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## No on Roundabout, Yes on Intermittent Medians

By Cathy Tyson

A standing-room-only crowd filled the Community Hall to hear the Lafayette City Council discuss a controversial proposed roundabout for the intersection of Mt. Diablo Boulevard and Golden Gate Way. In a public hearing that ran until almost midnight, citizens made it loud and clear that they didn't like the idea of a large landscaped circle in the middle of Mt. Diablo that narrowed the existing two lanes in each direction to one, forcing drivers to slow down. This topic has been examined in meetings with the Circulation Commission and Planning Commission. Although the proposed roundabout meets goals set forward by city staff, it was uniformly not popular with residents. Despite data indicating that traffic capacity is a non-issue, the perception was that it would cause congestion. Reid Middleton, Inc., an engineering and surveying firm, provided an analysis of the roundabout concluding that if installed, the roundabout would operate at an "A" level of service - the top tier of a six-level grading system. Tony Coe, City Engineering Services Manager summarized in his staff report: "Hard data and fact suggest that the roundabout will have minimal impacts to the intersection's capacity to handle traffic well into the future. In this case, moderating vehicle speeds clearly does not translate to debilitating congestion."

City staff proposed the roundabout because it was determined to be the best solution to address three goals: restore pedestrian ability to cross Mt. Diablo safely, moderate traffic speeds, and transform the auto-dominant streetscape design to a pedestrian-scale that supports development in the area. With construction crews busy working on two nearby senior housing projects - Merrill Gardens and Eden Housing - in the very near future there will be a large increase in the number of elders in the immediate neighborhood. It's likely that many of those seniors will want to cross the street at some point to visit shops and the pathway on the south side of Mt. Diablo.

Negative reaction spilled onto the internet-an unspecified "coalition of neighborhood homeowner associations" in Lafayette even put up a website called NoRoundabout.org detailing their opposition. They felt a roundabout isn't necessary at the wide open straight-away section of Mt. Diablo and would slow emergency response times and create traffic congestion.

"If it's not broke, don't fix it," said the initial speaker of a parade of citizens who felt compelled to comment. Don Good followed, calling the proposed roundabout an "albatross" and in his opinion, "senior citizens as pedestrians just doesn't make sense."

The alternative, intermittent medians between First Street and Brown Avenue are clearly more popular than the proposed roundabout - using landmarks that would be from the new Library to just past the Forge and Bo's Barbecue. There are existing landscaped medians, complete with twinkle lights for the holidays in the center of town; this proposal would just extend them farther on the east end.

The City Council ultimately voted unanimously against the roundabout, and city staff was directed to work on engineering and design that would combine two alternatives that reconfigure the intersection of Golden Gate Way and Mt. Diablo, along with intermittent medians as part of the East End Pedestrian Bike and Streetscape Improvement Project. Once an engineering and design report is complete, it will come back to the City Council for more discussion and possible approval.

Who's Watering the Plants?

In exploring medians - several property owners on the east end complained that the City no longer takes care of planting on their street frontage facing Mt. Diablo Boulevard. The City Council asked staff to analyze ownership of street front parcels from First Street to the Lafayette Park Hotel. The City used to water private landscaping, but a few years ago Public Works Services Manager Ron Lefler was directed to trim his budget, just like other city departments in collective belt-tightening, and he sent out letters to property owners stating that, going forward, the City will only be watering municipal landscaping. City staff will prepare an inventory of city owned right-of-way areas and present it to the Council at a later date with maintenance and beautification options.

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