



Item No. 15 Town of Atherton

CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT – REGULAR AGENDA

**TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL
GEORGE RODERICKS, CITY MANAGER**

FROM: ROBERT OVADIA, PUBLIC WORKS DIRECTOR

DATE: JUNE 21, 2023

**SUBJECT: PROVIDE FEEDBACK AND DIRECTION REGARDING THE
CONCEPTUAL DESIGN OF THE WATKINS AVENUE
PEDESTRIAN IMPROVEMENTS**

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that the Council review the conceptual design options for the Watkins Avenue Pedestrian Improvements project and provide feedback and direction to staff.

BACKGROUND

The Fiscal Year 2022-23 Capital Improvement Program budget included \$100,000 for the design and implementation of pedestrian improvements along Watkins Avenue from Middlefield Road to the Watkins Avenue rail crossing. The primary concerns were related to walkability and issues related to biking along the existing curb separating the pedestrian walkway from the roadway, which is marked as a Class III (shared use) bikeway. The existing walkway varies in its elevation to the existing roadway, where in some portions are lower than the existing curb/dike and other areas where the walkway is elevated to the height of the existing curb. The curb/dike is not uniform and includes a short segment of concrete curb, closest to the rail crossing, with a majority made of asphalt with an inconsistent slope.

Additionally, the Fiscal Year 2022-23 Capital Improvement Program Budget included \$200,000 for fencing improvements along Watkins Avenue.

A Task Order was issued to Willdan Engineering to develop conceptual design alternatives and estimates for walkway and fencing improvements along Watkins Avenue.

ANALYSIS

Willdan Engineering evaluated various options and prepared conceptual layouts for various options including:

1. Replacement of the existing walkway with a standard concrete sidewalk and curb, where the walkway would be elevated from the adjacent roadway where feasible.
2. Raising the elevation of the walkway where feasible/appropriate by filling with asphalt and making the curb face more uniform in appearance, sealing and repainting.
3. Protecting and fix the existing asphalt dike and install flexible bollards atop the dike.
4. Removing the asphalt dike and replace it with segmented hardscape medians.

All options included the replacement of the existing chain link fence with a metal fence matching the design being implemented with the Holbrook-Palmer Park Access and Circulation project.

Upon initial review, staff felt that the replacement of the walkway with a concrete curb and sidewalk (option 1) offered little benefit over the elevated asphalt walkway (option 2), at a substantially higher cost, and thus removed the option from further consideration. Options 2-4 were presented to the Town's Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee for review and feedback at their March 28, 2023 meeting. The key discussion points and considerations were as follows:

1. Walkway elevation - Though the elevation of the walkway varies, there are constraints in localized areas that fix the elevation. These include the following:
 - a. Walkway at or below roadway level from rail crossing to McCormick Lane
 - i. Walkway elevation must match grade at the pedestrian bridge entry to Holbrook-Palmer Park
 - ii. Walkway grade should match roadway grade at McCormick Lane for accessibility reasons. Access ramp is required for the crossing and elevating the walkway would require depressing with the access ramp.
 - b. Walkway at roadway grade at Burns Avenue
 - i. Similar to McCormick Lane, the walkway should be at the roadway grade to facilitate accessibility at the crossing
 - c. Walkway at entry/exit drives
 - i. Will tie into the curb ramps to be constructed with the Holbrook-Palmer Park Access and Circulation Project
2. Usage of the walkway by cyclists
 - a. Roadway is listed as a class III (shared use) bike route, wherein through cyclists should be riding along Watkins Avenue
 - b. Walkway area is too narrow to accommodate both bikes and pedestrians – there is insufficient room to accommodate both pedestrians and cyclists between the roadway and the channel. Cyclists should walk bikes on the walkway between Dinkelspiel Station Lane and the pedestrian bridge entry to the park, or use the entry drive.
3. Curbs/dikes
 - a. The curbs and dike are a beneficial separator between pedestrians and motorists and should be retained
 - b. The asphalt curb/dike is inconsistent in shape and appearance and may be more effective if uniform

After review and discussion the Bicycle and Pedestrian Committee recommended the following:

- The walkway configuration be generally the same as it is now with areas below the level of the curb/dike.
- Walkway cracks and other issues in the walkway be spot repaired.
- Widen the walkway where possible towards the channel when removing/replacing the fence. It is noted that there may be utilities in the area.
- Trim/reshape the dike, seal and repaint white for visibility.

Though discussion also included the potential for signing/marketing the pathway to discourage bike use and the potential for cutting an opening in the curb at the pedestrian bridge. These changes were not recommended.

FISCAL IMPACT

None at this time.

GOAL ALIGNMENT

This Report and its contents are in alignment with the following Council Policy Goals:

- Goal Area A – Maintain Fiscal Responsibility
- Goal Area B – Preserve Small Town Character and Quality of Life
- Goal Area D – Manage Circulation and Improve Safety

POLICY FOCUS

Council policy focus should be on providing design direction in improving the pedestrian facility along Watkins Avenue.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Public notification was achieved by posting the agenda, with this agenda item being listed, at least 72 hours prior to the meeting in print and electronically. Information about the project is also disseminated via the Town's electronic News Flash and Atherton Online. There are approximately 1,200 subscribers to the Town's electronic News Flash publications. Subscribers include residents as well as stakeholders –to include, but be not limited to, media outlets, school districts, Menlo Park Fire Protection District, service providers (water, power, and sewer), and regional elected officials.

COMMISSION/COMMITTEE FEEDBACK/REFERRAL

Bicycle/Pedestrian Committee (meets as needed)

ATTACHMENTS

1. Watkins Avenue Pedestrian Improvements Concept Plan and Estimate
2. Watkins Avenue Walkway – Existing Condition Photos