

## Staff Report

**WELCH AVENUE BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN PILOT PROJECT**

May 24, 2016

**BACKGROUND:**

During 2014 the City Council directed staff to identify methods to reduce pedestrian/bicycle and bicycle/car collisions in the area near Welch Avenue and Lincoln Way. Working together, City staff, Campustown Action Association (CAA) representatives and students from Iowa State University identified a number of alternatives that would address these issues. These alternatives included converting parking space to bike lanes along Lincoln Way, developing improved wayfinding signage, evaluating fees to encourage parking in the Intermodal Facility rather than on streets, evaluating how bicycle infrastructure connects to the ISU campus, and implementing educational efforts regarding road user rights and responsibilities.

Business owners adjacent Lincoln Way were not supportive of the closure of parking spaces on Lincoln Way for the purpose of installing a bike lane. **However, at the July 22, 2014, City Council meeting, the City Council expressed an interest in seeing options for a temporary pilot project along the 100 and 200 blocks of Welch Avenue.**

Bicycling on the sidewalk along the 100-block of Welch Avenue is prohibited by ordinance due to the congestion of pedestrian traffic and street furniture. Bicyclists are expected to ride in the street. However, bicycling in the street presents the danger of bicyclists being struck by the opening doors of parked cars. This is possible on any stretch of roadway, but becomes even more dangerous on the downhill slope of Welch Avenue.

Along the 100 and 200 blocks of Welch, converting the parking aisle to a true bike lane is not possible on a temporary basis because the streetlights are installed in concrete bumpouts in the parking lane. Moving these streetlights would be cost-prohibitive for a temporary project. **Therefore, the alternative selected by City Council was to investigate a closure of the east-side (downhill) parking spaces in the 100- and 200- blocks.**

This two-block project would help provide a safer corridor for bicyclists who are heading north towards the ISU campus. Additionally, the closure of the parking spaces would create an extended area of the sidewalk to use for pedestrian passing; street furniture such as bike racks, trash cans, and benches; and offset sidewalk cafes (where the café is situated closer to the street than the building) for adjacent businesses.

The City Council should note that the delay in implementing this pilot project is due to a desire to wait until completion of the Kingland construction project before moving ahead with any further alteration to the streetscape. Now that the parking facility portion of that project has been completed, now is an appropriate time to determine how to proceed.

## **PARKING CLOSURE METHODS:**

There are eight parking spaces on the east side of the 100 block of Welch Avenue and six parking spaces on the east side of the 200 block of Welch Avenue. Following the last discussion with the City Council, City staff discussed alternatives to accomplish this closure with the Campustown Action Association (CAA).

### **1) Paint Striping**

This alternative is the lowest cost (approximately \$1,000). It would involve using the City's roadway painting equipment to paint a line along the closure and hatch the former parking spaces. This option provides no physical barrier to keep vehicles out of the closed area.

### **2) Tubular Barrier**

The tubular barrier would consist of a series of semi-rigid plastic tubes attached to the pavement to more clearly delineate a closure. This barrier provides a greater visual indication to motorists that vehicles should not enter the area, but the tubes would not provide physical protection to a vehicle that crosses over them. This alternative is estimated to cost \$11,000.

### **3) Concrete Jersey Barrier**

Jersey barriers would provide a substantial amount of physical protection between vehicles and pedestrians, and can be bolted to the pavement to prevent tipping. Using Jersey barriers is estimated to cost \$20,000. Each barrier could be re-used elsewhere upon conclusion of the project.

### **4) Concrete Planters**

Concrete planters would provide a similar level of protection as Jersey barriers, and can also be bolted to the pavement to prevent tipping. These planters could also be re-purposed elsewhere in the City upon conclusion of the test. Planters have a higher aesthetic value, but require additional maintenance to keep the plants growing. Planters are the highest cost alternative. The estimated cost for basic concrete planters is \$20,000. City staff estimates basic plantings can be installed for an additional \$2,000.

To create the parking closure, 31 planters ranging in size from 2'x2' to 2'x4' would be arranged along the line created by the existing streetlight bump-outs. This would leave a vehicle lane width of at least 13 feet, which is wide enough for transit buses and other large vehicles. The planters would be spaced apart enough to allow

pedestrians to move between them, but would not allow a vehicle to enter the closed lane.

Superimposed on the attached aerial photographs are depictions of the approximate locations where these planters could be located.

Regardless of the method of the closure, sharrows would be marked both northbound and southbound on the pavement along the 100 and 200 blocks of Welch Avenue. City staff estimates the project could be installed within 2-6 weeks, depending on the availability of materials and the closure method selected by the City Council.

#### **FEEDBACK FROM CAMPUSTOWN ACTION ASSOCIATION:**

The CAA board indicated that using the concrete Jersey barrier or plastic tubular barrier would be less desirable than using planter boxes to create the separation. The concern was that concrete and plastic barriers would intensify the “construction zone” perception of Campustown due to the various large redevelopment projects that have taken place. Instead, CAA supported using concrete planters, which offer a higher aesthetic value while still providing a vehicle/pedestrian barrier safety factor.

#### **ADDITIONAL FEATURES:**

City staff has investigated the possibility of temporarily installing street furniture, such as benches and bike racks, in the newly closed area to encourage its use. The street furniture would be bolted to the pavement to prevent it from being moved or knocked over. Installing street furniture to make the closed area more functional could be accomplished with a budget of approximately \$10,000. As with the planters, street furniture installed in this area could be repurposed elsewhere in the City upon conclusion of the project.

#### **PROJECT EVALUATION:**

The 100 block of Welch Avenue is scheduled to be reconstructed in 2020. Since this project is intended to be a temporary installation, information gathered about how bicyclists, pedestrians, and motorists use the public space will be helpful to identify any changes to the streetscape that the City Council may wish to make a part of the permanent reconstruction project.

If approved by the City Council, feedback will be gathered from CAA, businesses, and users throughout the duration of the project, which is initially proposed to last for a period of one year. If significant negative feedback is received from CAA and others, City staff will return to the City Council prior to one year to determine if the project scope should be modified or if the test should be abandoned. If positive feedback is received, City staff may return to the City Council to ask if the project duration should be extended.

## **NEXT STEPS:**

If the City Council supports proceeding with this pilot project, direction should be given to City staff regarding each of the questions below:

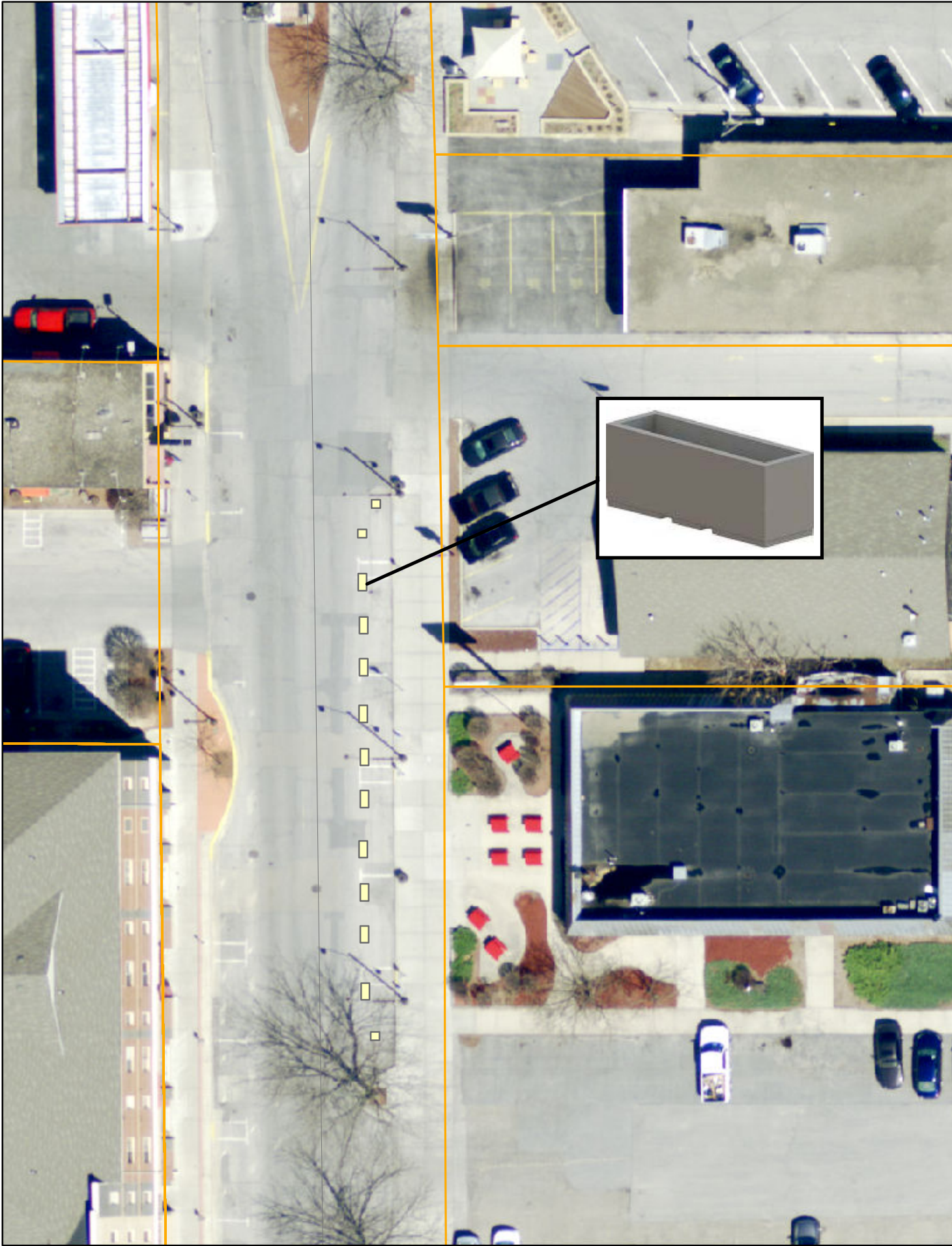
- 1. How should the parking closure on Welch Avenue be created?** Options include the use of paint striping, installation of tubular barriers, installation of Jersey barriers, or installation of concrete planters and plantings. Costs range from approximately \$1,000 for paint striping to \$22,000 for concrete planters with plantings.
- 2. Should the project include a budget for installation of street furniture?** City staff believes basic street furniture, including benches, tables, and a bike rack, could be installed for approximately \$10,000. This equipment may make the closed space more functional for pedestrians. At the conclusion of the project, any street furniture could be repurposed elsewhere in the City. City staff recommends that street furniture be spread out in a manner that would allow for interested businesses to install sidewalk cafes in the former parking spaces.
- 3. What source of funds should be used to complete this project?** Funding is available in the Local Option Sales Tax fund balance, the Public Works operating budget, and the Road Use Tax fund. If the City Council is interested in the lower-cost alternatives, funding from the Public Works operating budget may be appropriate. If the City Council chooses to pursue the costlier Jersey barrier or concrete planter options, using the Local Option Sales Tax fund would be more appropriate. Funds from the Road Use Tax Fund may be used, but may also limit where any purchased equipment (e.g., street furniture, planters, barriers) could be re-used in the future.
- 4. What specific information would the City Council like to see collected from this project?** If the City Council would like feedback from CAA or businesses, or if the City Council would like a more formal study of the utilization of this space, it should indicate those expectations prior to the commencement of the project. The City Council could also choose to receive a formal report regarding the outcomes of this project after a specified period of time, such as at the end of the summer or after one year. At that time, the City Council could choose whether to extend the project or to direct staff to dismantle it and convert the space back to parking.



WELCH AVENUE BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN PILOT PROJECT







WELCH AVENUE BICYCLE/PEDESTRIAN PILOT PROJECT

