



Independent, locally owned and operated!

www.lamorindaweekly.com 925-377-0977

Published May 24th, 2023

'Detail' design review of Pleasant Hill Road Pathway Project to move forward

By Lou Fancher

During the May 8 Lafayette City Council meeting, Engineering Services Manager Matt Luttrupp gave an update regarding the Pleasant Hill Road Center Median Pathway and requested authorization for staff to complete the design with the preservation of the dedicated right turn lane and drop-off area, per the city's commitment to Assemblymember Rebecca Bauer-Kahan who helped secure a grant for the project.

The purpose of approving the design completion is not to move into the construction phase, Luttrupp said, but work toward having plans shovel ready to be in the best position possible to compete for future grants. If the Terraces development proceeds, additional opportunities may present themselves for extending the expanded pathway through the Terraces property and separately, to downtown Lafayette and the BART station.

In 2022, the city received an earmark grant of \$238,000 from the state of California to fund a technical study and design work for the project. Luttrupp noted that Lafayette has spent approximately \$85,000 on pathway consulting fees to date. If a reallocation of the funds is requested, the city may have to absorb that \$85,000.

According to Luttrupp's staff report, the concept for the pathway would eliminate gaps and pressure points in the transportation network in Lafayette, allow pedestrians and cyclists the ability to avoid conflicts at the SR-24 on- and off-ramps connecting to Pleasant Hill Road, while providing a direct connection to the Class I Pathway along Pleasant Hill Road south of Mt. Diablo Boulevard to the Lafayette-Moraga Regional Trail.

Two virtual public meetings were held by staff in July 2022 and in March 2023, where the revised traffic study and the two technically viable pathway configuration options were reviewed and discussed. Option 2, is the staff recommended design alternative, included a 10-foot-wide pathway with 2-foot-wide shoulders and staged pedestrian crossings, and suggested a design involving widening Pleasant Hill Road to the west, preserving the dedicated right turn lane from northbound Pleasant Hill Road.

A summary of the details in the staff report available online cover impacts on traffic, street parking, bike lanes, sidewalk widths, and a center median pathway, the latter of which was not supported by the majority of the public.

While acknowledging the project is controversial and altering existing road configurations and traffic patterns involves change and resistance is high, Luttrupp said staff believes the concerns have been mitigated by design alterations. Furthermore, the project conforms to the City Council's Vision Zero policy and provides a viable pathway extension that eliminates a gap in the pedestrian and bicycle network. While receiving a number of additional suggestions from the public, he said staff believes that further study is unlikely to produce meaningful alternatives other than those that have already been provided.

Questions from council first concentrated on the center median design and its safety features. Luttrupp suggested improvements could be made to the design and additional discussions held with Kittelson & Associates concerning safety elements. He said other options suggested by the public or council had been thoroughly examined, but all had negatives, not the least of which was for a tunnel proposed that he said would be "breathtakingly expensive."

Public comment at the meeting came primarily from residents who did not support the project, citing potential traffic delays, a lack of understanding if students would even use the path, the extensive cost of the project, and potential environmental issues. Approximately 90 written comments were submitted from community members. Most people spoke about the complex congestion issues in the targeted area and said that ultimately, the pathway plan as it stands would not solve the safety issues.

Community member Eric Law, who presented the concept for the pathway project to the Transportation and Circulation Commission in August 2020, appeared and said his project at the beginning represented to him an engineering challenge that he did not anticipate would become political. He said public input served to make projects better and encouraged the council to persist while listening to the public and working to improve Lafayette.

Council discussion focused on design features of the latest detail plan, the ramifications of pausing the project or not pausing and conducting additional studies, and the process involved in re-appropriating the funds. After extensive dialogue with Luttrupp, three council members supported staff's recommendation to continue the study process, incorporate more of the public input, and work with Kittelson consultants and the council to improve the safety of downtown Lafayette and the surrounding streets and neighborhoods. In a 3-1 vote, with Council Member Susan Candell voting no, (Mayor Carl Anduri was absent), the council authorized the staff to complete the design, with the understanding that improvements will be considered in future design plans.

The full staff report and written public comments can be viewed on the city website, www.lovelafayette.org, in the May 8 agenda packet link.

Reach the reporter at: info@lamorindaweekly.com

[back](#)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA