CITY COUNCIL
NEW BUSINESS

FEBRUARY 7, 2022

SUBJECT: **SAN VICENTE BLVD STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENT CONCEPT**

INITIATED BY: **CITY MANAGER'S DEPARTMENT**
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STATEMENT ON THE SUBJECT:

The City Council will review a streetscape improvement concept and provide direction regarding the desirability of developing a public gathering space on San Vicente Boulevard north of Melrose Avenue and south of Santa Monica Boulevard.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

Staff recommends that the City Council direct the Urban Design & Architecture Studio to collaborate with the Public Safety, Public Works, and Economic Development Departments and the Event Services, Facilities & Field Services, and Arts Divisions and proceed with the following:

1) Work with professional Landscape Architecture and Civil Engineering consultants to develop the design for a transformable urban plaza to support city programs and goals.

2) Develop a cost analysis and timeline for implementation.

3) Pursue project support grants from outside agencies.

4) Reach out to community stakeholders, first responders, and affected transportation agencies for feedback and input.

5) Return to the City Council with a final design and implementation plan that includes an analysis of impacts as well as recommendations on timing, construction staging, funding requirements, and operational suggestions for desired uses or programs, and number of street closures per year.

BACKGROUND / ANALYSIS:

As an urban artery and transit corridor San Vicente Boulevard, between Santa Monica Boulevard to the north and Melrose Avenue to the south, has served as an important socio-economic core for over a century. From modest beginnings during the 1920s as a Sherman Yard connector road to hosting earliest efforts to establish city hood to the present where it welcomes civic pride events, celebratory gatherings, and spontaneous expressions of speech, the street has consistently remade itself over the decades.

Currently, City-sponsored programming and other approved events differ annually but account for approximately 20 to 30 days of partial or full street closures per year. One of the challenges with this stretch of San Vicente Boulevard is that, when used for public gathering purposes, it is completely exposed to the elements with little shade trees or respite within or alongside it. Moreover, at times, San Vicente Boulevard has also become a higher speed vehicular shortcut. Beyond traffic safety issues, serious public health concerns particularly during the summer arise when individuals spend significant time in direct sun exposure and are subjected to effects from heat island while standing on hardscape concrete and asphalt surfaces.

As the City of West Hollywood grows in population and redevelops its 1.9 square miles, more than ever enhanced “green” public spaces and regenerative ecosystem strategies take on an even greater significance. From a land use planning perspective, West Hollywood is almost fully built out, so creative solutions in the form of refashioning or remodeling existing conditions will take on an elevated level of value with respect to safe public gathering opportunities.

With creative visioning, this portion of the boulevard has the potential to evolve and augment current temporary road closure practices (and staging costs each time) and to function as a thoughtfully designed “shared street”. If conceived as a space for both people and cars, this particular stretch can on occasion also serve as a forward thinking, transformable, pedestrian-oriented experience that can also bridge between the Pacific Design Center to the east and West Hollywood Park and Library to the west.

<u>San Vicente Streetscape Plaza: A Shared Street Concept</u>

Adjacent to STORIES: The AIDS Monument, conceptually this new shared street gathering space would be created through temporary, partial or full closures and designed as a micro-climate inspired ecosystem emphasizing shading, resource management, and pedestrian-oriented wayfinding in support of city-sponsored or otherwise approved programs and events, permitted activities, and organized or impromptu gatherings.

The intent is to have a space that is temporary yet flexible and transformable seasonally and situationally. If carefully crafted as a “streetscape plaza”, this bookended and protected area could operate as a programmatic extension of West Hollywood Park, as a useful companion to the STORIES: The AIDS Monument, or as an independent civic or public event space itself. Centrally located within the city’s west side, San Vicente Streetscape Plaza would be well buffered from a sound standpoint from residentially zoned areas nearby yet still very walkable and in close enough proximity from the diversely scaled neighborhoods that surround it.

Urban Design and Architecture Studio (“UDAS”) staff has worked in consultation with Public Safety, Events Services, Arts, Economic Development, Facilities & Field Services, and Public Works staff to explore the potential for a new streetscape plaza. Requirements related public safety and first responders, transit operations, event planning, street and landscape maintenance, and civil engineering are all considerations that will need to be addressed.

The vision is for a public gathering space with new tree lined sidewalks and a central bioswale median to create an urban grove like setting. New metal stanchions would be

positioned to allow for overhead shade canopies, programmable color changing string lighting, new signage banners and creative forms of seasonal or event-based graphic communication, and integrated sound technology. Two new elevated crosswalks (one each at the north and south of the plaza space) would connect both sides of the street and function not only as a more accessible level path to cross the street but also as tapered speed humps that can calm traffic up to 15 to 20 mph. Motorized bollards that raise to close off all or partial traffic lanes would by synched with first responder vehicles and city staff controls to lower for one- or two-way through passage as needed. The ground surface would emphasize eco-friendly materials using integrally colored and textured or patterned pervious concrete or drive-rated paver materials. New trees would be selected not only to provide high-leaf density shading for public gathering but also to promote rain water capture and wildlife propagation for nesting and pollination. The focus of this plaza is on expanding pedestrian-oriented gathering space while also promoting health and wellness, safety, thermal comfort, sustainability and resilience, and climate-responsive design in accordance with the city's core values and policy goals.

Benefits of a New Streetscape Plaza

With the remaking and expansion of West Hollywood Park, new opportunities for community gathering and engagement would emerge. This type of streetscape plaza would promote the following benefits:

a. Fostering Health & Wellness: A public gathering space that is shaded, protected, well lit, and connected to nature has both physical benefits with respect to thermal comfort but also psychological value and a safe and welcoming space where free speech can be celebrated; and

b. Enhanced Public Safety: By introducing new raised crosswalks with integrated motorized bollards, traffic calming will naturally occur. And when the bollards are upright, the resultant contained space with turning loops at both north and south will be easier for the needs of first responders, service providers, and event supporters to be staged; and

c. Integration of Sustainable Infrastructure: Key elements such as the eco-friendly hardscape surfacing, reduced energy LED lighting, and a central bioswale median to capture storm water and reduce irrigation needs support city goals for sustainability and resilience; and

d. Increased Focus on Equity and Inclusion: Large gathering spaces are welcoming to all but also should be thoughtful about special needs. In this case, diverse areas for shade and seating, wide pathways for access, integrated technology, and the raised cross walks will provide improved physical and sensory accessibility and a safe, open, and inclusive space for all; and

e. Expanded Opportunities for Economic Development & Event Planning: This type of plaza space supports and reinforce West Hollywood's deep interest in a broad range of cultural and socio-economic programming. From impromptu rallies and gatherings to city-sponsored events, to non-profit organization programs, and to public events (i.e. book fairs, food & dining festivals, car shows, art exhibitions, farmers markets, celebratory milestones, memorials, etc.), a transformable plaza

space has the potential to elevate the quality of life for its residents, encourage local business and organizational participation, and spur the economy; and

f. Heightened Environmental Responsiveness: In support of the city's climate action and adaptation goals, its urban forestry objectives, and its tree canopy expansion efforts, this streetscape plaza with its new tree "grove" and bioswale components would regenerate the immediate eco-system, adding new opportunities for urban wildlife and biodiversity to take shape; and

g. Fostering Walkability: A large portion of the city's high-density residential and commercially zoned areas are within a 15 to 20 minute walk from this plaza location. In highly urbanized areas, the most successful walking cities contain multiple nodes or destinations like this type of gathering space that operate as both a magnet and a reward for those who choose to access public space on foot or bicycles.

Conceptual visioning image for a new streetscape plaza on San Vicente Blvd.

CONFORMANCE WITH VISION 2020 AND THE GOALS OF THE WEST HOLLYWOOD GENERAL PLAN:

This item is consistent with the Primary Strategic Goal(s) (PSG) and/or Ongoing Strategic Program(s) (OSP) of:

- PSG-5: Move forward on City Parks and Library and Expand and Enhance the City's Green and Public Spaces.
- OSP-8: Enhance the Cultural and Creative Life of the Community.

In addition, this item is compliant with the following goal(s) of the West Hollywood General Plan:

- LU-1: Maintain an urban form and land use pattern that enhances quality of life and meets the community's vision for its future.
- LU-6: Create a network of pedestrian-oriented, human-scale and well-landscaped streets and civic spaces.

EVALUATION PROCESSES:

This vision for a new streetscape plaza is conceptual in nature at this time. Staff looks forward to returning with a more developed "project" should this be the will of the City Council and developing more specific evaluation tools and measurables as part of that effort.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY AND HEALTH:

The San Vicente Streetscape Plaza concept accommodates and fosters the implementation of City environmental initiatives and public programs or events exceedingly well. From efficient resource management, to "greening" and street activation, to physical improvements focused on wellness, and safety, the plaza reinforces and actually implements city goals as a biodiverse, eco-system that integrates urban resilience.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT:

Staff has reached out internally with multiple conversations occurring cross-divisionally as well as externally to key stakeholders and organizations.

UDAS staff prepared an initial conceptual presentation for the West Hollywood Chamber of Commerce (WHCC), the West Hollywood West Neighborhood Association (WHWNA), and the Foundation for The AIDS Monument (FAM). Initial feedback was very supportive. Excitement centered around the concept of a new flexible gathering space, enhanced shading, new traffic calming measures, additional trees, and ecosystem improvements. Staff was asked to be mindful of the quantity of street closure days and to address potential impacts from amplified sound with respect to larger events but also noise impacts in general. Fortunately, the location of this plaza between the PDC and West Hollywood Park does provide very favorable buffering of most noise-related impacts. Should this plaza concept move into development stages, Staff anticipates a community meeting(s) and specific outreach to mid-city residents to the east and south of the Pacific Design Center in addition to on-going outreach to groups already familiar with and interested in the project.

OFFICE OF PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY:

CITY MANAGER'S DEPARTMENT / URBAN DESIGN & ARCHITECTURE STUDIO

FISCAL IMPACT:

Staff will incorporate activities related to this item into its currently budgeted work plan. Staff anticipates the initial expenditure for efforts outlined above in the amount of approximately $ 40,000 to 45,000 for consulting and related services.

A preliminary cost opinion prepared by a consultant has established a probable cost in the range of $1.5 million to $2 million dollars and does not include impacts related to project labor agreements. If this item is approved, staff will include more detailed capital and operational costs and revenues when returning to Council with an updated design and implementation plan.

AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
$ 40,000 to 45,000	Funding for this item is already budgeted.

ATTACHMENT:

Attachment A: San Vicente Streetscape Plaza Concept: Selected Vignettes

ATTACHMENT “A”

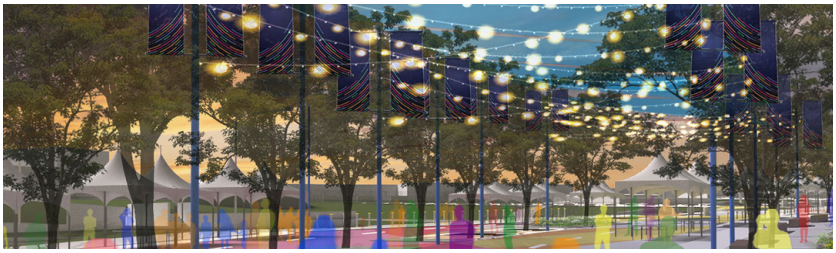
SAN VICENTE PLAZA STREETSCAPE VISIONING CONCEPTS

Selected Vignettes

Street view of Streetscape Plaza

Speaker’s podium to support planned presentations or impromptu gatherings

View up to elevated STORIES: The AIDS Monument



New tree canopy “grove” feature and integrated bioswale for water capture

Public safety and accessibility enhancement concepts