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COMMUNITY PLANNING
LAND DEVELOPMENT AND DESIGN
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

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MEMORANDUM

To: Aaron Schrager, P.E., C.M.E., P.P.
Director – Department of Community Services & City Engineer
City of Summit

From: Thomas Behrens, Jr., P.P., AICP

Subject: Maple Street Closure

Date: March 4, 2024

BA#: 4167.07

Beginning in the Spring of 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City temporarily closed the blocks of Maple Street on both sides of Springfield Avenue to provide seasonal outdoor dining opportunities for directly adjacent restaurants due to indoor spacing restrictions and public preference. The street closures were secured by Jersey barriers at the ends and primarily contained outdoor dining furniture with ambient string lighting. There were no on-street parking stalls impacted on Maple Street north of Springfield Avenue while 8 on-street parking stalls were temporarily occupied on Maple Street south of Springfield Avenue.

The Maple Street closure continued on a seasonal basis through the Fall of 2022. At present, the City is considering whether to continue the closure of Maple Street in 2024 among other placemaking alternatives to create interest in the Downtown. To aid the City in considering this alternative, this memorandum is intended to address the extent to which the Maple Street closure is consistent with the City's Master Plan. This includes a review of the City's adopted 2000 Master Plan, 2015 Downtown Improvement Plan and 2016 Reexamination Report. Upon review of these documents, it is noted that none of them specifically discussed the closure of Maple Street but recommend Beechwood Road as a potential street closure location to create a flexible public amenity space. The documents also include several related land use policy themes generally pertaining to the goals of providing: safe and efficient traffic circulation; adequate parking; alternative modes of transportation, including walking, biking and public transit; and Downtown placemaking strategies.

In addition to the applicable Master Plan provisions, the City may wish to consider the following in determining whether to continue its street closure program:

1. Confirm that Maple Street is the best location for a street closure in the Downtown in lieu of other alternatives.
2. The City should draw on the experiences and lessons learned during the past several years when the Maple Street closures were in effect. This might include consideration impacts to surrounding uses, traffic, safety, nuisances and public response/utilization, among other variables.
3. Are the street closures intended to accommodate outdoor dining for adjacent restaurants or should any closure serve as a public amenity space with associated programming, or both?

4. If a street closure location is selected, should the City install removable bollards to protect the spaces in lieu of the Jersey barriers previously used?
5. Confirm the appropriate length of time for the street closure. This may also include consideration if the closure will be the entire length of the season or limited to nights and weekends, for example.

Master Plan Review

Our review of the City's adopted 2000 Master Plan, 2015 Downtown Improvement Plan and 2016 Reexamination Report indicates these documents establish several applicable land use goals, objectives and policy statements applicable to the contemplated Maple Street closure as listed below.

2000 Master Plan

The Maple Street closure area is located in the City's CRBD Central Retail Business District which, as the plan states, "*is intended to serve as a pedestrian-oriented core-shopping district with retail facilities to be primarily related to existing street frontage...The vitality and compact size of the CRBD, and the fact that Summit is a regional transportation hub, combine with the 19th century blueprint of the City to make parking a dilemma. Creative thinking, compromise and good will must be continually employed to maximize the efficient allocation of existing parking spaces and to incorporate expanded parking in appropriate ways.*" As such, the plan continues that "*through traffic on Springfield Avenue should continue to be discouraged. Traffic desiring to pass through Summit can be accommodated on Broad Street or Morris Avenue rather than Springfield Avenue.*"

Traffic, Parking & Circulation

Regarding traffic and circulation, the Plan designates Maple Street as a collector road "*which should be safeguarded from overuse and intrusive development....Collector streets provide access between local streets and primary and secondary arterial roads. They provide access to abutting properties and carry traffic from residential neighborhoods to arterial roads. Recommended traffic volumes for collector streets range from 1,500 to 3,000 vehicle trips per day.*" The 1994 Master Plan identified the intersection of Springfield Avenue and Maple Street as a high traffic accident area which was subsequently addressed with traffic signal upgrades and pedestrian controls.

The 2000 Master Plan includes the following specific goals and policy statement related to traffic, parking and circulation:

- To encourage the location and design of transportation and circulation routes which will promote the free flow of traffic in appropriate locations while seeking ways to address congestion and unsafe roadway conditions.
- To channel through traffic to major streets and discourage it in residential neighborhoods.
- To provide for adequate parking and adequate loading and unloading facilities.
- To improve and expand pedestrian and bicycle connections.
- To relieve traffic congestion in the CRBD.

- To implement streetscape, parking and traffic improvements proposed by the SID.
- Every effort should be made to encourage the flow of traffic towards controlled intersections and major circulation arteries and discourage traffic on residential streets.
- Decisions and recommendations regarding circulation issues have direct impact on public safety and overall quality of life for the community.
- These features, which include a myriad of social, cultural, artistic and health services, are beneficiaries of a functional, coordinated and well-maintained roadway and mass transit infrastructure.
- Sound transportation planning must, by its very nature, be multi-faceted in order to deal with the complex multimodal transportation and circulation systems in the community. Summit is unquestionably a prime example of the need for a multi-faceted approach to a complex set of community wide transportation issues.
- Typically, the issue of motor vehicle traffic is the dominant factor when issues of circulation are discussed. Certainly, cars are a significant element to a community's circulation system and lifestyle. However, other modes of transportation such as mass transit, bicycling and walking are significant and are becoming even more so with current emphasis on environmental and quality of life issues. Today, in order to properly plan a community, it is vital that a Circulation Plan Element thoroughly address all modes of transportation.
- Traffic congestion, speeding and traffic and pedestrian safety are unquestionably the single biggest issues to residents and business owners in Summit.
- Continued planning efforts must address the needs for alternative modes of transportation within the City, most especially bicycles and pedestrians.

General Land Use Goals

- Recognize and manage the City's position as a regional center – as transportation, employment, shopping and entertainment destination.
- Reinforce the Central Business District as a mixed-use core that is pedestrian oriented with a concentration of commercial, civic and institutional uses in close proximity to housing and mass transit.
- The City will consider and evaluate innovative development and zoning proposals which would enhance and protect the City's diverse character, economic vitality and overall high quality of life.
- The City will emphasize a balancing of concerns in establishing land use and zoning policies throughout Summit seeking to ensure economic stability, retention of employment opportunities and neighborhood preservation.

2015 Downtown Improvement Plan

The City's adopted 2015 Downtown Improvement Plan includes the following relevant goals and land use policy statements:

Traffic, Parking & Circulation

- Increase on-street parking.
- Calm traffic approaching the Downtown.
- To promote walking and district exposure.
- To improve the balance of parking availability and awareness while also balancing reducing congestion and encourage the use of mass transit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- To ensure that parking solutions are implemented in an unbiased fashion.
- Provide and expand pedestrian and bicycling linkages.
- Identify and implement traffic calming techniques where possible.
- Parking policies promote short term parking turnover for customers and limit spillover impacts onto residential streets. Promote walking and district exposure. Businesses see parking as critical to their success and need dependable customer parking access. The goal is to improve parking availability, awareness while avoiding congestion.

General Land Use Goals

- Create activity nodes along Springfield Avenue.
- Provide visual interest.
- Create a new night image.
- Focus on Beechwood Road as a Public Gathering Place: Due to its location between Springfield Avenue and the train station, The Study noted that Beechwood Avenue is "perfectly situated to become a strong pedestrian link." The Study recommended paving the road with a brick or granite to distinguish it from other streets, relocating the farmer's market to the street, installing removable bollards, and slowing traffic as to make it more compatible with pedestrian traffic. While the City has not changed the composition of the street, installed bollards, or slowed traffic, it has relocated the farmer's market to this location. Furthermore, the SDI does use Beechwood for other event programs. Finally, a small pedestrian sitting and gathering area has been fashioned along Beechwood Road adjacent to the Bank Street Parking Lot.
- Encourage more special events in the Downtown.
- To promote the downtown district incorporating special events with a refined focus, including but not limited to street fairs, juried art fairs, seasonal events, music events, partnerships with public and private entities including houses of worship, and the continuation of Restaurant Week and Taste of Summit.
- Provide public gathering spaces and places for social interaction.
- Improve accommodations for outdoor dining.
- Improve the components of place making by fostering a positive aesthetic character and image.

2016 Reexamination Report

The City's adopted 2016 Reexamination Report includes the following relevant land use goals, objectives and policies:

Traffic, Parking & Circulation

- Policies that mitigate vehicular congestion and improve safety.
- Study and improve the circulation patterns around the train station.
- Improved safety on streets and sidewalks for pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists.
- Reduced parking demand and increased parking availability.
- Reduced vehicular congestion.
- Improved circulation patterns.
- Consider redesign solutions on corridors and intersections that pose systematic risk to pedestrians and cyclists.
- Where possible, reclaim pedestrian space and implement traffic calming measures.

General Land Use Goals & Policies

- Maintain a dynamic and vibrant city.
- Enhanced use of downtown.
- More places for people to meet, gather and socialize (e.g., public plazas and engaging streetscapes).
- Emphasize places to gather.
- A distinguishing quality of an engaging and vibrant city is how the spaces between those buildings function. Plazas, walkways, parks, alleys and the streets themselves are a crucial component of the city experience.
- Public spaces should first and foremost be designed to function as places that people can access, socialize in, gather and encourage chance interactions. It is here where function and form should be in harmony. A well designed public space is not only beautiful and well maintained, but also invites use with plentiful places to sit, interact and enjoy the city.
- Public spaces foster social interactions that respond to a variety of variables. Determining what does or does not work takes time, deliberate action and some trial and error. It does not, however, require a lot of capital investment to activate underutilized public spaces. Simple and inexpensive interventions such as placing movable tables and chairs in plazas, improving lighting and safety, incorporating concessions and sidewalk cafes or hosting community events in public spaces are all efficient and effective ways to bring new life to public spaces.
- Creating an enhanced sense of place and encouraging interaction and pedestrian experience can support local business with increased foot traffic and add significantly to a community's livability.
- Define a placemaking strategy that includes public art opportunities, seating and public plaza opportunities, greening and landscaping improvements and public event opportunities that are consistent with the streetscape design guidelines and/or
- Better utilization of key assets (e.g., parks, community facilities, streets and sidewalks).

Planning Summary

To reiterate several points previously mentioned, the City's current master plan documents do not specifically recommend or address the closure of Maple Street. This street closure began in response to the COVID-19 pandemic to enable restaurants to stay open and as patrons preferred outdoor dining in the midst of the public health emergency. While the street closure can be viewed as advancing some of the City's placemaking goals in the Downtown, the decision to close Maple Street must be evaluated on balance with due consideration to impacts to other local businesses and uses, traffic, public safety and parking. The City may wish to explore whether the Maple Street closure is the best location among other locations in the Downtown to establish such an amenity. In addition, the City should articulate the objectives of any prospective public space in order to provide appropriate programming (e.g. private dining vs. public amenity space, or both). The City's Reexamination Report of the master plan and development ordinances, last adopted in 2016, must be conducted at least every ten years which may provide an avenue for the City to review these issues with the public in the near future.