane Hwy 101 northbound off ramp, Steele Lane and Mendocino Avenue, Elliott Avenue and Mendocino Avenue, and Pacific Avenue at Mendocino Avenue. The study reviewed existing, existing plus project, future, and future plus project conditions at fifteen intersections and was circulated for public review from January 22, 2021, to February 22, 2021. The entire study can be found in Exhibit A.

Comments collected from the ISMND circulation included the following:

- potential increased traffic on Armory Drive, Illinois Avenue, Mendocino Avenue, Steele Lane and within the neighborhood
- loss of Elliott Avenue as a convenient and safe alternative exiting the neighborhood
- effect on emergency access and evacuation
- additional stop controls on Elliott Avenue or an alternate pedestrian bridge to link the campus across Elliot Avenue

On January 18, 2022, an additional public meeting was held to re-engage the neighborhood regarding the plan. Due to COVID and the delays on the implementation, the SRJC wanted to give the community an additional opportunity to hear about the pilot project prior to the environmental document going to the Board of Trustees for adoption.

Comments from the January 18, 2022, meeting included the following:

- request to evaluate a “blind corner” at Oliver Ln and Albany Dr
- notification of the meeting was received too late, for many the same day as the meeting
- gap in bike lane on Steele Lane and speed of traffic on Steele Lane is high
- review timing of the signal at Elliott Avenue and Mendocino Avenue
- include residential permit parking on the east side of Salem Avenue (behind CVS)
- concern regarding potential cutting through the Emeritus parking lot
- concern with the study being done before the occupancy of the STEM and student housing buildings

The study determined that the proposed pilot project to close Elliott Avenue would not increase the number of trips to and from the Junior College, however, it would redistribute existing trips, primarily for the residents on the north of the campus. Residents that typically use Elliott to enter and exit the neighborhood via Mendocino Avenue, would now likely use Steele Lane to access Mendocino Avenue. That variation in their trip route would increase the number of vehicles at the intersection of Mendocino

Avenue and Steele Lane and is one location where an increase in intersection delay was noted. The other location that had a noted delay was the intersection of Illinois Avenue/County Center and Steele Lane.

Upon redistribution of existing trips all study intersections are expected to operate acceptably at the same level of service. Under Future conditions the intersection of Steele Lane and Mendocino Avenue would operate at a level of service E during the PM peak period under the project volumes with or without the Elliott closure. One mitigation for this intersection would be to add an additional northbound left turn lane. Currently, there is not adequate right of way for those improvements to occur without the removal of the existing bike lanes. If the bike lanes were removed to accommodate the additional turn lane, this mitigation would result in a significant impact under CEQA as removal of existing bike lane facility would occur.

The intersection of Illinois Avenue/County Center and Steele Lane would also experience an increase in delay that could be mitigated with the addition of an eastbound right turn lane. To accommodate this additional lane, a shared right turn/bike lane could be constructed. Although a separate bike lane and right turn lane is preferred, the share right turn/bike lane has been implemented successfully in several locations around the City of Santa Rosa.

The circulation report also addresses collision trends at several intersections. Four signalized intersections had collision rates higher than the Statewide average for similar sized intersections. These included Steele Lane at Illinois/County Center, Steele Lane at Mendocino Avenue, Mendocino Avenue at Elliott Avenue, and Mendocino Avenue at Pacific Avenue. The report attributed a high number of the collisions at each intersection to unsafe speed. The report suggests additional speed enforcement may curtail some of those collisions. Traffic Engineering has recently implemented increased clearance times and all red clearance at these intersections.

Collisions were also analyzed on Elliott Avenue and although there have not been any recent reported collisions with bicycles or pedestrians, during the public meeting there were a few accounts of very close calls between pedestrians and vehicles.

The closure is proposed to begin in the Summer of 2022 and remain closed through December 2023 so that the closure will span the opening of their STEM and student housing buildings.

The benefit of this project is enhancing the pedestrian comfort level and linking the north and south sides of the campus across Elliott Avenue. By eliminating the potential conflicts between vehicles and pedestrians, we are ensuring the well-being of a large number of pedestrians in that space.

In conjunction with the temporary design of the closure, Santa Rosa Water and Santa Rosa Fire were both consulted on their needs to access the closed section of Elliott Avenue. The Fire Department requires emergency access to the buildings adjacent to Elliott Avenue while Santa Rosa Water requires access to the underground utilities

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within the block. The City of Santa Rosa will retain full operational access during the pilot project and moving forward.

Upon approval by City Council the SRJC will be required to submit an encroachment permit to install any improvements on this section of roadway that would be in compliance with Transportation and Public Works, Santa Rosa Water, and the Fire Department.

FISCAL IMPACT

This pilot project is being funded by the SRJC and will be processed through the City of Santa Rosa encroachment permit process.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

On February 8, 2022, the SRJC Board of Trustees adopted an Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration (IS/MND) for the proposed Elliott Avenue Pilot Closure Project, which evaluated the impacts of the closure of Elliott Avenue to vehicle access. The Council's action to authorize the pilot closure of Elliot Avenue falls within the scope of the adopted IS/MND and no additional environmental review is required.

BOARD/COMMISSION/COMMITTEE REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Santa Rosa Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board was notified and encouraged to attend the meeting with the SRJC and the City in November 2019.

Santa Rosa Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board was notified and encouraged to attend the virtual meeting with the SRJC and the City on January 18, 2022.

The concept of the closure pilot project was brought to the Santa Rosa Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Board for comments and support on February 17, 2022.

ATTACHMENTS

- Attachment 1 – Aerial map showing proposed closure location
- Attachment 2 – Previously adopted Initial Study/Mitigated Negative Declaration
- Resolution

CONTACT

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