

Council Business Meeting

June 16, 2020

Agenda Item	Update on Downtown Street Closures	
From	Adam Hanks Scott Fleury	Interim City Administrator Interim Public Works Director
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SUMMARY

As requested by Council, staff is providing an update on the status and logistics of the proposed closure of East Main Street between Church and Gresham Streets for up to eight weekends in July and August as an economic stimulus activity for downtown businesses. The proposed closure requires permit approval from the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT) and as of the completion of this staff report, no final approval (or denial) of the request has been formally received. Preliminary communication with ODOT staff indicate they are unable to approve any requests for closures that facilitate commerce within a State Highway right-of-way as commerce is a prohibited activity within ODOT right-of-ways.

POLICIES, PLANS & GOALS SUPPORTED

Economic Development – COVID economic recovery

PREVIOUS COUNCIL ACTION

No previous formal Council action has been taken on this item beyond direction to staff to pursue the ODOT street closure permit application. This occurred as part of the City Administrator's Report at the May 19, 2020 Council business meeting.

BACKGROUND AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

With Council direction given at the June 3, 2020 business meeting, Public Works Staff began discussions with ODOT for permitting requirements associated with the closure of East Main Street in the downtown area to facilitate, encourage, and promote economic activity for downtown businesses significantly affected by COVID-19 related economic shutdown and stay at home orders and subsequent full season closure of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival. The full closure was intended to provide space for dining and retail expansion into the right-of-way while also allowing appropriate space for physical distancing. As no commerce is allowed in ODOT right-of-way, expansion of dining and retail space could only be considered within the sidewalk boundary. If dining and retail expansion occurs into the sidewalk area, then the closure of the adjacent parking areas on East Main Street would facilitate and area for pedestrian passage and appropriate physical distancing.

The general closure concepts were raised by a variety of interested community members, business owners, building owners, and the Chamber of Commerce. The Chamber with their extensive background in large community event planning that includes similar closures for parade events quickly became the logical lead partner with the City as they had already begun planning efforts to develop a broad "Summer Series" of weekend events to re-engage the local community and visitors and bring people to the downtown core. The Chamber's engagement with a variety of business community stakeholders has provided input and guidance for many different facets of re-engaging efforts, including the road closure concept.

Concurrently with the pursuit of the ODOT closure approval, City, Chamber, and other key participants have been developing options to augment the road closure or to implement instead of a full road closure, should that not be approved. These options include:

- Parking “lane” only closures along East Main to extend the area for safe pedestrian physical distancing where parking normally occurs, which would free up sidewalk space for outdoor dining and retail sales.
- Several different plaza closure options to facilitate desired expansion of outdoor space for plaza business
- Potential alternative closures and uses for side streets and/or parking areas or other public spaces that would be usable for expanded community and/or business activity.

The Interim Public Works Director developed a memo (Attachment 1) that provides a description of the logistics of a full street closure, as well as additional information on some of the local street options that are being developed.

FISCAL IMPACTS

As described in the attached Interim Public Works Director’s memo, full East Main street closure has considerable staffing requirements and would require a third-party vendor contract to install and manage the closure in order to meet ODOT permit conditions. With this approval unlikely, staff has yet to solicit formal bids, but preliminary communications with traffic control contractors estimate the cost between \$10,000 to \$15,000 for each weekend during the closure period, if they are able themselves to execute due to resources and manpower issues.

Staff is confident that closure of existing parking lanes, the Plaza and side street can be handled with existing staff. Incidental costs would include the purchase or rental of temporary ADA ramps, cone/barricades and minor signage. This is estimated to cost less than \$10,000 to \$20,000 in total and, if purchased, would become part of the City’s inventory and likely be utilized for future events beyond this season. Closures of the Plaza and side streets fall within the City’s jurisdictional control and would be permitted by Public Works.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Consistent with AMC 13.03.030 – Exempt Activities: City Seasonal Event Usage, the use of sidewalks by adjacent business owners for commercial use is expressly permitted for two three-day periods – the week before Memorial Day and the week after Labor Day. An expansion of this approval requires Council approval by resolution.

Staff recommends Council support for the following:

- Development of a resolution for Council consideration at the July 7 Council meeting to expand the timeline for approved commercial use of downtown public sidewalks to include each Friday, Saturday and Sunday of July, August and September.
- Continued pursuit of the parking lane closure permit from ODOT for a timeframe matching that of the resolution above.
- Continued development and coordination of plaza and side street closures connected with adjacent business agreement and support of those closures.
- Regular reports back to Council on effectiveness of these efforts.

ACTIONS, OPTIONS & POTENTIAL MOTIONS

- 1) I move to direct staff to develop a resolution to allow expanded timelines for the business use of downtown sidewalks each Friday, Saturday and Sunday for the months of July, August and September.
AND
- 2) I move to direct staff continue pursuit of parking lane closures with ODOT and closure options for the plaza and select side streets to further encourage and support economic activity in the downtown.
OR
- 3) I move to direct staff continue pursuit of closure options for the Plaza and select side streets to further encourage and support economic activity in the downtown area.

REFERENCES & ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Road Closure Technical Memo, Scott Fleury, Public Works Director, June 10, 2020

Memo

CITY OF
ASHLAND

Date: June 11, 2020
From: Scott Fleury PE, Interim Public Works Director
To: Adam Hanks, Interim City Administrator
RE: Main Street 72 Hour Closure Logistics

Temporary Closure of Main Street, parking, travel lanes, & side streets background:

General:

The closure of Main Street between Church Street and Sherman, even during the currently run special events, propose special logistical hurdles and extensive management and cooperation between the Street Division and Police Department. These events represent short term closures that are permitted by the Oregon Department of Transportation (ODOT). The Chamber of Commerce has been the group that typically applies for the permitting through ODOT and the City has facilitated the closures.

There are specific rules with respect to traffic control and signage that must be accounted for when proceeding forward with a roadway closure and associated detour routing. These rules, depending on the length of the closure are detailed in the ODOT Temporary Traffic Control Handbook (less than 72 hours) and the Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). In addition, the City employs other safety countermeasures for the temporary closure to ensure that vehicular access is prevented into the closed area. These additional measures include parking dump trucks and trailers at critical access locations as recommended by APD. Closures and changes to pedestrian facilities also require Americans with Disabilities (ADA) accommodations to allow safe access and are accounted for with a formally developed traffic control plan.

The special event closures are manned during the entire event and rovers are utilized to drive around and fix any portion of the closure infrastructure that gets disturbed. Staff and volunteers are utilized to ensure that pedestrians, cyclists and drivers understand where to go and ensure that safe traffic operations continue during the special event.

An extended duration (72 hour) closure of Main Street between Church Street and Sherman Street that includes routing two-way traffic onto Lithia Way presents a logistical hurdle and serious issues for traffic operations and safety in that area that extend well into local neighborhoods and associated roadways. Overnight and extended closures require a significant increase in the amount of signage, detours and barricades, as compared to those currently utilized for the few short duration special events permitted annually. There are also issues associated with current residential uses in the downtown and in the adjacent neighborhoods. These people could potentially be significantly impacted with respect to ingress and egress to their residence for a prolonged closure. The closures and associate signage and appurtenances would need to be manned 24 hours a day to ensure that everything is operating correctly and fix things that get disturbed.

Currently ODOT ***does not allow commerce within their controlled right of way***. Since commerce is not allowed in ODOT right of way, the expansion of retail and dining opportunities would need to stay within the sidewalk boundaries. The sidewalks fall to local control and responsibility and the City could allow the expansion of commerce into this portion of the right of way. Closure of adjacent parking spaces and potentially a travel lane on Main Street could allow for pedestrian expansion into these areas and provide for adequate physical distancing.

There is also the ability of City staff to install and take down the closures. The Street Department already under financial duress due to the loss of Food and Beverage revenues and a diminishment in Gas Tax revenue are running on a skeleton crew with no seasonal employees. Without serious efforts that include a change to schedules and a reduction in continued daily maintenance activities, the Street Department does not have the manpower resources to manage the full closure of Main Street down each weekend over eight weekends this summer. The Police Department also does not have adequate staffing or the additional volunteer help it receives for the designed special event closures.

Inability to perform the work internally will require contracting with a third-party vendor to provide traffic control services of this magnitude. Staff is in process of obtaining an estimated price from a third-party vendor for installing and removing the closure on a weekend basis. Staff hopes to provide estimated costs to Council at the June 16th Business Meeting.

Main Street Single Lane and/or Parking Closure:

The closure of parking and/or a single travel lane for the 72-hour period is something that can be accomplished with existing staff as the logistics are much simpler. A lane/parking closure would require a few typical work zone signs, cones and barricades placed in the correct location along Main Street. The permitting for this type of activity would follow the ODOT process as well.

Side Street and Plaza Loop Closures:

The closure of side streets and the Plaza loop is another item that can be handled directly by the City and are out of ODOT right of way, which would require only a Public Works Right of Way closure permit. These types of closures could also be facilitated by current staff as they require minimal staffing and materials the City generally has in stock.

ODOT

In preliminary discussions with ODOT they are supportive of any direction the City is looking at taking whether is be the full closure, partial closure, or parking space closures of Main Street. The permitting process for the City would be the same for the various options. First is the requirement to develop a Traffic Control Plan (TCP) that includes any Temporary Pedestrian Access Routes (TPAR) required to accommodate ADA accessibility. The TCP must follow the guidance of the MUTCD and submit to ODOT for review/comments. If ODOT requires comments to be addressed, then a revision of the TCP would be developed and re-submitted for approval. Once approved by ODOT the implementation of the TCP and any and all TPAR routes requirements could be put in place. They can provide a quick review and turnaround of proposed TCP's and we should be able to hit the target timing of approval associated with the July starting date.