

## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** City Council

**FROM:** Brian Pedrotti, Community Development Director

**BY:** Andrew Perez, Acting Planning Manager

**SUBJECT:** Discussion and Consideration of the Current and Future Short Street Status and Pedestrian Plaza and Park Conceptual Design and Adoption of a Resolution Authorizing the Continued Closure of Short Street

**DATE:** May 10, 2022

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### **SUMMARY OF ACTION:**

The purpose of the discussion is to provide a status update about the closure of Short Street and to receive direction on whether to move forward with development of a plan to permanently close Short Street for redevelopment as a pedestrian plaza and/or public park. It is also recommended that direction be provided to implement an intermediate design plan for Short Street that includes adoption of a Resolution to continue closure of Short Street and use as a pedestrian and public area with the removal of the existing concrete k-rail and the addition of decorative traffic rated planter barriers as needed at each of the streets.

### **IMPACT ON FINANCIAL AND PERSONNEL RESOURCES:**

A \$30,000 Short Street Scoping budget will be included in the proposed FY 2022-23 Capital Improvement Project schedule designated for cost analysis and design refinement, depending on the direction provided by Council. An intermediate street closure and use project would cost approximately \$7,000 to \$12,000 for the purchase of decorative traffic barrier planters and picnic tables. The total costs of replacing Short Street with a pedestrian plaza and park is unknown at this time. If directed by Council, staff would send requests for proposals to obtain cost estimates on any future project. If a public park is included in a future project at this location, Park Development Impact fee funds may be available to fund at least a portion of the project costs. The Park Development fund balance is currently approximately \$1.5 million.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

1) Receive the updated proposed sample concept plan, receive public comment, and provide staff direction to move forward with further evaluation of a conceptual plan along

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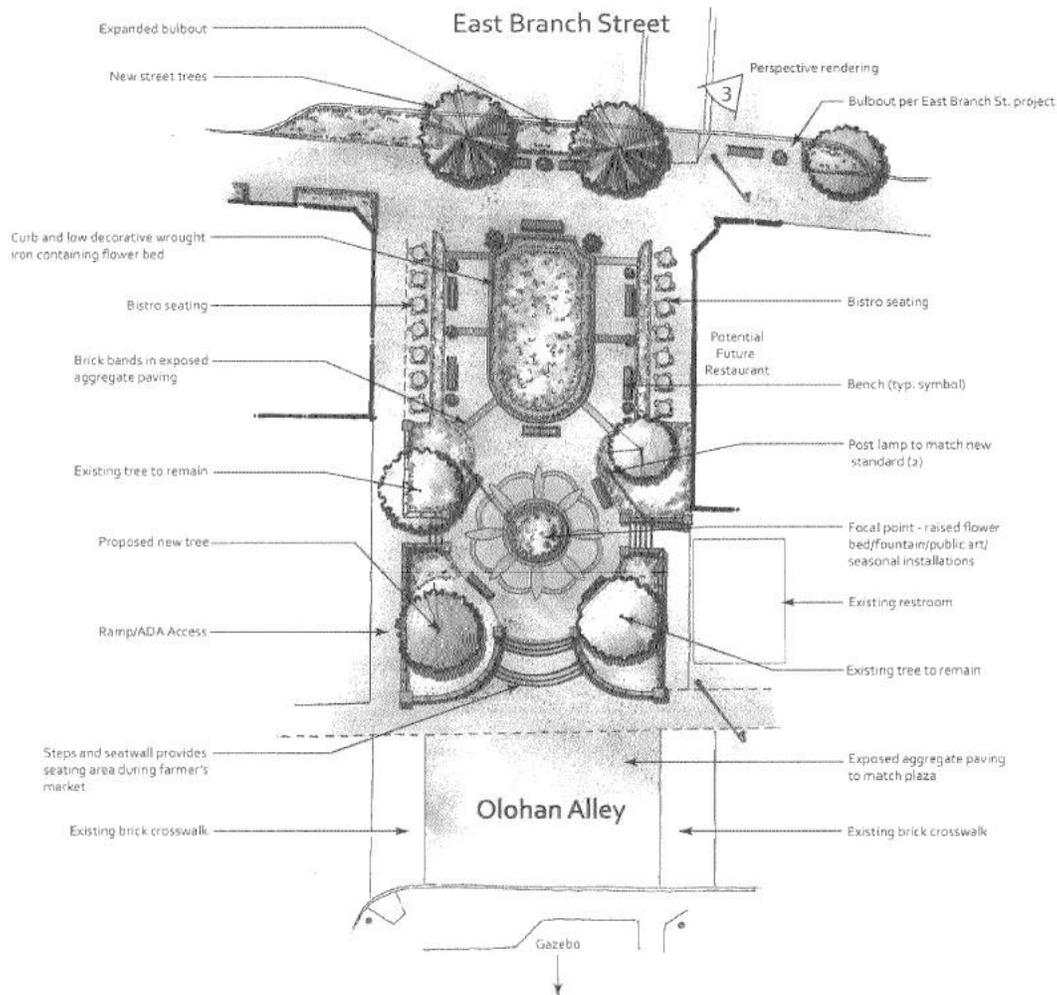
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with a cost analysis and public feedback; and 2) Provide staff with direction to implement an intermediate design plan for Short Street that includes adoption of a Resolution to continue closure of Short Street and use as a pedestrian and public area.

**BACKGROUND:**

The subject location is the portion of Short Street that provides access into Olohan Alley from East Branch Street. Outdoor dining areas for Rooster Creek Tavern and Gina's Restaurant are located adjacent to Short Street to the east and west, respectively. Short Street gradually slopes down from E. Branch St. to Olohan Alley.

In 2009, Council considered closing Short Street to construct a pedestrian open space area to be designated Centennial Plaza (see rendering below).



**Rendering of a conceptual proposal from 2009 to convert Short Street to Centennial Plaza.**

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Council directed staff to move forward with a project, solicit community input, and develop a formal proposal. On February 23, 2010, Council adopted Resolution 4262 authorizing a Purchase and Sale and Improvement Agreement to redevelop the property at the eastern corner of Short St. and E. Branch Street, including some modifications to Short Street. Aesthetic and circulation improvements to Short Street did not include a full closure with a pedestrian plaza, but rather straightening and narrowing the travel lane down to 16 feet from curb to curb and converting the traffic flow to one-way in only. Improvements related to this realignment included construction of curbs and gutters, sidewalks and ADA ramp improvements. This construction was finished in 2011.

#### **ANALYSIS OF ISSUES:**

The COVID-19 pandemic created a unique opportunity to re-imagine how the City's public right-of-way can be utilized to improve long-term community vibrancy and economic vitality. In addition to numerous parklets that were installed to provide outdoor dining areas when indoor dining was unavailable due to the pandemic, Short Street was closed and converted to an outdoor dining area by Resolution on June 23, 2020 and modified through a second Resolution on July 13, 2020 to allow individual restaurants to use a portion of the closed area for their own customers (see Attachment 4, Reso. 5006 and 5018). This dining area is currently utilized by the adjacent Rooster Creek Tavern and, at times in the past, by Gina's Restaurant. Tables are also provided by Rooster Creek Tavern for use by the general public.

#### Sample Conceptual Design

While Short Street has been closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, a new conceptual design (see Attachment 2) was developed in 2020 by Rooster Creek Tavern and MW Architects that proposes to permanently eliminate vehicular access to Olohan Alley via Short Street and construct a pedestrian plaza. A raised landscaping median would block vehicular access and the decline from E. Branch to Olohan Alley would be raised to create a flat pedestrian plaza that extends to the northern boundary of the existing alley. To account for the elevation difference, a series of steps would be constructed to create amphitheater-like seating that lead down to the alley. Pavers are proposed for the plaza area along with trees and lighting. Outdoor dining space for the adjacent restaurants is also included in the conceptual design. The dining uses would be movable and non-permanent and would be subject to lease agreements and use permit requirements, if included in the final project scope.

It is possible that at least a portion of this conceptual plan, such as the amphitheater-area, may be designated as a City park facility and, therefore, be funded using a portion of the City's Park Development fund balance. Additional analysis of funding sources and options would be included in a more detailed scoping and conceptual plan if direction is provided to pursue this long-term project.

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It is also requested that direction be provided regarding the types of commercial uses, if any, that may be allowed in the plaza, including outdoor dining uses by Village restaurants.

#### Intermediate Design Plan Option

If Council is interested in moving forward with a project that would permanently close and redevelop Short Street with a pedestrian plaza and park, staff is recommending the implementation of an intermediate design plan for Short Street that includes continued closure of the street to vehicles and use as a pedestrian and public area, with the removal of the existing concrete k-rail and the addition of decorative traffic-rated planter barriers as needed at each end of the street. Attachment 3 shows a simple site layout graphic and a sample planter barrier.

This intermediate plan allows for a public outreach program, such as a design workshop and/or social media design postings, further refinement of the conceptual design, and completion of a cost analysis to be made for a permanent project while also continuing to allow usage of the street for pedestrians and other public activities. Communal dining may also be facilitated if new picnic tables are purchased and placed in the area. The intermediate plan may also allow Short Street to be used as a protected public space for the upcoming Harvest Festival and/or for the expansion of Farmer's Market, especially during the summer months. As demonstrated from bids on current City projects and based on input from building industry professionals, the current construction bidding climate is very volatile and inflated. This intermediate plan could also allow for better timing in construction cost/bidding, as inflation and labor costs may calm over the next year to 2 years.

To implement this interim option, a Resolution is provided to continue the street closure for the time period needed to develop a permanent pedestrian plaza and park. Usage of the area by Rooster Creek Tavern and Gina's Restaurant would cease under this intermediate plan.

#### General Plan Consistency

Infill of the Short St. entrance to Olohan Alley is supported by the following policies from the Land Use Element related to the emphasis of pedestrian related activities in the Village Core.

**LU6-5:** Village Core developments shall emphasize uses that contribute to the vitality of the whole, creating pedestrian traffic and interest, as outlined in the Design Guidelines for the Arroyo Grande Village.

**LU6-6:** The Village Core encourages the development of outdoor dining and other similar uses provided that they do not impede pedestrian use of the sidewalks.

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**LU6-7:** All revitalization, redevelopment and new development projects in the Village Core shall include appropriate site planning and urban design amenities to encourage pedestrian travel.

Construction of a pedestrian plaza to replace Short Street is supported by policies in the Land Use Element that encourage pedestrian mobility and outdoor dining in the Village Core. The 2020 conceptual plan provides additional outdoor seating for patrons of Village restaurants. However, as design refinements are made, this space could be used as a hybrid area where dining seating is allowed and times where the space is fully open for public gatherings. The design refinement process will allow for versatility and best use of the space.

#### Access and Parking

Short Street currently provides one-way access into Olohan Alley. Construction of the project would limit vehicular access to Olohan Alley to the two-way driveways at S. Mason Street and Bridge Street. The driveways at both S. Mason St. and Bridge St. allow right and left turns into and out of Olohan Alley. The conceptual design for Council's consideration would neither create nor eliminate any parking spaces.

#### Next Steps

Approval of the recommended actions will allow for:

- Further development of the conceptual plan such as public input, refinement of the design, and cost analysis of a final concept;
- During the public input and design process, an intermediate step of removal of the concrete k-rail and replacing them with a more decorative traffic barrier, as well as removal of Rooster Creek Tavern's use of the street;
- A final concept will be presented to the City Council in the future and,
- The proposed improvements will be incorporated into the Capital Improvement Program budget and work plan. A Request for Proposals would be prepared to procure a consultant for design and construction.

#### **ALTERNATIVES:**

The following alternatives are provided for the Council's consideration:

1. 1) Receive the updated proposed sample concept plan, receive public comment, and provide staff direction to move forward with further evaluation of a conceptual plan along with a cost analysis and public feedback; and 2) Provide staff with direction to implement an intermediate design plan for Short Street that includes adoption of a Resolution to continue closure of Short Street and use as a pedestrian and public area; or
2. 1) Receive the updated proposed sample concept plan, receive public comment, and provide staff direction to move forward with further evaluation of a conceptual plan along with a cost analysis and public feedback; and 2) Direct staff to reopen

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Short Street to vehicle traffic until the permanent redesign of Short Street is completed; or

3. 1) Do not direct staff to proceed with the redesign of Short Street and 2) Direct that Short Street be reopened to vehicle traffic; or
4. Provide other direction to staff.

**ADVANTAGES:**

Construction of a pedestrian plaza to replace Short Street is supported by policies in the Land Use Element that encourage pedestrian mobility and outdoor dining in the Village Core. A public space like a redesigned Short Street, will provide an area for social interaction and economic activities, which improve and support commercial businesses and draw people to the Village. The design refinement process will allow for versatility and best use of the space.

**DISADVANTAGES:**

Eliminating access to Olohan Alley from Short Street reduces the ingress and egress from Olohan Alley to S. Mason Street and Bridge Street. Traditionally, parades for the Harvest Festival and Christmas Parades were staged in Olohan Alley and started their route from Short Street, which required a minimal amount of street closures and detours. Closure of Short Street will require re-routing of each of these parades.

**ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW:**

No environmental review is required for the discussion about the conceptual plan. In the event that the project comes to fruition, it will be reviewed in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act.

**PUBLIC NOTIFICATION AND COMMENTS:**

The Agenda was posted at City Hall and on the City's website in accordance with Government Code Section 54954.2.

Attachments:

1. Proposed Resolution
2. 2020 Short Street Conceptual Plan
3. Intermediate Conceptual Plan
4. Resolutions 5006 and 5018 for closure of Short Street in 2020