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## Stone Wall and U-Turn Get Green Light

By Cathy Tyson

"It wasn't ten minutes after the cones went up that customers started complaining," said Connie Collier of Diablo Foods. "Our customers are very angry." She's referring to cones temporarily installed at the intersection of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Happy Valley Road. Their purpose was to test-drive the effect of loss of U-turn capability in order to accommodate a proposed "bulb-out" for pedestrians at the corner.

A bulb-out is an extension of the sidewalk designed to expand the space available for pedestrians and raise driver awareness of crosswalks. While it provides more room for pedestrians, apparently losing the ability to make a u-turn wasn't ultimately worth it.

The cones are part of a project to improve the sidewalk and streetscape along Mt. Diablo Blvd. from Oak Hill Road to Dolores Drive, funded mainly by a \$1.2 million grant. The finished appearance should look similar to the streetscape in front of the Lafayette Mercantile building. Two key contentious issues remained after general approval to proceed last month - the U-turn dilemma and design of the low stone wall that would front the Happy Valley Shopping Center.

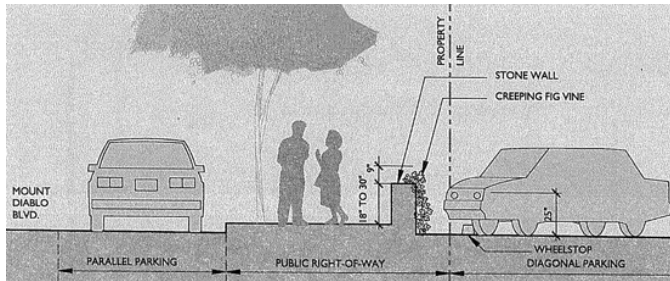


Illustration from City of Lafayette Staff Report

The Council members agreed that they don't want to negatively impact any of the business in the immediate area - so the U-turn will stay.

After much discussion about the pros, cons, expense and maintenance costs of four wall design options, Option 1 was decided upon. This choice had a growing consensus of shop owners along with city staff. It includes a low stone wall with a creeping fig vine on the shopping center side that allows the most room for parking. The current layout of the busy parking lot at the Happy Valley Shopping Center, home to Trader Joe's and Diablo Foods, encroaches onto city property, up to a foot and a half in places.

The balancing act Council members and the designer hope to achieve is to upgrade the sidewalk and improve access for pedestrians, while weighing the need for adequate space for parking, and still keep the apparently beloved U-turn. Designer Sudhish Mohindroo explained, "We are looking for the least amount of negative impact and still achieve a reasonable solution."

"The intent is to have a sufficient number and width of planting zones to accommodate a thriving landscape element to screen the stone wall on the parking lot side and to complement its appearance from the street side. The greenery also serves to soften the view of the wall on the parking lot side and further addresses the concern about limited parking," said Engineering Services Manager Tony Coe in a staff report.

Property owner Bill Eames expressed his reservations at a recent City Council meeting, "How can we make this pedestrian-friendly and still respect businesses?" Noting the number of accidents that regularly occur in the lot, Collier urged the Council to maximize available parking area, stating, "Our parking lot is a nightmare as it is."

Reach the reporter at: [cathy@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:cathy@lamorindaweekly.com)

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