



DATE: April 18, 2017

CATEGORY: New Business

DEPT.: Community Services

TITLE: **Castro Street Median Renovation and City Hall Plaza Enhancement**

RECOMMENDATION

1. Recommend a preferred concept(s) for the renovation of the Castro Street medians.
2. Recommend a preferred concept(s) for City Hall Plaza enhancements.

BACKGROUND

The Castro Street medians were installed in 1990. They had a soft green swath of turf lined with two rows of ornamental cherry trees, which are uplit at night. The design worked well until State 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. Examples of the special events include Concerts on the Plaza, Yoga on the Plaza, and the Holiday Tree Lighting. Concepts for improving the City Hall Plaza physical features 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. Attachment 1 provides concept drawings for the various options discussed below.

Callander Associates will begin construction drawings after the City 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 early 2018.

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 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 uplights for the trees will be updated to show 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 uplighting and rings high in the trunk for downlighting.

Contemporary:

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

Plaza Enhancement: Callander Associates studied the Plaza, considering 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 for the Performing Arts 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 could 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, which is used in the Holiday Tree Lighting, has declined significantly over the past few years and will need to be removed in the near future. Both plans would replace it with a large specimen boxed tree.

DOWNTOWN COMMITTEE INPUT

The design concepts for the medians and Plaza were presented to the Downtown Committee on April 4, 2017. The Committee was not in favor of the Modern concept for the Castro Street medians. They believed the concept was too dramatic and not a good fit for Castro Street. They were in favor of either the Classic or Contemporary concepts. They suggested possibly using the multi-trunk olive trees from the Classic concept in the design and layout of the Contemporary concept. In regard to the City Hall Plaza enhancements, the Downtown Committee recommended Plan 1, with an emphasis on

the need for lots of power outlets. They also suggested using stepped seating around the fountain as well as different colors and tiles for the ground to break up the grey of the plaza.

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION INPUT

On April 12, 2017, the design concepts for the [Castro Street](#) medians and [City Hall Plaza space](#) were presented to the Parks and Recreation Commission (PRC). For the design of the Castro Street medians, the Commission recommended the Modern concept. Rather than palm trees, the PRC recommended utilizing a tree species that would reach 50' in height and 50' in width, with the purpose of providing canopy coverage over the median and pleasing visual aesthetics from the sidewalks on either side of the street. They also recommended blending the shrub palette from the Modern concept and Contemporary concept. The Commissioners recommended this plan with a 3-2 vote. They liked the clean look and the ability to see through the plants to both sides of the street. It was also noted that this plan addresses tree-trimming concerns of branches overhanging the streets as large trucks drive by.

In regard to the City Hall Plaza, the PRC recommended Plan 2 with an emphasis on providing a variety of seating options such as modular benches with ottomans and children activity areas. They liked the idea of more portable power stations and wanted special consideration for child safety when choosing materials and plants for the modifications to the Plaza's fountain. The commission voted 5-0 on this concept.

FISCAL IMPACT

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

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

CSD currently has \$200,000 set aside for design and construction of the Castro Street medians. Callander Associates will be paid \$52,000 for their services out of this \$200,000. Additional funding will be required to implement any of the options and could be built into the CIP.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Direct staff to explore other concepts for the Castro Street medians.
2. Do not pursue new landscaping of the Castro Street medians at this time.
3. Direct staff to pursue other concepts for the Plaza.
4. Do not pursue enhancements to the Plaza at this time.
5. Provide other direction.

PUBLIC NOTICING

The meeting agenda and Council report were posted on the City website. In addition, public notice was provided to the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce, Central Business Association, Downtown Committee, Parks and Recreation Commission, and other interested parties.

Prepared by:

Bruce Hurlburt
Parks Manager

J.P. de le Montaigne
Community Services Director

Approved by:

Daniel H. Rich
City Manager

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