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Council makes minor adjustment to Burton Valley Safe Routes to School pilot program parking restriction hours

By Jennifer Wake

Lafayette residents who live near Burton Valley Elementary School once again expressed concerns to city staff and council during the Public Comment portion of the Sept. 13 council meeting, asking for changes to proposed safety measures planned near the school as part of a Safe Routes to School pilot program.

The council had voted on Aug. 23 to restrict parking on the west side of Merriewood Drive, the north side of Rohrer Drive between Silverado Drive and Merriewood Drive, and the west side of Silverado Drive between Merriewood Drive and the park trail entrance approximately 100 feet south of Burton Drive for two hours in the morning and two hours in the afternoon, Monday through Friday, during the school year, in addition to adding a stop sign and 11 speed humps as part of its traffic calming measures, as well as new crosswalks at the intersection of Burton Drive, Silverado Drive, Lucas Drive and Somerset Drive. Following council's direction to staff, a resolution was presented to council on Sept. 13 for approval, which is needed when involving parking restrictions.

According to Engineering and Public Works Director Mike Moran, 150 pages of public comment were added to the Aug. 23 staff report presented to the council, with a large contingent of those residents thinking that the two-hour periods are too long, while others expressed the desire for 24/7 parking restrictions or 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. restrictions at the proposed locations.

Council Member Carl Anduri said, "It's clear we're not going to make everybody happy with our decisions," adding that he didn't think "a longer period (of parking restriction) will allow us to learn more. We should look at less restrictive times to learn the same amount, as opposed to 7 a.m. to 7 p.m."

Council Member Gina Dawson agreed with Anduri, saying, "Obviously, we have a safety issue across town and need to address that. I believe in a narrow time frame within school days."

During this portion of the six-hour-long meeting, council and staff also discussed how parking restrictions would be enforced, how data would be collected and what steps would be taken to pursue longer-term solutions, such as the addition of sidewalks to the area.

In response to Vice Mayor Teresa Gerringer, who said she'd been asked when speed humps were going in, Moran noted that they have chalked hump locations and have a contractor for paving and striping. "Signage goes hand in hand with speed humps so it could be done within a month or two after we receive a formal green light from this body," he said, noting that adding the stop sign at Indian Way and Merriewood would happen at the same time.

In an effort to make parking restrictions as small as possible during this one-year pilot study, council voted to amend the morning parking restriction to no parking from 7:30 a.m. to 9 a.m., leaving the afternoon times of 1:30 to 3:30 p.m. the same. Council Member Wei-Tai Kwok said, "Let's try some change and learn from it, and be open-minded to change."

Mayor Susan Candell noted that council had allocated money to use as a buffer "if we need to make adjustments. . We're trying to look for those things that we can quantify," she said.

Moran said they will plan to count bikes in the enclosure and have people around Burton Valley count pedestrians to see if there is an uptick in those walking or biking to school. They will use data provided from the schools from 2017-18 pre-COVID as a baseline.

Kwok asked that the city also conduct a qualitative analysis by asking for feedback about the pilot program from the community. Council moved to approve the resolution as amended with a 4-0 vote, with Kwok abstaining.

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