

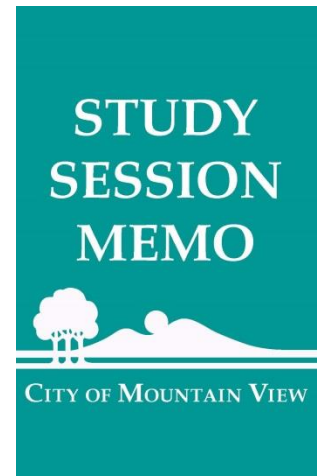
DATE: May 22, 2018

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council

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TITLE: **Expanded Programming and Activation for
Civic Center Plaza**



PURPOSE

The purpose of this Study Session is to provide an update regarding current programming scheduled on the Civic Center Plaza and to present proposed expanded programming and activation elements for the Civic Center Plaza.

BACKGROUND

At the April 30, 2013 City Council Study Session on the Mountain View Center for the 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 the 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.

On April 18, 2017, staff, along with Callander and Associates, landscape architects, presented to Council conceptual plans to improve both the Castro Street medians and Civic Center Plaza. At that time, Council approved the plans for the Castro Street medians. The review of the plaza improvements was tabled because the interest was more focused on increased programming than with physical improvements to the Civic Center Plaza.

DISCUSSION

Plaza Activation to Date

Based on previous direction from Council, in late 2013, staff purchased 10 wrought iron mesh tables, 20 wrought iron mesh chairs, and 3 wrought iron mesh benches to add 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. The City also utilizes the Plaza for the very well attended Tree Lighting event and Spring Parade.

Additional events that have taken place on the Plaza include the City's Technology Showcase. This event takes place during the day and provides 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 resource tables, food trucks, and dance and musical performances throughout the event. All together, there were ten City-sponsored events on the Plaza in 2017.

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.

Proposed New Plaza Amenities

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 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 30' by 30' 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 non-programmed 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 beanbag toss. These will not only be highly visible; it will also 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.

New bike racks are also being recommended as a new element on the Plaza. New bike racks can vary from very simple design to one-of-a-kind work of art. Staff will provide Council with a few examples at the Study Session to review and provide comments on to better understand the type and size desired.

There are additional amenities that could be added in later phases. 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 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 has the option to be sensor-enabled to measure activity taking place within a 150' radius of the bench. Measurable activity includes hourly and daily counts of Wi-Fi 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 Elements

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

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 and 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 Mountain View Center for the Performing Arts schedule.

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

In order to further engage the public in activating the Plaza, staff recommends creating 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 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.

Initial Cost Estimates

The one-time cost of implementing each of the first-phase amenities is estimated to cost approximately \$49,500. Attachment 1 to the Study Session report provides a breakdown of the recommended activation elements. This includes the additional

matching tables/chairs/umbrellas as well as the new turf with concrete planters, Adirondack chairs, bike racks 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 and \$20,000 for three instruments that are sold as a bundle.

The annual 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 set-up 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 approximately \$5,200 per event.

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 Placemaking 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 and \$15,000 to help support the initial cost of awarding the Placemaking Grant Program.

A variety of options for additional programming are being listed. If any are desired, the cost of staff time to coordinate additional events will be reviewed and a final staffing model will be developed.

Parks and Recreation Commission Review

On April 18, 2018, staff presented the recommended new programming and activation elements of the Civic Center Plaza to the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC). Overall, the Parks and Recreation Commission approved of staff's recommended amenities and programming elements. They particularly liked the Kids Festival, the additional Concert on the Plaza, and Movie Night elements. Additional suggestions included providing different seating arrangements and to look into future opportunities for free exercise programs.

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council provide direction regarding proposed new Civic Center Plaza amenities and programming element.

Question 1: Does the Council support the proposed Phase 1 amenities, including synthetic turf, Adirondack chairs, concrete planter boxes, additional tables, chairs and umbrellas, and chess/checker board?

Question 2: Does Council support recommended Phase 1 programming elements, including one additional Concert on the Plaza per month, a kids music festival on one Saturday per month for three months, and a new sound system?

Question 3: Does Council have further input regarding additional amenities or programming for the Civic Center Plaza?

NEXT STEPS

Staff seeks direction on the items discussed in this report as well as direction to include the funding for Phase 1 amenities and staffing in the final FY 18-19 adopted budget. Implementation of these items is anticipated to be done in early 2019.

PUBLIC NOTICING – Agenda posting.

MP-KC-JRM-JPdIM/AF/2/CAM
224-05-22-18SS-E

Attachment: 1. Plaza Activation Cost Estimates