



Office of the Mayor

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CONSENT CALENDAR

February 26, 2019

To: Members of the City Council

From: Mayor Jesse Arreguin, and Councilmembers Ben Bartlett, Lori Droste and Sophie Hahn

Subject: Establishment of Traffic Circle Policy Task Force

RECOMMENDATION

Establish a Traffic Circle Policy Task Force comprised of representatives from neighborhoods currently maintaining traffic circles. Members will be appointed by the Mayor and chosen from geographically diverse parts of the city, including one representative from Berkeley Partners for Parks. Staff participating will be appointed by the City Manager.

The charge of this Task Force is to:

1. Evaluate the City's current traffic circle vegetation policy for consideration by the City Council and Traffic Engineer;
2. Find a solution, through active participation and engagement with the community, that respects:
 - Environmental Policy
 - Habitat
 - Safety and Performance Standards
 - Existing and future liability issues that address sight lines; and
3. Deliver a policy to City Council for adoption prior to August 9, 2019.
4. Conduct a community-led process to update that policy to ensure pedestrian/bicycle/vehicle safety and community efforts to beautify traffic circles.

Task Force activities may include, but are not limited to:

- Recommend appropriate characteristics and parameters for allowed plantings based on input from the community and city staff;
- Recommend a policy that ensures lines of sight and other important safety considerations;
- Work with City staff to conduct a survey of current traffic circles and their vegetation;
- Conduct a survey of neighborhood associations, neighborhood captains, community and community groups such as Berkeley Partners for Parks to determine which traffic circles are being maintained by community members;
- Examine the City of Oakland's 'Adopt a Spot' initiative to encourage community involvement in the maintenance of public spaces by loaning tools, supplies, and technical assistance to committed members of the community;
- Host a presentation from City staff to better understand concerns with the current traffic circle policy and any safety concerns that should be taken into consideration;
- Recommend a clear set of guidelines/criteria to allow for community maintenance of traffic circles, with input from city staff;

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Traffic Circle Policy Task Force

- Outline the appropriate community outreach strategy and process to share the updated policy for managing vegetation in traffic circles;
- Recommend a replanting strategy, with emphasis on drought-resistant plants.

BACKGROUND

In the summer of 2018 in response to a legal settlement agreement, the Public Works Department provided notice to all neighbors responsible for the maintenance of traffic circle vegetation, informing them that the City would be removing trees and other large vegetation that obscures line of sight and poses a safety risk.

This communication elicited significant concern from the community. Residents responded by asking for more outreach and engagement of neighborhood traffic circle volunteers, particularly regarding decisions on the removal of vegetation or updates to policy. The current Traffic Circle Planting and Maintenance policy, last updated in 2012, prohibits vegetation over two feet in height and/or six inches in diameter, yet there are many trees that exceed these limit in traffic circles. There is a need to update this policy to reflect current conditions and to ensure ongoing maintenance that improves safety at these intersections.

On August 8, 2018, the Mayor, Councilmembers and City staff held a public meeting where many of the traffic circle volunteers attended along with Berkeley Partners for Parks. A major takeaway was a strong desire by many for a more formal process to engage neighborhood volunteers and other stakeholders in updating the current Traffic Circle policy.

On September 25, 2018, the City Council unanimously referred to the Parks and Transportation Commissions to create a city/community task force on Traffic Circle vegetation maintenance. Since the Council's referral, the Parks Commission was informed that they do not have the authority to establish a Task Force, and that Council action is required.

A stakeholder task force would be the most strategic, effective, and appropriate approach to respond to the community's substantial interest in, and continuing care for, the circles. The City has partnered with its citizens on their stewardship for almost two decades. Now is the ideal time to revisit, enhance and formalize that partnership, support community involvement and work together to address important safety concerns. To help meet the spirit and desired follow up of the August 8th community meeting, it is important for community members to have representatives actively participating in and contributing to discussions about the traffic circles.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Costs associated with staffing the Traffic Circle Task Force, hosting community meetings and developing a new Traffic Circle Planting Policy.

ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Supports the City's Climate Emergency Declaration, the City's Climate Action Plan and commitment to Vision Zero.

CONTACT PERSON

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