



Agenda Report

Fullerton City Council

MEETING DATE: JANUARY 21, 2025

TO: CITY COUNCIL / SUCCESSOR AGENCY

SUBMITTED BY: SUNAYANA THOMAS, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

PREPARED BY: SUNAYANA THOMAS, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT
STEPHEN BISE, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC WORKS

SUBJECT: WALK ON WILSHIRE - WILSHIRE AVENUE ROAD CLOSURE BETWEEN MALDEN AVENUE AND HARBOR BOULEVARD

SUMMARY

The temporary closure of a 200-foot segment of Wilshire Avenue, west of Harbor Boulevard for the Walk on Wilshire (WOW) Parklet Pilot Program ends on January 31, 2025. City Council directed staff to assess the feasibility of a permanent Wilshire Avenue road closure of from Malden Avenue to Harbor Boulevard.

PROPOSED MOTION

1. No Action.
- a. Reopen Wilshire Avenue to vehicular traffic by February 2025.

This option is recommended, as the evaluation of the full closure determined that all the elements required cannot be met currently for a permanent closure.

In addition, a pedestrian activated space is currently in development at the Fox Block location that will include elements that have been advocated for including the closure of a vehicular street into a pedestrian thoroughfare and gathering space.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- Direct Staff to update Parklet Guidelines for Downtown and evaluate the feasibility of a comprehensive Downtown parklet program
- ADOPT RESOLUTION NO. 2025-XX - A RESOLUTION OF THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA, AUTHORIZING CLOSURE OF WILSHIRE AVENUE TO VEHICULAR TRAFFIC, EXCLUDING BICYCLES, FROM MALDEN AVENUE TO HARBOR BOULEVARD

- Direct appropriation of \$250,000 from the General Fund to facilitate the road closure and implementation efforts.
- Direct Staff to develop a Slow Streets Program per CVC Section 21101(f).
- Other options brought by City Council.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Based on preliminary analysis, Staff cannot definitively conclude the segment of Wilshire Avenue between Malden Avenue and Harbor Boulevard is no longer needed for vehicular traffic. Key considerations identified at this time include potential challenges with refuse collection, local deliveries and access considerations for Promenade Apartments and Villa Del Sol building, parking and tenants due to a full closure. While alternatives for refuse collection and local deliveries may be feasible, further discussion with the affected property owners is necessary to identify suitable solutions. Initial feedback from property owners reflects a willingness to explore improvements for Wilshire and Downtown in general. However, one property owner does not support a full closure, while the other is open to exploring options but prefers either a partial closure or re-opening the street with the flexibility for businesses to implement individual parklets as a compromise.

Staff proposes re-opening the street while allowing businesses to explore the option of parklets through an annual permitting process. This approach would maintain vehicle access while providing businesses with outdoor space. Community and Economic Development and Public Works would evaluate the impacts of this measure and retain the authority to revoke or deny re-issuance of permits if significant challenges arise.

CITY MANAGER REMARKS

After reviewing the study necessary for a consideration of a permanent closure, the City Manager concurs with the staff recommendation to allow the street to reopen at this time.

While it is a different project, the Fox Block Development adjacent to the historic Fox Theatre is a project aimed at revitalizing Downtown Fullerton in part through activation of pedestrian space. This project includes creating a space for multiple food and beverage uses as part of an outdoor food hall concept. It also plans to transition a vehicular street into a fully pedestrian thoroughfare and gathering space with outdoor amenities for the community.

The impact of the Fox Block Development could provide valuable insights into how such targeted projects affect the dynamics Downtown. It would allow staff to assess the project's success in meeting community goals and inform decisions on additional improvements needed in downtown that meets the goals and needs of our residents and business stakeholders.

In addition, Community and Economic Development (CED) is collaborating with Public Works to enhance pedestrian walkways in Downtown Fullerton this year through upgraded lighting installations. These improvements aim to create a safer, more inviting environment that attracts both residents and visitors to the area.

We can further look at Wilshire if Council directs, but that would require an opening of the street due to timing and then a financial commitment by the City to begin to further study the area. I believe a better alternative would be to do a wholistic view at the downtown and include the developing project of the Fox Block.

PRIORITY POLICY STATEMENT

This item matches the following Priority Policy Statement:

- Infrastructure and City Assets.

FISCAL IMPACT

The permanent closure feasibility assessment required Staff time and consultant support in the amount of approximately \$10,000.

The City invested \$90,569 from the Public Works operational budget for the temporary partial closure (200 feet of Wilshire Avenue west of Harbor Boulevard), including traffic signal modifications, street signing and striping, bollard installation and pedestrian enhancements. Most of these improvements can be retained if a permanent closure is approved. However, additional bollards, signing/striping and traffic controls will be required in the amount of up to \$50,000. An informal request for proposals from consultants showed that average cost for feasibility assessment is approximately \$60,000 and \$100,000 for design and implementation. If the closure is continued or permanent, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Exemption will be up to \$10,000.

Based on data from the WOW parklet pilot program, Staff estimates an annual lease revenue up to \$60,000 from participating businesses if WOW expands/continues.

BACKGROUND AND DISCUSSION

The WOW Parklet Pilot Program temporarily closed a 200-foot segment of Wilshire Avenue, west of Harbor Boulevard, to vehicular traffic to support local businesses by creating outdoor dining space. Businesses along the closed section of Wilshire could extend operations into public space, facilitating a safer and more vibrant environment for patrons and the community.

Below is a summary of City Council directives regarding the Wilshire Avenue closure and Walk on Wilshire Parklet Pilot Program.

Key Dates and Decisions:

- March 15, 2022 – City Council approved ending the temporary outdoor dining program effective September 30, 2022. Businesses could continue outdoor dining by following the Standard Outdoor Dining permitting process.
- August 16, 2022 – City Council approved an 18-month Parklet Pilot Program for WOW businesses effective January 1, 2023, through June 30, 2024. The program included a bike element and temporary closure of Wilshire Avenue.
- July 16, 2024 – City Council approved a 90-day extension of the WOW Parklet Pilot Program, pushing the new end date to September 30, 2024.
- October 15, 2024 – City Council adopted Resolution 2024-050 to temporarily close

200 feet of Wilshire Avenue west of Harbor Boulevard to facilitate the Walk on Wilshire Parklet Pilot Program. Temporary closure ends on January 31, 2025. City Council directed Staff to assess the feasibility of permanent closure of Wilshire Avenue from Malden Avenue to Harbor Boulevard.

Key Findings and Analysis

Legal Framework

Per California Vehicle Code (CVC) Section 21101(a), local authorities may close a highway if the legislative body determines it is no longer needed for vehicular traffic.

To satisfy the CVC requirements, Staff completed the following tasks to assess the feasibility of permanent road closure of Wilshire Avenue from Malden Avenue to Harbor Boulevard:

Public Engagement

The City conducted four stakeholder meetings in the last three months and received mixed feedback regarding the WOW Program from businesses and the community, highlighting both the successes and challenges of the initiative. Many businesses on WOW have not fully capitalized on the available space, complicating efforts to visualize the full potential. For instance, while Fullerton Brew and SomiSomi have secured their permits, they have yet to commence construction. Rialto expressed investment concerns about maintaining a temporary parklet and Sip and Savor declined participation.

Businesses outside of the WOW Program support the success of their neighboring businesses involved in the Pilot Program; however, concerns raised include equity, lack of activation and limited indirect benefits. Many of the businesses not part of the closure noted it has not generated enough increased foot traffic or sales to justify their support without additional activation efforts. They expressed concern about the mid-block closure, which limits visibility and access for those not adjacent to the closed section. These businesses may show more support if they had equal opportunities to participate such as extending the closure to their storefronts or allowing them to create parklets.

The community provided overwhelmingly positive feedback regarding the Walk on Wilshire Pilot Program. Over 500 respondents shared their thoughts in a survey, with the majority expressing strong support for continued closure of Wilshire Avenue. Respondents highlighted the benefits of enhanced walkability, outdoor dining and increased social opportunities in Downtown Fullerton.

Residents offered constructive suggestions to further enhance the experience. Key suggestions included:

- Improved Lighting – Better street lighting to make the area more inviting and safer, especially in the evening.
- Increased Safety Measures – Enhanced safety protocols to ensure pedestrian and cyclist safety.
- More Events – Hosting additional promotional events and activities to attract more visitors and create a lively atmosphere.

- Traffic and Parking Management – Respondents mentioned traffic congestion and parking availability concerns, but the positive impacts of the closure generally outweighed these comments.

The community at large have provided positive support, emphasizing the value of enhanced walkability, safety, bicycle access and placemaking opportunities in Downtown.

Impact Studies

- a. Traffic Impact Assessments: Vehicular access to this section of Wilshire Avenue would be eliminated, resulting in vehicular traffic having to be re-routed/diverted to Whiting Avenue and Amerige Avenue to access the respective parking lots that currently have access off Wilshire Avenue. Based on the existing traffic data collected, the adjacent streets of Whiting Avenue and Amerige Avenue can accommodate the diverted traffic without measurably affecting the operations of these two roadways.

A total of 34 on-street parking spaces would be eliminated on Wilshire Avenue; however, there is available parking immediately north, south and west of the closure for patrons of the Wilshire Avenue businesses to utilize.

Driveway and alley access will be impacted on the north and south side of the street. The Villa Del Sol parking lot will need to be modified to create a drive aisle for vehicular circulation at the southern end of the parking lot. The result will likely be loss of parking, which may not be acceptable to Villa Del Sol.

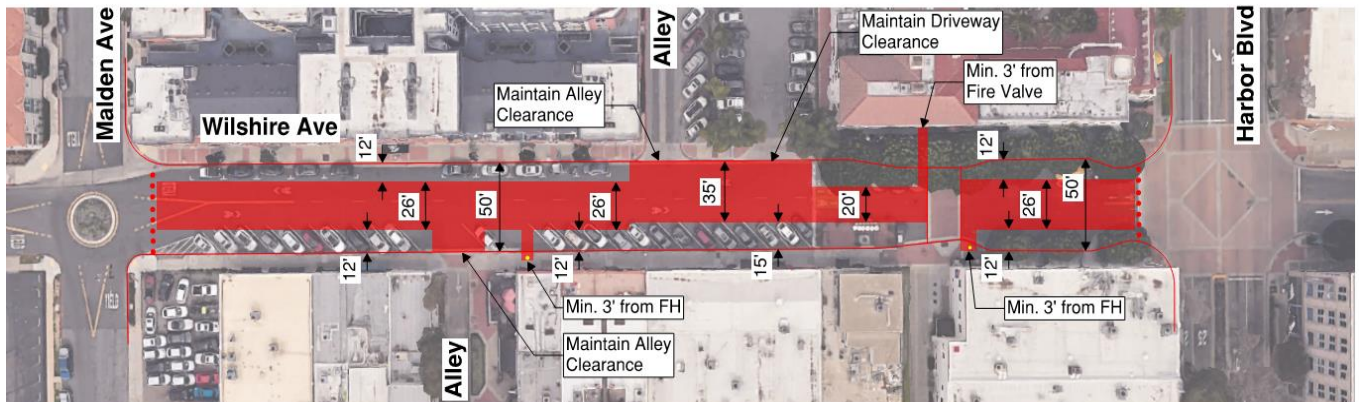
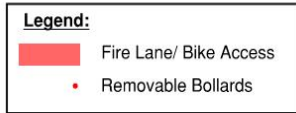
In conclusion, the WOW extension closure will not significantly impact the existing surrounding roadway network; however, additional analysis and outreach is required to determine impacts.

- b. Environmental Impact Assessment: No significant issues identified. Possible Categorical and Statutory exemptions can apply (CEQA Guidelines Section 15301, Class 1(c) and California Public Resources Code Section 21080 and 21080.25(b)).
- c. Economic Analysis: Street closures can have both positive and negative economic impacts on businesses. Success on street closures depend on coordination, stakeholder input and solutions to balance the needs of the businesses and the community. It can enhance walkability, create space for outdoor dining and provide opportunities for events and community gatherings. These factors can increase foot traffic, attract new visitors and improve the area's appeal as a pedestrian-friendly destination. It also has the potential to boost property values.

However, challenges include reduced vehicle access, which may inconvenience customers who rely on driving or make delivery logistics more challenging. Transitioning to a closure may require upfront costs for adjustments like outdoor seating, staffing or new delivery methods. Additionally, some businesses may not benefit equally, particularly those that rely less on foot traffic.

Coordination with Agencies

- a. Emergency Services: Requires a minimum 20-foot clearance, 26 feet adjacent to two-story buildings. Possible to achieve; however, will require strategic planning for activation. Below is an exhibit showing the access area required to be maintained for emergency services to the area. NOTE: The 26-foot area from Malden Avenue to the northly alley can be shifted to the north curb face if needed/desired.



- b. Utility and Infrastructure: SCE, SoCal Gas and City departments require access for maintenance and operation but had no objections to the closure. Southern California Edison (SCE) requires unobstructed access to their facilities at all times for maintenance, operations and emergencies. They confirmed that the Wilshire Avenue closure is acceptable with removable bollards, provided no structures obstruct their facilities. SoCal Gas reported no impacts to natural gas infrastructure from the closure. The City of Fullerton Water and Sewer Division supports the closure but requires access for repairs and maintenance.
- c. Refuse Collection: Options were provided by Republic Services, but it requires further coordination. They identified two options for maintaining refuse collection under a potential closure of Wilshire Avenue, both requiring further coordination to address operational constraints:
 - i. Option A: Involves removing parking spaces on Whiting Avenue and in The Cellar's parking lot, removing a gate for truck access and relocating Wilshire Promenade Apartments' pull-out service to an alternate location. Challenges include narrow alleyways and limited maneuvering space for trucks.
 - ii. Option B: Proposes staging containers in Farmers and Merchants Bank's parking lot with scout service to move and return containers for Wilshire Apartments and The Cellar. This would minimize disruption and be scheduled for early morning operations.

Temporary Activation Efforts

The City made two key efforts to activate the space during the 90-day Program extension:

Community Activation: A new grassroots community group, formed because of the WOW initiative, met with Staff early on to brainstorm ways to activate the area. They shared numerous creative ideas. The City focused its limited resources on assistance through a streamlined special event permitting process to help incorporate some of the suggestions such as the Chalk on Wilshire event, encouraging residents and visitors to engage with the space and create sidewalk chalk art. There were an additional four events that were hosted through Special Events permits to date.

SCAG Kit of Parts Initiative: The City expanded the Downtown Fullerton Farmers Market area beyond the Plaza to Walk on Wilshire and collaborated with the Southern California Association of Governments (SCAG) to enhance the area during the Farmers Markets by installing temporary parklets and street walkway art to increase foot traffic and engagement.

Potential Alternative Options – Parklet Program or Comprehensive Assessment

The mixed feedback from businesses and the community presents a divide between business concerns about visibility and foot traffic and the community enthusiasm for a pedestrian-friendly environment. A potential medium is to revise the Parklet Program in Downtown Fullerton. This approach requires review from Community and Economic Development as Downtown operates on a shared parking model and review from Public Works for the use of public parking area, encroachment fees, guidelines, etc.

The City would need to assess the feasibility of implementing parklets before moving forward including evaluating how parklets could coexist with the shared parking model, determining how many spaces the City could convert without negatively affecting overall parking availability and considering potential impacts on surrounding businesses that rely on public parking.

Alternatively, the City could undertake a comprehensive assessment of Downtown to identify activation spaces that align with economic development goals. This assessment would explore opportunities to enhance pedestrian-friendly spaces and support businesses by strategically locating activation areas that draw visitors and foster economic activity. By linking activation efforts to broader economic development strategies, the City can ensure that improvements are both impactful and sustainable.

An example of the above alternative is that the Fox Block Development adjacent to the historic Fox Theatre is a project aimed at revitalizing Downtown Fullerton. This project includes creating a space for multiple food and beverage uses as part of an outdoor food hall concept. It also plans to transform a vehicular street into a fully pedestrian thoroughfare and gathering space with outdoor amenities for the community.

The impact of the Fox Block Development could provide valuable insights into how such targeted projects affect Downtown's dynamics. It would allow staff to assess the project's success in meeting community goals and inform decisions on additional improvements needed in downtown that meets the goals and needs of our residents and business stakeholders.

In addition, CED is collaborating with Public Works to enhance pedestrian walkways in Downtown Fullerton this year through upgraded lighting installations. These improvements aim to create a safer, more inviting environment that attracts both residents and visitors to the area.

Through either approach, the City could establish guidelines and requirements for public space enhancements that fit Downtown's unique needs, balancing the community's desire for walkability and placemaking with the necessity of maintaining sufficient public parking to support businesses.

Attached for reference are considerations provided by consultants through an informal request for proposals (Attachment 4).

Conclusion

Based on preliminary analysis, Staff cannot definitively conclude the segment of Wilshire Avenue between Malden Avenue and Harbor Boulevard is no longer needed for vehicular traffic due to the need for further review and potential challenges with refuse pick-up, emergency vehicle access requirements, business participation, economic impacts and parking loss. Further coordination and analysis would be required to make a definitive determination.

If a closure is desired, Staff recommends directing efforts toward a comprehensive approach, which we anticipate will require approximately one year to complete thoroughly. This process would include engaging with stakeholders, exploring activation opportunities, identifying necessary improvements and ensuring the closure aligns with community and business needs. Additionally, a full closure would necessitate a public hearing to gather input and City Council's vote of the findings for the street closure. Staff advises against a piecemeal approach to ensure the closure is well-planned, equitable and sustainable.

Attachments:

- Attachment 1 – Draft City Council Resolution No. 2025-XX
- Attachment 2 – Traffic Impact Assessment
- Attachment 3 – Coordination with Agencies
- Attachment 4 – Cost and Scope Proposals for Design and Implementation

cc: City Manager Eric J. Levitt