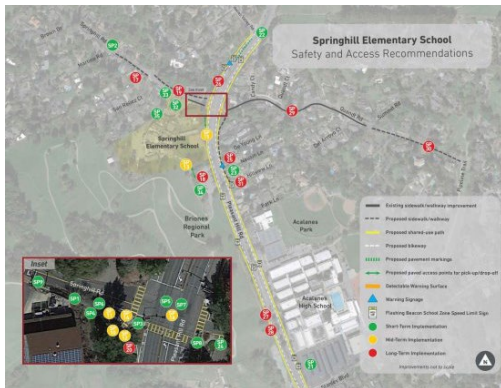




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Council approves moving forward on 'quick-build' school safety plans

By Lou Fancher



Courtesy staff report

The City Council on April 11 received staff recommendations for moving forward with the next steps of what Engineering and Public Works Director Mike Moran described as a "first batch" of quick-build school safety plans for three local schools. Stanley Middle School, Lafayette Elementary School and Springhill Elementary School were clustered in the first Rapid Implementation School Safety Plans proposal developed by the city in partnership with Toole Design Group. The consultancy firm was hired in October 2021 to assist the city in reviewing existing traffic safety plans and studies near seven Lafayette schools.

TDG met with stakeholders and school district staff and conducted school walkabouts that were open to public participation and aimed at observing and learning about local residents' safety concerns near schools. The plan in front of council presented alternative actions for three schools and included short-, mid-, and long-term projects. Acalanes High School, Happy Valley and Burton Valley elementary schools, and Meher White Pony School would come in a second batch, Moran said.

Among the improvements recommended by the Trans/Circ Commission after two recent study sessions of the TGD report are signing, striping, curb-painting, delineation using temporary materials, improving ramps, sidewalks, and paths, installing speed humps, radar speed feedback signs, bulb-outs, temporary bike lanes, fences or barriers, and rectangular rapid flashing beacons (RRFBs) at select crossings. Mitigating safety issues at a pork chop island in an intersection on Pleasant Hill Road near Springhill Elementary School drew considerable attention from the public and from Council Member Susan Candell.

Drew Parker from the Toole Design Group in responding to the concerns about school children and traffic moving swiftly past the island said protective fencing or a similar barrier and traffic calming measures could be added at low cost.

A proposed two-way, temporary bike lane installed on the north side of First Street running from the Lafayette/Moraga Trail to Paradise Court and from Paradise Court to First Street would result in the loss of approximately 30 parking spaces. Moran said this action item will require more study by the Transportation and Circulation Commission, notification of residents, a public hearing, and a council-adopted resolution to be enacted. Moran said despite that time-intensive process not being started yet, approvals for moving to the next stage of planning and funding the other recommendations should not be delayed, emphasizing that completing projects during the summer months was practical and vital to residents concerned about school safety.

In response to public comment concerning the location of the bike path, Moran said the city for at least a decade has studied which side of First Street is best suited for a bike path. The north side was chosen because it provides a more direct connection to the trail path and eliminates the need for pedestrians and bikers to make street crossings when moving from School Street to the trail path (and other street crossings from other directions). "The frontage along the Stanley school (side) isn't a good place to cross because of a parking lot that is congested and is already a concern," he said.

He said a north side bike path could be considered long-term for a permanent solution, but locating the path on that side would require a considerable amount of delineation to reduce pedestrian/bike and vehicle conflicts. He reiterated that the council was making no decision or endorsement on the parking reduction-related items during the meeting. He and members of the council repeatedly emphasized a public forum is standard procedure for any parking removals and adopting a resolution for any such changes is required of council. Individual notices about the loss of parking spaces sent to homeowners by the city are not required because parking falls under municipal codes.

The staff report proposed council release \$500,000 in funds from the Vision Zero Capital Improvement Seed Fund and authorize a fund transfer of \$112,000 from the General Fund to Capital Improvement Projects Fund 014 620 906. Asked for an estimate of the costs associated with the second batch of recommendations, Moran said a "first cut" from the draft report he has reviewed results in an estimated \$435,000. He said the "lion's share" of the "big ticket" items in the second batch recommendations would be at Acalanes and White Pony because considerable improvements have already been made at Happy Valley and Burton Valley schools.

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In addition to asking the council to approve finalizing plans and soliciting contractor costs for improvements at the first three schools, the council in staff's second request was asked to authorize the release of funds to cover the \$612,000 tab for the projects near Stanley Middle and Lafayette and Springhill elementary schools. Staff and council agreed that any costs higher than estimated in the first batch of proposed actions will come back to the council for consideration.

After a handful of additional suggestions and modifications such as adding crosswalk push buttons and a fencing/barrier of the Springhill pork chop to the proposed actions, the council unanimously approved staff recommendation to solicit bids and authorized the transfer of funds for safety improvements near the first three-of-seven schools.

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