



DATE: September 8, 2020

CATEGORY: Consent

DEPT.: Public Works

TITLE: **Amendment to Resolution Nos. 18470 and 18489 to Extend the Castro Street Closure for Outdoor Dining to December 31, 2020, and Expand to Include Other Businesses**

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt a Resolution Amending Resolution No. 18470 and Resolution No. 18489 Temporarily Suspending and Designating Parking Restrictions and Prohibitions Pursuant to Mountain View City Code Chapter 19 and Temporarily Closing the 100, 200, 300, and 400 Blocks of Castro Street Pursuant to California Vehicle Code Section 21101 to Facilitate Outdoor Dining, to be read in title only, further reading waived (Attachment 1 to the Council report).

BACKGROUND

On March 17, 2020, the County of Santa Clara (the County) issued a Shelter-in-Place order in response to the COVID-19 pandemic that required the closure of nearly all nonessential businesses, which included gyms, fitness facilities, and personal care services, and limited restaurants to take-out service. On June 1, 2020, the County's COVID-19 Shelter-in-Place order was modified to allow outdoor dining at restaurants starting on June 5, 2020. On June 9, 2020, the City Council adopted Resolution No. 18470 to temporarily close the 100, 200, 300, and 400 blocks of Castro Street, between West Evelyn Avenue and Mercy Street, to vehicular traffic ("Castro Street Closure") to facilitate the outdoor dining program, "Castro Summer StrEATs." According to the original resolution, the closure to motor vehicles of the four blocks of Castro Street is effective until September 30, 2020.

On August 25, 2020, the City Council adopted an amendment to Resolution No. 18470 to extend the prohibition on operating bicycles, electric bicycles, motorized scooters, and transportation devices along Castro Street sidewalks (with an exemption for children 10 years and under) to roadways within the Castro Summer StrEATs outdoor dining program.

During the month of July 2020, the County began allowing more businesses to operate outdoors pursuant to certain mandatory directives or guidelines for the operations.

On July 14, 2020, the County issued a mandatory directive for gyms and fitness facilities that would allow for outdoor operations. This directive requires businesses to submit social distancing protocols, provide signage, require face coverings even while exercising, and limit the density of users. It also requires a reservation system, verbal screening, sanitization procedures, and marking of personal exercise zones.

On July 29, 2020, the California Department of Public Health released further guidance with similar requirements related to outdoor operations of personal care services, hair salons, and barber shops.

On August 28, 2020, the California Department of Public Health issued a new Statewide Public Health Officer Order that establishes a four-tier system for counties to reopen specific business sectors. As of August 31, 2020, Santa Clara County is in Tier One, Widespread, which will allow hair salons and barbershops limited indoor operations, but restricts all other personal care services to outdoor-only operations. Under Tier One, restaurants also continue to be restricted to outdoor dining only. The County Public Health Officer may establish more restrictive measures.

ANALYSIS

Feedback on Castro Summer StrEATs Program

Since the beginning of the Castro Summer StrEATs outdoor dining program (the program), staff has been working with downtown businesses and the community to garner feedback, analyze issues, and make adjustments to the program. Regular check-in meetings have been held with the Central Business Association, the Chamber of Commerce, and individual business operators, which resulted in several revisions to program guidelines and operations. Adjustments include a shift from a food court to a restaurant table format, extension of the street closure across the Caltrain tracks, additional bike signage, pedestrian barricades at intersections, traffic signal changes, changes to the table layout, upgrades to street lighting, and clarification of guidelines related to noise, lighting, shade coverings, and ground covers. While various aspects of the program have been adjusted, feedback received from a majority of businesses and many members of the community revealed strong support for the program.

The program has helped downtown businesses to reopen or continue to operate, while doing so in a manner that satisfies County requirements. City staff recently conducted

outreach meetings and a survey to understand business impacts of the program. A summary of key findings includes:

- Most businesses saw a slight or significant improvement in business revenues since the start of the program, but revenues continue to be lower than before the COVID-19 pandemic began.
- A majority of the businesses support extending the program through the end of the year.
- Businesses are concerned about operating outdoors during the cold-weather months.

The Central Business Association has also indicated support for continuing the program to at least the end of the year.

The City also conducted an online survey of users of the program. Key findings included:

- Approximately 70 percent of respondents had visited downtown multiple times since the program began, with most visits being for outdoor dining or food pickup.
- 90 percent of users felt positively about the program and would like to see more of this in Mountain View.
- Negative experiences among users generally related to access to restrooms and handwashing stations. It should be noted that there are three portable handwashing stations and one portable restroom along Castro Street. Access to indoor restrooms is also provided to restaurant patrons. The business owners have expressed a preference not to have additional portable restrooms in the roadway area with the outdoor dining.

Extension of Castro Street Closure

As provided in Resolution No. 18470, the Castro Street Closure ends on September 30, 2020, unless extended by Council. Given the ongoing upward trend in the number of COVID-19 cases, staff expects that the County's Public Health Order, which currently prohibits indoor operations of various businesses, will continue through the end of the year. Even if the County Public Health Order is modified to allow indoor operations, it is likely that the level of indoor operations for restaurants and other businesses will be

limited, which will curtail businesses' ability to recover. As noted above, there is support among the businesses and public to continue the closure beyond September 30, 2020.

Staff recommends extending the Castro Street closure through December 31, 2020, to support the economic recovery of downtown businesses. With the ongoing County order for nonessential employees to work from home to the greatest extent possible, the continuation of the closure is not expected to create a significant traffic impact. The Santa Clara Valley Transportation Authority (VTA) has agreed to continue rerouting buses for the duration of the program. Likewise, Recology has agreed to continue rerouting solid waste collection in downtown. In addition, Shoreline Amphitheatre/Live Nation and the Mountain View Whisman School District are willing to allow the City to utilize the borrowed bollards, barriers, and tables for the extended period.

One challenge for businesses in having outdoor operations through December will be weather conditions. The Castro Summer StrEATs Pilot Program guidelines do allow businesses to use portable heaters, which can help once the weather turns colder. However, businesses will not be able to operate in the street when it rains. Tents and canopies in the street are not a viable option to provide protection from the rain. The County's Mandatory Directive for Outdoor Dining does not allow tents or canopies with sides because they reduce open airflow. In addition, portable heaters cannot be placed under tent/canopy coverings due to potential fire hazards. Finally, when it rains, water will be flowing along the street into the storm drain system.

Other Business Operations

In addition to requests to extend the outdoor dining program until the end of the year, some downtown businesses along the closed blocks of Castro Street have requested to use the street for their operations. For instance, a fitness business has requested to hold fitness classes in the early morning and early evening hours. There is space available on Castro Street to accommodate additional business operations. Staff recommends amending the program to allow other businesses along the closed blocks of Castro Street to operate in the right-of way, in accordance with the appropriate County mandatory directives and State guidelines.

These businesses will be required to enter into a no-fee license agreement similar to the restaurants participating in the Castro StrEATs Pilot Program. They will also be required to comply with the Citywide Outdoor Business Operations Program for temporary outdoor business operations throughout the City, if approved by the Council. This related item is also included on the September 8, 2020 Council Agenda. Should Council not approve the Outdoor Business Operations program, but still wish to allow other

businesses to operate outdoors on the closed blocks of Castro, the resolution in Attachment 1 to this Council report will need to be modified to remove references to the Citywide Outdoor Business Operations Program and to indicate that the City will develop requirements for these businesses to operate in the closed blocks of Castro Street.

FISCAL IMPACT

Any costs associated with the recommended action will be nominal and will not require additional funding allocations. An ongoing commitment of staff time will be required to on-board new participating businesses, monitor operations, and continue coordination with participating businesses.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Do not adopt the amendment to Resolution Nos. 18470 and 18489.
2. Modify the amendment to Resolution Nos. 18470 and 18489.
3. Provide other direction to staff.

PUBLIC NOTICING

Agenda posting and e-mail distribution to the Downtown Committee, Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Central Business Association, Mountain View Chamber of Commerce, and Old Mountain View Neighborhood Association.

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Attachment: 1. Amendment to Resolution Nos. 18470 and 18489

cc: TP – Bodduna, TM, APWD – Skinner