



MEMORANDUM

Community Services Department

DATE: April 12, 2017

TO: Parks and Recreation Commission

FROM: Bruce Hurlburt, Parks and Open Space Manager
J.P. de la Montaigne, Community Services Director

SUBJECT: Castro Street Median Renovation and City Hall Plaza Enhancement

RECOMMENDATION

Provide a recommendation to the City Council for a preferred concept(s) on the Castro Street medians and City Hall Plaza enhancements.

BACKGROUND

The Castro Street medians were installed in 1990. They have a soft green swath of turf lined with two rows of ornamental cherry trees, which are up-lit at night. The design worked well until rules for water conservation during the recent drought prohibited irrigation of ornamental turf in medians. Both the turf and ornamental trees have succumbed to the drought, providing an opportunity to redesign this downtown focal point.

Also in 1990, City Hall and the Center for the Performing Arts were built. The City Hall Plaza was constructed at the same time to connect the two buildings, creating a large open hardscape area. The Plaza has traditionally been an underutilized public space, partially due to its Spartan appearance.

Over the last few years, the City Council has requested the Community Services Department (CSD) find ways to activate the Plaza and increase its usage. CSD is taking a two-pronged approach by increasing the number of special events at the Plaza and exploring ways to improve the Plaza's physical features. Therefore, concepts for improving the City Hall Plaza are being explored at the same time as the Castro Street medians.

In January, the City selected Callander Associates Landscape Architecture to design enhancements for both areas. One set of designs addresses the Castro Street medians by incorporating new plantings and emphasizing low-water-use species with seasonal

blooming periods. The other set of designs addresses the City Hall Plaza by incorporating accent plantings to soften the Plaza hardscape and furniture enhancements to create a more inviting environment.

ANALYSIS

Castro Street Medians: Callander Associates has provided three concepts for the design of the Castro Street medians: Classic, Modern, and Contemporary. Each provides a unique vision for the look of Castro Street. All designs will utilize low-water-use plants and current infrastructure such as concrete walls and decorative wrought iron.

Classic:

The Classic concept comes closest to replicating the original landscape design for the medians. It provides an allée of multi-trunk fruitless olive trees down the center of the median. Surrounding the trees are ornamental grasses and shrubs for seasonal color and visual texture highlights. The up-lights for the trees will be updated to show beautiful silhouettes of the trees at night.

Modern:

The Modern concept picks up on the diagonal scoring of the gray concrete in the sidewalks and parking zones. It provides a bold vision using mature Canary Island palms in conjunction with succulents like agave and aloe while incorporating perennials for seasonal color. It also includes decorative bands of gravel to highlight the design. The palms will utilize both up-lighting and rings high in the trunk for down-lighting.

Contemporary:

The Contemporary concept provides gentle curving swaths of California native plantings with Mediterranean grasses and shrubs for accent and color. Large-scale trees are planted in an alternating pattern along the median. Trees would also be up-lit in this plan.

Plaza Enhancement: Callendar Associates studied the Plaza looking at elements such as pedestrian circulation and use. The company has provided a couple of visions for enhancing the look and use of the Plaza. These include adding new landscaped accent areas, furnishings, and amenities such as computer and cell phone charging terminals.

Plan 1:

This plan incorporates new furnishings that include additional tables and chairs throughout the Plaza, a new modular bench system, and utilizing umbrellas in bold primary colors for accent. The fountain would be converted into a planter to introduce soft landscape touches in the Plaza. Other perimeter planters would be replanted to complete the landscape theme. Trees in the southeast portion would be replaced by flowering dogwood trees. The planters in front of the Center would be upgraded and replanted. The sides of the tree planters and old fountain would be updated with patterned tiles providing visual interest. Finally, charging stations for computers and cell phones would be installed to allow users to work or enjoy social media while seated in the Plaza.

Plan 2:

This plan would incorporate large, whimsical seats in place of the modular benches and use a slightly different style for tables. The old fountain would again be utilized as a planter with a more formal spiral planting design using succulents around the existing sculpture. The plant palette would incorporate bamboo instead of trees in the southeast planters. Sofa benches with solar-powered cell phone/computer charging stations would also be incorporated.

Unfortunately, the cedar tree on the corner of Mercy and Castro Streets has declined significantly over the past few years and will need to be removed. Both plans would replace it with a large specimen boxed tree.

FISCAL IMPACT

Medians: Concepts are estimated to cost between \$295,000 and \$453,500 depending on which concept is implemented.

Plaza: Concepts are estimated to cost between \$160,000 and \$180,000 depending on which concept is implemented.

CSD currently has \$148,000 set aside for design and construction of the Castro Street medians.

NEXT STEPS

The Parks and Recreation Commission's recommended concept plan for the medians and Plaza will be presented to the City Council at their April 18, 2017 meeting. Callander Associates will begin construction drawings after the Council provides final

direction on the preferred options. Staff anticipates going out to bid for construction in late summer with the project being completed by January 2018.

BH-JPDLM/BR/2/CSD

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- Attachments:
1. Concept Drawings for Castro Street Medians and Plaza
 2. Cost Estimates for Concept Drawings
 3. Proposed Project Timeline