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Council hears final recommendations from Burton Valley Elementary Traffic Calming study



Traffic Count Location Map

Image provided

By Lou Fancher

Transportation Program Manager Patrick Golier presented the city staff's final recommendations for the Burton Valley Elementary Traffic Calming Pilot Project to the Lafayette City Council at its May 22 meeting. The project launched in 2021 and followed years of requests from residents of the neighborhood and the Burton Valley school community to improve safety in the neighborhood and specifically, around Burton Valley Elementary.

The one-year pilot project conducted by the city included pre- and post-project evaluations of the installed measures. In February and March, a survey was mailed to households located within the area of the pilot study to gather community response to three of the pilot project's nine traffic

calming and pedestrian/bicycle measures. The survey results were key to determining which elements should be retained and which should be removed.

Golier itemized the traffic calming elements that were installed during the pilot project, including: eleven speed humps on Burton, Lucas, Silverado, Merriewood, and Rohrer Drives and Michael Lane; white pole delineators on both ends of each speed hump to discourage drivers from using the roadway shoulder; part-time restricted parking zones on Silverado, Merriewood, and Rohrer drives aligned with school drop-off and pick-up hours; red curbs/permanent no parking zones near corners; reduced lane widths to slow vehicle speeds and provide a wider shoulder; markings and delineators to emphasize lane lines; the addition of a stop sign on Indian Way at Merriewood Drive; a right-turn-only sign from the Burton Valley Elementary driveway at Merriewood Drive; installation of a fourth leg to the crosswalk at the intersection of Burton, Silverado, Lucas and Somerset drives and "ladder striping" emphasizing existing crosswalks at Silverado and Merriewood.

The staff had been directed by the council to gather information regarding adding a permanent pathway/sidewalk to Burton Valley Elementary School along the west sides of Burton, Silverado and Merriewood Drives. Toole Design Group, a civil engineering consulting firm, prepared conceptual designs and planning-level cost estimates for the permanent pathway. To help the community visualize the sidewalk a photo-simulation was created and a link to the rendering on the city's project webpage was included with the community survey.

The specific items eligible for community input on the survey and up for consideration and public comment at the May meeting were the speed humps, the white pole delineators, the part-time parking restrictions, and whether or not to continue with the permanent pathway. Some of the measures are co-dependent and would result in specific, interlinked actions – for example, if the delineators were eliminated and the speed humps retained, the humps would need to be extended to the gutter. For that reason, Golier recommended the linked items be addressed "as a package."

The data collected during the study included vehicle speeds and traffic counts. The results showed a 42% reduction in the number of drivers speeding, with an overall 5 mph reduction from an average of 32 mph to 27 mph in areas with posted speed of 25 mph. The safety measures were less effective when it came to the volume of motor vehicles, which dropped only 7% in one area and in all other areas decreased at lower percentages. The average numbers of bicyclists and pedestrians was mixed; increasing only slightly in some locations during school start and end times and dropping by small numbers in other areas and at different times.

The community input related to the permanent pathway, which would come at an estimated cost of \$2.9 million, and the pilot project's other measures came from the nearly 737 households within the study area receiving the survey. Golier said the survey in summary communicated that the city should retain the speed humps, remove the delineators and extend the speed humps to the gutter, and eliminate the part-time parking restrictions. Furthermore, plans to pursue a permanent pathway/sidewalk were not supported by 66% of the respondents, with only 115 (34%) who favored retaining the option. The staff report noted the city does not have a dedicated funding source for the sidewalk and it is unclear how construction funds would be acquired.

Questions from the council included one from Mayor Carl Anduri, who asked if the collective vehicle speeds in Burton Valley going down 5 mph is a significant number to an expert in the field. Golier said in terms of public safety, the reduction "is a great success story."

Public comments came from one man who spoke for the 415 residents active in Burton Valley Safe Streets, a coalition working together to make the streets in their neighborhoods safer. He urged the council to follow the staff's recommendation and to approve and extend the speed humps, invest more funds in and focus on downtown safety, work to preserve the character of the neighborhood, and make efforts aimed at rebuilding the trust of the Burton Valley community. Most speakers acknowledged the pilot study was a success in terms of the city's Zero Vision plans and traffic calming, but objected to what they perceived as extended, undue and "undemocratic" focus on Burton Valley and its safety. Importantly, several people encouraged the council to consider the needs of elder adults and people with disabilities separately from traffic calming and seek a proper safety study and funding for measures aimed specifically at protecting the safety of vulnerable residents.

Recognizing that concluding the pilot project requires compromise and has involved divisive confrontations during its long and contentious process, council members expressed their intention to work with the community to re-establish trust. The cost to make the recommended changes to the traffic calming and pedestrian/bicycle measures in Burton Valley is approximately \$40,000, which will be discussed and acted upon during a council meeting in June. The vote to support the staff recommendation was unanimous at 4-0 (with Vice Mayor Gina Dawson absent).

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