



City of Culver City

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Staff Report

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CC - ACTION ITEM: (1) Discussion and Review of Options for the Future of Melvil Street, between Washington Boulevard and the City Boundary; and (2) Direction to the City Manager as Deemed Appropriate.

Meeting Date: October 10, 2022

Contact Person/Dept.: Andrew Maximous/Public Works Department
Phone Number: 310-253-5628

Fiscal Impact: Yes No **General Fund:** Yes No

Attachments: Yes No

Commission Action Required: Yes No

Public Notification: (E-Mail) Meetings and Agendas - City Council (10/05/2022)

Department Approval: Yanni Demitri, Public Works Director/City Engineer (09/29/2022)

RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends the City Council (1) discuss and review options for the future use of Melvil Street, between Washington Boulevard and the City boundary; and (2) provide direction to the City Manager as deemed appropriate.

BACKGROUND

The City of Culver City's Local Emergency relating to the outbreak and spread of the coronavirus respiratory disease ("COVID-19") pandemic has been in effect for over two years since March 14, 2020. The Local Emergency was proclaimed pursuant to the authority granted by Culver City Municipal Code ("CCMC") Section 3.09.020.B.1.a, to the City Manager, in his role as the Director of Emergency Services. The Local Emergency was ratified by City Council on March 18, 2020.

On March 16, 2020, the City Manager issued the first Public Order enacting new City measures to protect members of the public and City workers from undue risk of COVID-19.

On May 11, 2020, the City Council approved the formation of the Economic Recovery Task Force (ERTF) to address the unique challenges of COVID-19 and spur economic survival and, eventually,

recovery with a focus on public health and equity. The ERTF has worked closely with the Public Works Department to address priority items including Downtown and Arts District street closures and creation of a temporary use permit program.

On June 1, 2020, the City Manager issued the Sixteenth Supplement to the Public Order which provides the Public Works Director/City Engineer with the authority to establish procedures, standards, conditions, rules and regulations, as he may deem appropriate, to implement the processing and approval of expanded outdoor dining and retail areas in the public right-of-way, while ensuring compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and any other measures deemed necessary to protect the public health, safety and welfare. The Order also established a specific Temporary Use Permit (TUP) process, including standards and procedures, to allow retailers and restaurateurs to utilize adjacent public rights-of-way to temporarily expand their outdoor dining and retail areas to allow for increased occupancy levels while adhering to physical distancing requirements. Public right-of-way areas that may be utilized include, but are not limited to, the adjacent sidewalk (where space is available) and public street area (where temporarily closed).

In May of 2020, City staff received a request from representatives of the Culver City Arts District Business Improvement District (CCAD BID) and Culver City Arts District Residents Association to consider street closures in the Arts District to promote economic recovery and support area businesses impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. City staff developed an initial concept plan and presented it to the Mobility, Traffic and Parking Subcommittee on August 3, 2020. The plan included closures of the curb-side parking area and a westbound travel lane along some segments of Washington Boulevard between La Cienega Avenue and Adams Boulevard which included a dedicated 5-foot bike lane.

In addition, and in response to a request by the CCAD BID, a full closure of Hargis Street between the alleyway and Washington Boulevard was also included as part of the initial concept plan. Staff brought the plans for City Council consideration on August 24, 2020. During the discussion, the Council asked staff to consider closing Melvil Street as an alternative to Hargis Street due to accessibility issues relative to a local school. A community meeting was held on September 23, 2020, to discuss a potential street closure on Melvil Street between Washington Boulevard and the alleyway. Notification was sent to area businesses and residents on Melvil Street, Hargis Avenue and Fay Avenue. The meeting was attended by only a handful of area residents, and at that time, there were no issues/challenges presented regarding closing Melvil Street. An aerial of the area and surrounding business and residential neighborhood is provided in Attachment 1.

The street closures were implemented by the Public Works Department shortly thereafter and later modified in November 2021, as part of implementing the Move Culver City project. The modifications reduced the closure area along Washington Boulevard; however, these modifications did not change the Melvil Street configuration installation.

The closure areas, on both Washington Boulevard and Melvil Street, were improved by the Culver City Arts District with artificial turf and shade tents. However, within a few months of the closure, staff began receiving complaints from adjacent residents about noise, illegal parking in the alley, trash, and late-night events (Attachment 2). Since its closure, the space has been used by area businesses for yoga/pilates, outdoor classes, and special events, although not all of these uses were properly permitted prior to use. Staff reminded area business that any use of the space requires a temporary use permit (TUP) and related City indemnification and insurance coverage. Additionally,

staff spoke with representatives from the Art District on December 8, 2021, to discuss how to ensure proper permitting and whether the Arts District wanted to assume responsibility for the space. It was determined, at that time, that Rosie's Foundation, a non-profit that helps individuals of all abilities train for employment, would apply for the TUP to use the street and manage the space until further direction, relative to closure/reopening of the street, was considered by City Council. Rosie's TUP was approved in January 2022.

DISCUSSION

On May 9, 2022, the City Council received a presentation from the CCAD BID regarding several improvement projects they wish to implement in partnership with the City. One of the projects is the permanent closure of Melvil Street to create a community space that could be managed and programmed by the CCAD BID (Attachment 3). During the public comment period, area businesses and neighbors expressed both their support and opposition to this proposal. City Council asked staff to further explore impacts relative to a permanent closure. Shortly after this time, petitions were submitted to the City from area residents along Melvil and Hargis requesting the reopening of Melvil Street (Attachment 4). Staff also received correspondence and spoke with concerned residents about the process to explore the impacts including holding a community meeting.

As part of the review process, City staff also met with representatives from the Los Angeles Council District 5 including Los Angeles and Culver City Police, Fire and Sanitation Departments to understand service impacts and feasibility. During these meetings, staff from both jurisdictions indicated that maintaining the street closure would not have significant impact on area service assuming the implementation of specific design and bollard configurations.

On August 26, 2022, additional petitions, coordinated by area Arts District businesses, were submitted to the City in support of maintaining the closure (Attachment 5). On September 1, 2022, a community meeting was held for area residents to hear the CCAD BID proposal and provide their feedback/concerns. The meeting was facilitated by the Public Works Director who presented the background on the initial closure, invited the CCAD BID to present their proposal for how the space could be developed and received community comments. Eleven speakers provided comments/concerns regarding the permanent closure of Melvil Street. These comments/concerns are detailed in Attachment 6 and generally summarized below:

Support for Permanent Closure:

- Creates a special community space that could be used for artisanal markets, Farmer's markets, birthday parties, art, fitness classes and other public performances;
- Creates a connection to bike lane and promotes less cars in the area
- Could be called "Melvil Park" and serve as an organic space for people to come together and build community and create programming that supports the area
- Location in business district is nice addition to existing Syd Kronthenal Park and could make this part of town "shine"

Concerns about Permanent Closure:

- Only a few businesses benefit from space, not adjacent neighbors
- Increased nuisance, noise at night, trash, events and unhoused in the area. Residents are picking up trash, glass to keep area clean
- Residential street and is not intended for commercial uses
- Closure reduces parking in an area of the City that already has a parking deficit
- Not enough parking to support hosting events at space without ingress into adjacent residential neighborhood
- Closure encourages illegal parking in alley and at street closure preventing access to driveways
- Closure reduces neighborhood access and creates more congestion in the area
- Syd Kronenthal Park is nearby, has plenty of space to host community events/classes and has on-site parking

Closure Options

Should the Council direct staff to proceed with the permanent closure of Melvil Street, the closure would be done in accordance with California Vehicle Code Section 21101, including any needed environmental analysis, and the closure would be reflected in the General Plan. The physical closure of the street can be implemented in different ways. The options to close the street are:

- 1) Full curb and gutter - At the southern end of the closure area, the curb along Washington Boulevard would be extended across Melvil Street to provide a physical closure of the street. At the northern end of the closure area, the curb at the southeast corner of the alley would be extended across Melvil Street and connected to the curb at the west side of the street.

This configuration would allow for the street to be raised to sidewalk level in the future to provide an even surface throughout.

- 2) Bollards - Bollards provide flexibility to secure the street and be able to open it for any reason. Approximately 8 to 10 bollards would be needed across Melvil Street at each end to secure the street. The bollards can be lowered manually or via an automatic system.

Emergency vehicle access would be incorporated into the selected option per City fire and police department requirements.

FISCAL ANALYSIS

Direction provided to staff as part of this report does not have an immediate fiscal impact. However, the Adopted Budget for Fiscal Year 2022/2023 includes \$100,000 in CIP PF037 for design, should the City Council decide to make the Melvil Street closure permanent. Future funding would need to be requested for construction.

The cost estimate to construct the curb and gutter option is approximately \$100,000.

The cost estimate to construct the manually retractable bollards is approximately \$50,000. The estimate for the automatic system is approximately \$200,000.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Culver City Arts District Vicinity Aerial
2. Melvil St Emails from Residents
3. CCAD Presentation 5-9-2022
4. Melvil Reopening Petitions
5. CCAD Business Petitions
6. Melvil Community Meeting Notes 9-1-2022

MOTIONS

That the City Council:

1. Direct the City Manager regarding one of the following options:
 - a. Return Melvil Street to be open to vehicular traffic as it was before the pandemic; or
 - b. Take actions required to close Melvil Street to all vehicular traffic.

2. If closure is desire, direct the City Manager regarding the following closure options:
 - a. Full curb and gutter;
 - b. Manually retractable bollards; or
 - c. Automatically retractable bollards.

3. Provide other direction to the City Manager as deemed appropriate.