



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

PARK AND RECREATION COMMISSION REPORT

AGENDA DATE: January 28, 2009

TO: Park and Recreation Commission

FROM: Housing and Redevelopment Division, Community Development Department
Engineering Division, Public Works Department

SUBJECT: Update On The West Downtown Improvement Project

RECOMMENDATION: That the Commission receive a staff presentation summarizing the status of the West Downtown Improvement Project.

BACKGROUND:

West Downtown is the only predominantly residential neighborhood within the Central City Redevelopment Project Area. Acknowledging the importance of this neighborhood to the overall health of the Redevelopment Agency's Project Area, the Agency Board appropriated \$50,000 in its Fiscal Year 2002 Budget toward a community outreach effort. This effort enabled neighborhood residents to identify needs and desires for possible future infrastructure improvements. Agency staff conducted a number of professionally facilitated community meetings to gather input from residents. A Summary Report was developed and presented to the Agency Board on January 14, 2003. The Summary Report included a list of participants' responses. Topping the list of the resident's needs and desires for their neighborhood were "improved lighting" and improvements to "sidewalks, parkways, and crosswalks."

As part of the 2003 Tax Allocation Bond Issuance, the Agency Board included funding for various West Downtown Improvements in the amount of \$4 million. At a special meeting of the Agency Board on January 27, 2005, they reallocated a portion of the project budget to other priority projects, changing the budget to \$3.5 million.

Based on the desires and needs of the neighborhood, Agency staff worked with the Public Works Engineering and Transportation Divisions to develop the current scope for the West Downtown Improvement Project (Project). The goals of the Project are to improve pedestrian safety and enhance the neighborhood sense-of-place through addressing goals identified by residents. The Project elements focus on enhancing the West Downtown corridors along Anapamu and Ortega Streets that extend from the Highway 101 pedestrian overbridges to Downtown and State Street. Project elements include: pedestrian-oriented lighting, sidewalk replacement as needed, enhanced

crosswalks, bulb-outs, new street trees, and drought tolerant landscaping at Project intersections.

Due to neighborhood-oriented project goals and budget realities, improvements focus on the Castillo Street, Bath Street, and De La Vina Street intersections and extend along the Ortega and Anapamu corridors between Highway 101 to, but not including, Chapala Street. Comments from the Architectural Board of Review (ABR) review of concept plans in 2005, and again in 2006, strongly encouraged the inclusion of Chapala Street in the design proposal. As a result, these intersections will be included as bid alternates and constructed only if funding is available.

DISCUSSION:

The primary design elements have not changed significantly since Project conception, and include pedestrian-oriented lighting, sidewalk replacement as needed, enhanced crosswalks, bulb-outs, new street trees, and drought tolerant landscaping at Project intersections. The Project proposes to remove 18 street trees (various species) and 10 shrubs. These removals are proposed to take out trees that are dead or dying, and to improve the short and long term aesthetics of the neighborhood. Approximately 87 new street trees are proposed, with a net gain of 69 new street trees.

The Street Tree Advisory Committee (STAC) reviewed the project in October 2008 and recommended removal of 15 of the 18 street trees. The STAC did not recommend the removal of three Tipuana trees located on the north side of the 200 block of Ortega Street. The Tipuana trees grow into the Southern California Edison electrical lines and experience topping, thereby causing the trees to deteriorate over time. In October 2008, the Park and Recreation Commission (Commission) concurred with staff's recommendation and approved the removal of all 18 trees, although concern was expressed for removing all of the Tipuana trees on Ortega.

Since that time, ABR reviewed the Project and had concerns with the number of mature street trees proposed for removal. They asked staff to study canopy coverage with the possibility of adding additional tree wells. They encouraged staff to conduct a public meeting to address street tree removal, planting, and replacement plans, prior to returning for Preliminary Approval. Staff also determined that it was important to discuss these issues with property owners.

On December 13, 2008, staff held two neighborhood meetings and invited property owners and residents located within the Project limits. The purpose of the meetings was to review specific project elements and address comments and concerns attendees may have, including proposed tree removals, plantings, and replacements. There were an estimated 6 people at the first meeting and 3 at the second. Staff spoke with attendees regarding street tree removals. Although some property owners did not necessarily like the idea of removing street trees in front of their homes, they understood the need and reasons for the proposed tree removals.

Staff has closely examined each street tree proposed for removal. Staff has decided that removal of the 3 Tipuana trees on the 200 block of Ortega Street, while consistent with long term goals of a more sustainable urban forest, should be delayed until a phased approach can be developed to minimize canopy loss to property owners. The Project is now consistent with STAC recommendations.

Staff anticipates a return to the ABR and Historic Landmarks Commission for final approval in February. Construction is targeted for spring 2009, and is to be completed in the fall 2009.

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APPROVED BY: Nancy L. Rapp, Parks & Recreation Director