

CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

August 17, 2021
Economic Development

**TITLE: PROVIDE CITY COUNCIL POLICY DIRECTION REGARDING
WEEKEND ON MAIN STREET CLOSURE PROGRAM**

SUMMARY

The Weekend on Main street closures were introduced by the City in 2020, with support from the Pleasanton Downtown Association, to provide outdoor space for downtown merchants to expand their operations while indoor operations were restricted due to County and State health orders, as well as to draw local residents to downtown and provide additional space and opportunities for the public to safely gather, stroll, dine and shop, while maintaining social distancing. The program involves closure of Main Street between Del Valle Parkway and Bernal Avenue, from Friday through Sunday evening. In 2020 the street closures took place between June 19 and November 1; in 2021 the program began on April 30 and is scheduled to end at the conclusion of the Labor Day weekend on September 6. The 2020 and 2021 Weekend on Main seasons have been well-received by the community and helped to bring much-needed activity into the downtown during the pandemic, while merchants' experiences have been mixed. At its July 20, 2021 meeting, the City Council requested a discussion regarding the length of this year's Weekend on Main street closures, particularly whether to extend the season beyond the Labor Day holiday weekend (September 6) as currently planned.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the 2021 Weekend Main season end on Labor Day (September 6, 2021) as currently scheduled. Staff also recommends that in 2022 the Weekend on Main program be resumed and incorporated into the Pleasanton Downtown Association's annual events programming.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT

The 2021 Weekend on Main season from April 30 to September 6 has created direct expenses of approximately \$125,384 to the City. These costs are primarily for the barricade rentals and placement/removal to close and re-open Main Street each weekend (\$111,384) and needed staff overtime for placement/removal of signage and traffic circulation measures (\$14,000). Additionally, the City incurs indirect costs for police and traffic engineering staffing, downtown cleaning, and event management. Extending the Weekend on Main season in 2021 would cost approximately \$7,000 for each additional weekend closure. It is anticipated the City would incur similar costs per weekend in 2022.

BACKGROUND

Weekend on Main Street Closure Program

The Weekend on Main street closures were introduced in 2020 by the City, with support from PDA, to provide outdoor space for downtown merchants to expand their operations while indoor operations were restricted due to County and State health orders, and to draw people downtown in an expanded pedestrian environment that provided more space for gathering while maintaining social distancing. The program involves closure of Main Street to vehicular traffic every weekend, Friday evening through Sunday evening. During the closure period businesses can expand dining and other outdoor activities into the street, and pedestrians are able to stroll and circulate in this area as well.

The 2020 Weekend on Main season was originally scheduled from mid-June through Labor Day weekend in early September. It's notable that the street closures extend almost the full length of Main Street, as this allowed merchants which had previously been excluded from street closure events to participate. The 2020 season was extended through the end of October as merchants continued to be required to adhere to significantly reduced capacity for indoor operations. This initial Weekend on Main season was well-received by the community and helped to bring much-needed activity into the downtown during the pandemic.

As PDA considered scheduling a Weekend on Main season in 2021, the organization surveyed its members to solicit feedback on the impact of the prior season and interest in bringing back the street closures. While 81.5% of the 92 businesses that responded were in favor of the closures, the other 18.5% of the respondents – many of which are retailers – indicated negative impacts from the closures and therefore did not support closing Main Street every weekend. The survey results also indicated that May through September are the preferred months for street closures with greater than 70% support from respondents; April and October start and end dates received approximately 50% support from respondents. After considering the collective responses, the PDA requested the 2021 Weekend on Main street closures take place every weekend between April 30 – and Labor Day on September 6, 2021. Beyond the survey input, this timing was also intentional in allowing the restaurants to utilize the street during the spring and summer months when outdoor dining is at its peak, and then allowing the retailers to take full advantage of the fall months leading into the holiday season that provides a significant portion of the annual revenues for many of these shops.

Temporary Pop-Up Program

On July 20, 2021 the City Council considered and took action to extend the temporary downtown “pop-up” program. The pop-up program was instituted during COVID as another measure to support downtown and other businesses, by granting temporary approvals for installation of dining areas (tables, chairs, canopies, etc.) within the public street right-of-way - these temporary dining areas remain in place both during and outside the periodic street closures associated with Weekend on Main. The Council directed that the temporary pop-up program be allowed to continue through the end of the year, meaning that any of the existing outdoor dining areas may remain in place, irrespective of the duration of the Weekend on Main program.

DISCUSSION

On June 15, 2021, all restrictions under the State's Blueprint for a Safer Economy tiered system were lifted, and businesses were allowed to return to full indoor and outdoor operations. As the Weekend on Main season was already well underway and given the restaurants' and the community's enjoyment of the closures, there was no consideration to end the closures earlier than the Labor Day weekend.

At this time, the City Council has requested discussion regarding the length of this year's Weekend on Main street closures, particularly whether to extend the season beyond the Labor Day holiday weekend (September 6) as currently planned. Most of the feedback that City staff and the Mayor and Council have received about the street closures has been in support of the closures with expressed appreciation by the community to be able to enjoy the downtown with a pedestrian experience. Many have celebrated the vibrancy, atmosphere and shared community experience that the downtown closures have offered. The participating restaurants have widely shared their fervent support for the importance of the street closures in helping them to remain financially solvent, and supporting recovery following the extended hardship caused by the pandemic restrictions.

Notwithstanding the enthusiasm for the program by many, the decision to end Weekend on Main on September 6 as scheduled remains the recommendation of City staff and the Pleasanton Downtown Association, as outlined in the attached letter. In particular, PDA notes that it has already begun exploring downtown events and activities after the conclusion of Weekend on Main, including a six-week Concerts in the Park series. The concert series is predicated on the end of the street closures and would accommodate the traffic circulation and parking demands of the large number of attendees expected to attend the concerts, without unduly impacting surrounding neighborhoods. As expected, any such future events and activities will be dependent on current COVID conditions.

City staff's continued recommendation to conclude the program is based on a number of factors, including:

- Traffic and Circulation: As COVID restrictions have been lifted, both commute and personal auto travel has been increasing, with impacts to local roadways and intersections also increasing. The City traffic engineer regularly monitors traffic volumes throughout Pleasanton and has found that key intersections such as at Bernal and First Street/Sunol Boulevard are nearly returned to pre-COVID volume. As well, the closures have necessitated the rerouting of delivery trucks to onto side streets, creating traffic and other risks; in some instances, the closures have halted the delivery of inventory to retail shops.
- Impact to Downtown Residents: Another important consideration for ending the street closures is the impact to residents in the downtown core that are impeded from having direct or convenient access to their residences over the 18-week Weekend on Main season. For some downtown residents their only ingress/egress is on Main Street causing them, as well as other residents, to have to relocate their vehicles and shuttle themselves and their belongings back and forth each weekend to accommodate the closures. Notably, the Weekend on

Main Street closures are in addition to other street closures (e.g., for parades or events) that similarly impact access to/from their residences throughout the year.

- Impact to Downtown Businesses. As previously mentioned, not all merchants are supportive of the weekend street closures with some citing material financial impact to their establishments due to the Weekend on Main program, due to added inconvenience for their customers, decreased visibility, or impeded access to parking and delivery services. Through marketing and promotion both PDA and the City have provided ongoing exposure and support for our downtown retailers, but they continue to report that this doesn't surmount the effects of having the street closed every weekend.

Although a secondary consideration when evaluating the extreme financial hardship faced by local businesses as result of the pandemic, the Weekend on Main program is not without cost to the City. The cost of equipment rentals, staff overtime, and additional costs associated with managing the event, cleaning, and other tasks, have amounted to approximately \$250,000 over the past two years (and through this September). Each additional weekend of closure is estimated to cost the City approximately \$7,000.

Finally, staff notes that the City Council's recent action extending the approval for restaurants to have temporary dining areas in the street through the end of the year offers an opportunity to continue to support business recovery, and contribute to the vitality of Main Street, without incurring the degree of impact associated with a full street closure.

Future Weekend on Main Street Closures

Weekend on Main 2022

The PDA sees Weekend on Main as a seasonal summer attraction for downtown and intends to bring back the Weekend on Main street closures in 2022. City staff recommends the 2022 Weekend on Main program be resumed as part of the PDA's overall annual downtown programming. Following this year's Weekend on Main season, PDA and City staff will begin discussing how to deliver a Weekend on Main season in 2022 in a way that would best benefit all stakeholders and support the community's enjoyment of the street closures.

SUMMARY

Based on the input and considerations over the past two years, City staff recommends:

- The 2021 Weekend on Main season ends on Labor Day weekend (September 6) as scheduled
- The 2022 Weekend on Main program be resumed and incorporated into the Pleasanton Downtown Association's annual events programming.

Staff sees this recommendation as finding a balance in equitably supporting the diversity of merchants as well as engaging the community, while reducing the direct and indirect impacts of the closures on neighborhoods within and surrounding the downtown.

Submitted by:



Pamela Ott
Deputy City Manager

Fiscal Review:



Tina Olson
Director of Finance

Approved by:



Nelson Fialho
City Manager

Attachments:

1. Letter from Pleasanton Downtown Association dated July 30, 2021



July 30, 2021

Pamela Ott, Deputy City Manager
City of Pleasanton
200 Old Bernal Road, P. O. Box 520
Pleasanton, CA 94566

Pam:

This letter has circulated to our Pleasanton Downtown Association Board Directors to confirm their understanding and concurrence on our PDA position regarding the conclusion of Weekends on Main for 2021, scheduled for Monday, September 6.

PDA is thankful to the City of Pleasanton, and you, for championing and underwriting the considerable cost and effort of this much needed program.

That said, for a variety of reasons, **PDA supports allowing the 2021 version of Weekends on Main to sunset as planned on September 6.**

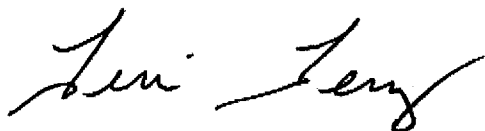
Reasons include:

- 1) **Concerts**. PDA has delayed our 2021 deployment of Concerts in the Park so as not to overburden First Street by conducting Concerts simultaneously with Main Street closures. Extending Weekends on Main beyond Labor Day could derail our plan to resume Concerts in the Park during the 6-week window between Labor Day and the 2021 Alameda County Fair. Due to shorter daylight hours in the fall, we plan to stage concerts from 4-6pm on Sundays, rather than the traditional Fridays.
- 2) **Fall Retail**. The City's Pop-Up Dining program has been extended through year end, which delivers much of the same value for restaurants that closing Main Street would deliver. On the other hand, certain retailers and other businesses who do not benefit directly from Pop-Up Dining will receive crucial benefit by allowing Main Street to remain open to vehicular traffic on weekends. This is **critical** to downtown retailers in the all-important fall/holiday shopping season.
- 3) **Cost**. Money the City saves by sunsetting Weekends on Main could be invested into multiple alternative projects in partnership with PDA and other civic-minded nonprofits.
- 4) **Uniqueness/Brand Value**. Though originally a COVID countermeasure, Weekends on Main has been a big hit with citizens in both 2020 and 2021. PDA would like to discuss opportunities for resuming the program in some form as a summer seasonal attraction downtown in 2022 and beyond. Closing Main Street indefinitely erodes the seasonality and brand value of the program.

Please feel free to share our PDA position with others regarding Weekends on Main. Board support for this position is unanimous.

One important caveat is that PDA will adjust our stance as necessary should unforeseen COVID-related developments materially change the basis on which the above is based. We have a physical Board of Directors meeting scheduled August 10th and will update you to changes, if any.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Terri Terry".

Terri Terry
President

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Zac Grant".

Zac Grant
Executive Director