



MEMORANDUM

Community Services Department

DATE: April 18, 2018

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Kristine Crosby, Recreation Supervisor
Michele Petersen, Recreation Supervisor

SUBJECT: Expanded Programming and Activation for Civic Center Plaza

RECOMMENDATION

Review and comment on the current programming of Civic Center Plaza and prioritize suggested new amenities and programming elements.

BACKGROUND

At the April 30, 2013 City Council Study Session on the Mountain View Center for Performing Arts—Operating Models Comparison and Analysis, Council directed staff to look for opportunities to increase utilization of the City Center Plaza, including updating Council Policy H-4, Use of the Civic Center Plaza, to allow limited commercial use.

Following the Council Study Session, an interdepartmental committee was formed to focus on increasing utilization of Civic Center Plaza. What came out of the committee meetings were several ideas that were brought back to City Council for approval. Ideas included the purchase of new tables, chairs, and umbrellas to encourage passive use. A recommendation to provide noontime music on the first Friday of each month and “low-level” events each quarter (yoga classes, spring parade) were also proposed. Council endorsed staff’s suggestions, and \$12,000 was appropriated to the Community Services Department for the purchase of new furniture and low-level programming of the Plaza for Fiscal Year 2013-14.

Staff recommendations for updates to Council Policy H-4, previously updated in 1993, included allowing commercial use and that commercial use be limited to those events that provide a benefit to the residents or businesses within the community. Plaza use was to be limited to the following users and awarded on a first-come, first-served basis:

1. Nonprofit organization and/or community group whose service area includes Mountain View and is located in Mountain View.
2. Nonprofit organization and/or community group whose service area includes Mountain View and is not located within Mountain View.
3. Users engaging in free speech/assembly/religious expression.
4. Commercial use by businesses located in Mountain View.
5. Commercial use by businesses not located in Mountain View that benefits the residents and/or businesses in Mountain View.

Council also directed staff to evaluate possible reductions to fees to increase utilization. Previously, the application fee for Plaza use was \$135 and waived for free speech, assembly, and religious expression. To encourage greater utilization of the Plazas, staff recommended modifying the application fees as follows:

1. Mountain View-based nonprofits 501(c) – \$0
2. Mountain View serving nonprofit and/or community group – \$50
3. Commercial use – \$270

Council Policy H-4, at the time, only allowed for use of the Civic Center Plaza and staff requested to expand the policy to include use at other City Plazas, such as Centennial Plaza and/or Charleston Plaza.

These recommended updates and a change to the name of Council Policy H-4, Use of City Plazas, were approved by resolution in April 2014.

INITIAL STEPS

Furniture Purchase – In late 2013, 10 wrought iron mesh tables, 20 wrought iron mesh chairs, and 3 wrought iron mesh benches were added to the Plaza. The furniture was also complemented by five umbrellas and umbrella stands. The furniture has created a

welcoming atmosphere that is inviting to residents and visitors utilizing City Hall, the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts, Library, and/or the downtown.

Monthly Programming – Children and family events complemented the furniture and began in October 2013. The events were named Plaza Palooza and scheduled the first Friday of each month. For the first year, staff hired performers for noontime children’s performances and evening family concerts on the first Friday of each month. Weather proved problematic from November through March the first year, and the noontime children’s performance attendance never really picked up a following despite our best efforts of marketing (banners, posters, flyers, and signage). By October 2014, staff recognized the need to rebrand the scheduled programming and solely focused on evening and family events between April and September of each year and the first Friday events were renamed “Concerts on the Plaza.”

In 2015, 2016, and 2017, staff has produced the six-concert series on the Plaza. Attendance has grown each year with the current level at approximately 250 to 300 attendees per event. The event provides a music performance, pop-up park amenities as well as a food truck available for food purchases. Bean Scene also provides a food option as well as nonalcoholic and alcoholic beverage service.

Additional events that have taken place on the Plaza include the City’s Technology Showcase. This event takes place during the day and provides an opportunity for local businesses to show their products to the community. The event is well attended and will continue to take place annually in the summer months. In 2017, the Human Relations Commission held a Multicultural Festival on Civic Center Plaza. The event featured community resources tables, food trucks, and dance and musical performances throughout the event.

A number of additional events, produced by outside agencies, have occurred since staff began actively programming Civic Center Plaza. The German International School of Silicon Valley has been approved to host the Holiday Market since 2013. This event is held annually in December and, due to its success, has expanded onto Mercy Street and into Pioneer Park. The applicant transforms the event area into a traditional outdoor winter market typically found in Germany. Another popular event is Yoga on the Plaza. Yoga Belly, a downtown yoga studio, has been holding this annual event since 2013 as well. The event is held on a Saturday morning in mid-September and attracts up to 300 people for a high-energy morning of stretching and meditation.

PREVIOUS REVIEW OF PLAZA ENHANCEMENTS

A landscape architect was hired last year to design enhancement options of both the Castro Street medians and Civic Center Plaza. Callander & Associates developed two conceptual plans that provided physical enhancement options for the Plaza. These concepts were reviewed by the City Council on April 18, 2017. During the discussion of the proposed enhancements, Council also discussed additional programming options to further activate the Plaza along with physical improvements. Council approved a motion to table this item until a future meeting. Staff has since been directed to review both physical and programmatic improvements that could be made to the Plaza and return to both the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) and City Council.

ANALYSIS

Staff has been directed to review current programming at Civic Center Plaza and to look at new ways to enhance current program levels and provide a variety of new options to enliven the space.

Staff conducted a meeting to establish what several other divisions/departments envisioned regarding enhancements and programming of Civic Center Plaza. The ideas that came out of the meeting include new amenities and activities for passive use, place making, and new programming ideas for Civic Center Plaza.

A Phased Approach to New Amenities and Passive Use

A number of new amenities have been identified to further engage the public to utilize the Civic Center Plaza. In an effort to determine the effectiveness of the elements, staff suggests a phased approach to adding new elements. The first phase would be to add to the existing furniture, create a new family-friendly seating area, and to provide passive games for the public to engage on the Plaza.

The existing furniture is well utilized throughout the day, especially during events, and staff recommends purchasing five additional tables, 20 chairs, and five umbrellas and stands for the Plaza to provide more seating for the public that match existing furniture.

In an effort to create an eye-catching, family-friendly area, a large 45'x40' synthetic grass area would be installed, and 12 commercial-grade Adirondack chairs would be purchased to be placed in the area. The turf would be anchored by large concrete planters that would accommodate greenery and anchor additional umbrellas for shade.

To encourage passive use of the Plaza, staff proposes placing activities on the Plaza for the public to participate in at their own leisure close to the turf area. Passive activities would include life-size chess and checkers and commercial-grade bean bag toss. These will not only be highly visible; they will provide an opportunity for the public to be active with friends and family. By adding these new amenities, the Plaza will be more vibrant and provide a sense of place that currently does not exist.

Additional amenities that could be added in later phases were also discussed. One such idea was the addition of outdoor musical instruments, such as those found at parks within the City. These would be accessible for passers-by to take a moment and make their own music with family and friends. This addition would draw those that may not usually stop on the Plaza and provide additional options for engagement.

The installation of two Soofa benches, solar-powered phone charging benches, could assist staff with better data collection and provide functioning charging stations to the public. These charging benches would attract the public to sit on the Plaza while waiting for their phone to charge. In addition to charging capabilities, each bench is sensor-enabled to measure activity taking place within a 150' radius of the bench. Measurable activity includes hourly and daily counts of WiFi-enabled devices and spatial flow of the devices within the location (i.e., directional flow of pedestrians on the Plaza). These benches would provide not only an amenity to the public, but data of Plaza usage for staff.

As part of an existing capital improvement project, the City's Facilities team is developing an outdoor lighting plan for the Civic Center Plaza. Therefore, at this time, staff is not recommending any additional lighting plans for the Plaza.

New Programming Ideas

Similar to adding new amenities to the Plaza in a phased approach, staff recommends increasing programming in a phased approach as well.

In addition to the existing Concert on the Plaza taking place the first Friday of the month between April and September, staff recommends adding a second event on the third Friday of the month. This would be an additional Concert on the Plaza taking place the third Friday of each month, April through September. Staff will look at finding different types of performers and music genres for the additional event dates. This could include Shakespeare groups and other performing artists that would appeal to large audiences. This would increase the number of events taking place on the Plaza. These performances would have the same event time of 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.

In addition, staff recommends the creation of a Kids Music Festival to be held the second Saturday of the month, May through July. The Kids Music Festival would feature a children's entertainer, games and crafts for youth attendees, and information tables for youth services. This event would be held late morning so as not to interfere with performances held at the Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts.

Staff recommends purchasing a sound system that can be utilized for amplified sound for events and classes. Currently, performers for Concert on the Plaza bring their own sound equipment, and quality can vary depending on performer. Some potential performers do not own their own adequate sound systems, and a City-owned and -operated sound system will allow for consistent quality, as well as reduce costs for City events where a sound system is currently rented. Sound engineers from the Center for the Performing Arts would be responsible for setup, operation, and take-down of the sound equipment for each event.

Additional Programming Options

Saturday morning special events could be scheduled to further activate the Plaza. Initial event ideas include Art Displays on the Plaza, a pet adoption event in partnership with Silicon Valley Animal Control Authority (Paws on the Plaza), and a health and wellness fair. These community events would bring different segments of the population to enjoy the events and enjoy the space. Events would take place in the mornings to not impact the Center for the Performing Arts schedule.

New outdoor exercise classes can bring the public to experience the Plaza in a different way. To date, the Yoga on the Plaza organized by Yoga Belly was successful, and staff could build on that success. Local exercise instructors could be contracted to provide classes. Drawing on the success of previous Yoga on the Plaza events, a more regular fitness class schedule consisting of Yoga, Zumba, Pilates, stroller-fitness, aerobics, and cardio/strength programs could be added through the Recreation Division's existing contract class program. The Plaza would be added as a "facility" and participants would register through the Recreation Division in order to participate. Staff suggests waiting to schedule such programming until the new Community Center renovation is complete. This will allow staff to build relationships with new fitness instructors and build their clientele. Should classes be located on the Plaza, staff would charge for programming and therefore, create revenue from these programs.

Staff has received requests from the public to offer outdoor movies geared towards adults, building upon the success of the Summer Outdoor Movie Night Series, which is marketed as family-friendly. A fall movie series held on four Thursday evenings in September could be added. Featured movies would be geared towards adults and

would begin roughly around 7:30 p.m. Food and beverages could be available for sale through the Bean Scene Café. Attendees would be encouraged to bring their own lawn chair to sit on and a selection of Adirondack chairs will be available to the public.

Community Art Grant Program for the Plaza

An option to further engage the public in activating the Plaza would be to create a Place-Making Grant Program. The program would invite artists, designers, community members, groups, and nonprofits to submit ideas to bring new artistic elements to the Plaza. A process would be developed whereby a Request for Proposals (RFP) process would be completed. The RFP would provide details of the anticipated outcomes of projects or programs and allow submissions to be accepted.

Other agencies have had success with this type of program whereby permanent artistic furniture and short-term art projects have been on display in public spaces.

Should the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC) and City Council be interested in such a grant program, staff would engage the City's Visual Arts Committee to review how other agencies have implemented such programs, receive their feedback, and engage them through the new process.

FISCAL IMPACT

The cost of implementing each of the first-phase new amenities and passive use is estimated to cost approximately \$40,000. Attachment 1 to this memorandum provides a breakdown of each element suggested in this phase. This includes the additional matching tables/chairs/umbrellas as well as the new turf with concrete planters, Adirondack chairs, and checkers with chess sets.

The additional amenities described as future options include the Soofa benches. The purchase price is approximately \$4,500 each with annual software analytics for \$1,500 per year per bench. The outdoor music elements vary by size and type and range in cost between \$10,000 to \$20,000 for three instruments that are sold as a bundle.

The cost of implementing the first phase of additional programming would cost approximately \$19,000. This total includes an additional Concert on the Plaza event per month from April to September for a total of approximately \$10,700 and the addition of a Saturday morning kids music festival to be held once a month from May to July for approximately \$8,500. To help coordinate these new events, additional staffing of an hourly Recreation Specialist would be requested at a cost of approximately \$13,500. This would provide 500 hours of staffing to find and book artists for the new events,

work with community groups to support the kids music festival, and be one of the lead staff the day of the event.

The new sound system to help support all Plaza events is estimated to cost \$20,000. This sound system would provide staff flexibility to provide a simple system for smaller events up to large-scale events such as the Community Tree Lighting event. This system would reduce ongoing costs for sound engineering and setup we currently pay a contractor to provide.

Additional programming beyond the initial phase include adding new Saturday events throughout the year such as art displays, Paws on the Plaza Adoption event, or health and wellness fair. For any of these one-time events, staff estimates a cost of \$5,200 per event.

The Plaza could be transformed into an outdoor exercise area, especially on weekends. Future exercise classes could be scheduled at this location. Once staff is prepared to move forward with such programming, approximately \$5,000 would be requested to implement initial classes, and this cost would be offset by revenue received from those registered.

The cost to implement an outdoor movie series marketed toward adults for four nights in September would cost approximately \$9,400. The movie series would use the City's existing outdoor movie supplies which reduces costs.

Finally, staff is suggesting that a Place-Making Grant Program be established. This would allow local artists and groups to submit their creative ideas to further activate the Plaza. An RFP process would need to be developed and a review process created with the assistance of the City's Visual Arts Committee. Initial staff estimates are between \$10,000 to \$15,000 to help support the cost of awarding the Place-Making Grant Program.

A variety of options for additional programming are being listed. Based on recommendations of the PRC, the cost of staff time to coordinate additional events will be reviewed, and a final staffing model will be developed and forwarded to City Council.

ALTERNATIVES

Staff has provided a number of options to activate the Plaza. While an initial phase has been recommended, the PRC may review all options and prioritize the elements listed

individually. Staff is also interested in any additional ideas the PRC may have to activate the Plaza and will bring recommendations to the City Council next month.

NEXT STEPS

Based on input from the PRC, staff will bring Civic Center Plaza activation recommendations to the City Council in a Study Session on May 22, 2018. During the Study Session, Council will provide staff with further direction, and staff will return at a later date with a final Plaza activation strategy and associated budget to a regular City Council meeting.

KC-MP/AF/5/CSD

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Attachment: 1. Civic Center Plaza Programming and Activation Budget