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On-Street Parking on Rheem Boulevard

By Sophie Braccini

The faint painted markings on Rheem Boulevard that indicate future parking stalls did not go unnoticed by some residents, who posted their feelings on Nextdoor.com and in emails, saying it would narrow the boulevard as it approaches the Moraga Road crossing and that the striping was a ministerial decision made without public consultation. Town manager Jill Keimach responded that the striping is part of a plan adopted last September by the town council, including the creation of 31 new parking spots that will be completed in the coming weeks. Since it is just paint, if traffic is impacted negatively the manager assured the striping could be undone.

"It's very clear that the Rheem Boulevard changes are being done without much thought on traffic flow and without any input from residents," one Moraga resident who did not wish to be named in the paper wrote online. "Reducing traffic lanes is the worst possible decision. Adding on-street parking is going to make this stretch of road a lot more dangerous because visibility will be greatly reduced for those turning out of the movie theater exit and the 24 Hour (Fitness) exit."

Keimach says the project has been discussed several times over the past three years at the council, starting on May 23, 2012 when the council requested staff defer its parking plan until the pavement program was underway. "It was discussed again in April 2014," said Keimach. "Further, parking has been allowed along the north side of Rheem near 24 Hour Fitness and some cars park there ... but they tend mostly to park up farther by HomeMade Kitchen all the way up and past our town offices where the road narrows to one lane."

The parking on the south side by the theater is the new section, but it still widens to two lanes at the entrance to Rheem Center and the last block before Moraga Road. "According to our traffic counts, it should still operate as it has generally in the past," said Keimach, adding that it will take getting used to, but that she hopes that drivers in Moraga will give it time to work. "As you and others have said, we are not immune to making mistakes and if this turns out to be the mistake predicted, the council of course has the option to direct staff to repaint it in the future."

Traveling from Orinda to the Rheem area, Rheem Boulevard is a two-lane road, with parking stalls sometimes on one or two sides. Until recently, the street widened to create four lanes from the intersection with Moraga Road to the end of the 24 Hour Fitness and the Saint Marys' parking lot, just before 335 Rheem where the new town chamber is located. The restriping would extend the two-lane profile for about 200 yards.

The 31 parking stalls are not the entirety of the plan. Staff was authorized to build ADA compliant curb ramps and a sidewalk, and a striped crosswalk across Rheem Boulevard. The town manager is reaching out to the Orion Academy, the school located across the street from the town chambers, to discuss the construction of pedestrian improvements on private property to continue the crosswalk across Rheem Boulevard and Park Street that would connect 335 Rheem to the theater, the shops, restaurants and businesses across the roadway.

Keimach says the project went out to bid. After proposals are reviewed, the concrete work will begin. The project construction manager, David Latona, can be reached at (925) 817-8091 with any questions regarding the construction operations.

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