



Internal Affairs Committee Agenda Report

Meeting Date: 12/04/23

TO: Internal Affairs Committee

FROM: Director of Public Works - Engineering, Brendan Ottoboni, (530) 879-6901

RE: Downtown Chico Complete Streets Improvements Project

REPORT IN BRIEF

Downtown Chico has always been the heart of the community and a circulation focus point. From its early days with horses to railways and later concrete highways, Downtown has morphed and adapted over time. We have again reached a point where Downtown needs renovation, and there is a unique opportunity to re-imagine its form and function. This report provides background on concepts and plans adopted over the last two decades to create design features that implement the envisioned ideas of Downtown in the 21st century. Due to limited right-of-way from building-face to building-face, not all design features identified in planning and outreach documents can be accommodated. Therefore, staff evaluated various concepts to enhance Downtown's functionality and connectivity to other community destinations. The objective is to have the Council adopt a set of alternatives that will form the basis of an implementable plan. With an adopted plan, staff will submit an Active Transportation Plan (ATP) grant in June 2024 and begin project design. Based on previous plans and public outreach efforts, below are key elements to consider:

1. Widen sidewalks to enhance pedestrian use of Downtown space.
2. Promote balanced multi-modal circulation (i.e., add bike lanes through Downtown).
3. Provide on-street parking.
4. Provide well-maintained and well-lit pedestrian pathways, landscaping, street furniture, courtyards, shade, and other amenities.

Recommendations:

Director of Public Works - Engineering recommends that the Committee:

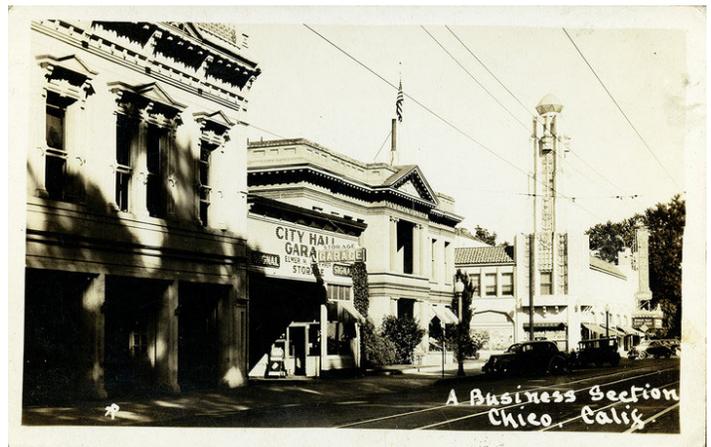
1. Provide the report, along with any recommendations, to the City Council for consideration and approval (anticipated at the first meeting in February 2024).
2. Direct staff to provide a public workshop to gather input from residents and share information on Downtown redesign concepts prior to the scheduled City Council meeting.
3. Direct staff to conduct a public survey to collect citizen input on design options prior to the scheduled City Council meeting.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funding for this project is anticipated to come from several sources. For design work, staff plans to utilize American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) grant dollars, State Carbon Reduction Program (CRP) dollars as a grant secured through BCAG, and a local apportionment of the Transportation Development Act (TDA) funding. Future construction phases are recommended to consist of Measure H funding as a City match (typically 20% to maximize grant application scoring) for a larger Active Transportation Program (ATP) grant.

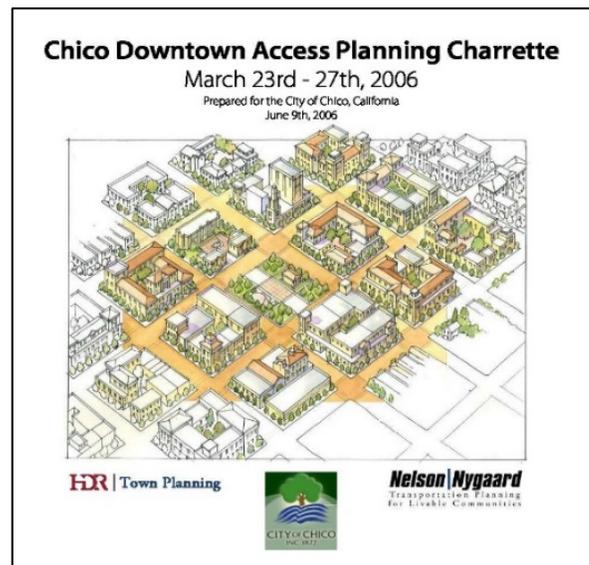
BACKGROUND

Downtown has a rich history dating back to 1872 when Chico became a city. The core of the community has always been Downtown. The proximity of what started as the Chico Normal School and eventually turned into California State University, Chico, provides a lively, active, and youthful energy to the City's core. Downtown started like many other 'Main Streets' across the United States with dirt roads and wood-planked sidewalks for wagons, horses, and buggies to traverse. In the 1930's, urban improvements were constructed. Construction standards and design criteria have evolved and changed since the original development of the buildings and underlying infrastructure. Original materials and functionality have deteriorated to the extent that it is time to remove and replace many of the dilapidated and outdated components.



Downtown Access Plan (2006)

In March 2006, efforts began to re-envision the Downtown to meet changing needs. This endeavor involved hosting public meetings, engaging stakeholders, and gathering valuable input through a charrette. Ultimately, the City adopted the Downtown Access Plan, which proposed enhancements to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, vehicles, delivery trucks, emergency vehicles, and transit in the Downtown core. This plan became a guiding policy document that provided the basis for the Goals, Policies, and Actions adopted in Chico's 2030 General Plan. Despite being nearly 18 years old, the 2006 plan remains relevant and provides the foundation for the concepts and options presented in this process. More recent changes to the Downtown have required certain modifications.



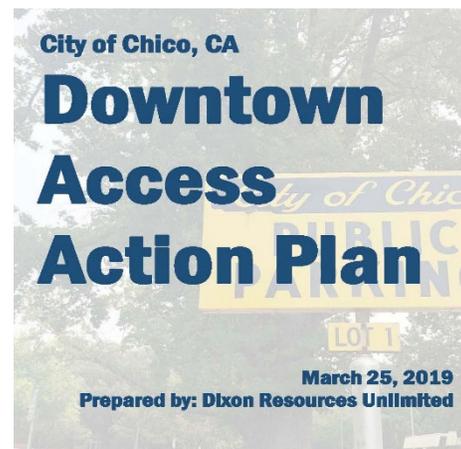


2030 General Plan Downtown Element (2011)

Recognizing the significance of Downtown Chico, the 2030 General Plan dedicated an entire Element, or chapter, to focus on Downtown's unique needs as the heart of the community and center of cultural activity. The vision for Downtown encompasses its role as both a visitor destination and a local community center hub through an engaging and active street level, with multi-story, mixed-use structures that provide restaurants, specialty retail, residences, and entertainment venues. Based on this vision, multi-modal access and connectivity are critical to support the concepts. Unfortunately, Downtown's current condition does not fully support this vision with its cracked and heaving sidewalks, dilapidated streets, aged underground infrastructure (sewer, water, gas, and electrical), and minimal bicycle infrastructure.

Downtown Access Action Plan (2019)

In 2019, consistent with previous Downtown planning efforts, the City Council adopted a Downtown Access Action Plan, which outlined short-, mid-, and long-term steps needed to implement an efficient and effective parking management program for Downtown Chico. The goal of a successful parking management program is to create proper customer parking availability in urban cores, so that there is consistent turnover, available spots, and reduced employee parking in intended customer zones. In addition, the plan identified new technology to enhance the convenience of managing and paying for parking. It also identified enhanced parking enforcement as a way to improve the customer experience. Further, the plan included goals and policies to re-envision Chico's aging Downtown infrastructure.



Active Transportation Plan (in progress): Consistent with the City's 2030 General Plan Circulation Element, multi-modal planning and implementation has also become a priority city-wide. To better understand and establish networks and connections for pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure, the City has been developing a 2023 Active Transportation Plan (ATP), which updates the Chico Bike Plan. One of the main identified gaps in Chico's bicycle infrastructure system is in the heart of the community -- Downtown Chico. Currently, there is a lack of adequate bike facilities in the Downtown area, restricting and limiting access to this mode of transportation. Those who do use the roadway for biking, experience safety concerns while competing for space with motorized vehicles. In fact, Downtown Chico area experiences the most bicycle and pedestrian accidents in the City. Therefore, the ATP envisions

significant enhancement to Downtown’s bike and pedestrian facilities, including connectivity to points of interest such as a Class IV separated bicycle facility north up the Esplanade Corridor (to be built in 2024), connections to Bidwell Park to the east, the Chico State South Campus neighborhood to the west, and the Park Avenue corridor to the south.

Outdoor Dining Café Ordinance (2012)

Another factor that plays heavily into a discussion of Downtown circulation is the council-adopted ordinance from 2012 that allows for the installation of outdoor dining cafes within the public right-of-way in Downtown. Since 2012, approximately seven outdoor cafes have been constructed, contributing to a more active and engaged Downtown streetscape. However, due to Downtown’s existing configuration, there have been challenges and costs associated with implementing enhancements. There are limitations on developing cafes in certain areas, such as locations with diagonal parking (i.e., 2nd Street). The key requirement for outdoor cafes is to widen the curb-line to twenty (20) feet from the building face (12’ for outdoor café and 8’ for sidewalk widening). This requirement sets some minimum requirements for the Main and Broadway corridors for the sidewalk alignments to match the existing dimensions.

Overall, these planning efforts and documents provide the foundational context for staff to perform more detailed layouts and options for the Council’s consideration. Each of the above planning efforts included significant and valuable public engagement. To the extent possible, this planning effort seeks to incorporate past planning direction and move forward with a detailed engineering concept that will fit and appropriately function with the Downtown’s existing environment and constraints. Although the width from building face to building face along the Main and Broadway corridors varies, a minimum width of eighty-two (82) feet has been confirmed through surveys. Therefore, even in areas where face-to-face widths are slightly wider by a foot or two, staff is using the eighty-two-foot width as a design basis to best implement consistent transportation facilities for the corridor.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The final project scope chosen by Council will be utilized to create design drawings and a project description for environmental review. For CEQA purposes, it is anticipated that the proposed project will require an Initial Study / Mitigated Negative Declaration due to some of the historic elements associated with removing and replacing existing features. If federal grant funds are awarded for this project, the project will also require NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) approvals.

DISCUSSION

The General Plan envisions Downtown Chico as the heart of the community and the center of cultural activity. Engaging and active at the street level, it is a multi-story, mixed-use hub, with specialty retail, restaurants, residences, services, entertainment, and civic and cultural uses. Downtown Chico serves as both a visitor destination and a community center with activities that attract heavy pedestrian traffic. Downtown is walkable with supportive parking facilities, and new developments are designed with pedestrians and bicyclists in mind. North and South Downtown each have their own distinct but complementary character.

The limits of this project include the Main and Broadway corridors from 1st Street to Humboldt Road, including the side streets between Main and Broadway.



FIGURE 1: PROPOSED PROJECT LIMITS

This project seeks to create connectivity and opportunities in both the North and South Downtown areas. The 2030 General Plan provides Goals, Policies, and Actions for Downtown, with the following policy framework applying to the project study;

Goal DT-3: Enhance the pedestrian environment in Downtown

Policy DT-3.1 (Design for the Pedestrian Environment) – Enhance the high-quality pedestrian environment within Downtown through the design and maintenance of buildings, sidewalks, open spaces, and other pedestrian amenities.

Action DT-3.1.1 (Downtown Design Guidelines) – Maintain and apply the Design Guidelines Manual for Downtown building rehabilitation, new construction, parking, signs, streetscape, pedestrian pathways, and sidewalks.

Action DT-3.1.2 (Common Spaces) – Modify standards and building fees to allow and encourage the incorporation of architectural features that create welcoming outdoor places for residents, employees and visitors.

Policy DT-3.3 (Public Realm) – Develop public areas in Downtown that are comfortable, welcoming, and available for use by the whole community.

Action DT-3.3.1 (Sidewalk Uses) – Encourage the active use of sidewalks by expanding their allowed uses to include outdoor seating and dining, streetscape and landscape furnishings, and other pedestrian features, while maintaining space for a path of travel.

Action DT-3.3.2 (Enhance Downtown Open Space) – Increase the use of public space by providing well-maintained and well-lit pedestrian pathways, landscaping, street furniture, courtyards, shade and other amenities.

Policy DT-3.5 (Pedestrian Priorities) – Prioritize facilities for pedestrian travel within Downtown

Action DT-3.5.1 (Enhance Sidewalks) – Enhance pedestrian facilities with features such as sidewalks, bulb-out corners, and street furniture, placing an emphasis on extending sidewalk features to South Downtown.

Policy DT-3.7 (Scale of Downtown Streets) – Design Downtown streets to encourage more sidewalk pedestrian activity

Action DT-3.7.1 (Number of Travel Lanes) – Giving special consideration for north-south circulation patterns and the delivery needs of Downtown businesses, identify options to reduce the number of travel lanes on Downtown streets to accommodate additional diagonal parking or an enhanced pedestrian environment.

Goal DT-5: Support all modes of transportation in and around Downtown

Policy DT-5.1 (Multi-modal Circulation) – Promote a balanced multi-modal circulation system to and throughout Downtown that includes pedestrians, bicycles, vehicles, and public transit.

Action DT5.1.2 (Expand Bicycle Amenities) – Create additional bike lanes and safe, convenient, and attractive bicycle parking, including covered spaces.

Action DT5.1.3 (Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety) – Identify and address hazards for pedestrians and bicyclists.

While the policy guidance seeks to incorporate all pedestrian and bicycling facilities, as well as parking within the primary corridors, there are limitations to putting all of these features within the eighty-two (82) feet of public right-of-way. Therefore, there is not a one-size-fits-all layout that adequately addresses the various needs for each infrastructure category. Staff started this effort by evaluating multiple layouts and considering each situation's functionality. Through this evaluation process, several concepts were determined to not be viable due to various factors. Refer to **Attachment A – Downtown Chico Complete Streets Project – Design Alternatives Analysis** for specific details on the factors considered and layouts not selected to move forward. Staff determined the viability of two alternative street configurations, each offering distinct layout options. While staff has identified these two options, we are seeking input from the community and are open to considering other options that may emerge.

The outcome and implementation of this planning effort will affect Downtown for generations to come and provides policymakers with the information they need to make informed decisions.



FIGURE 2: EXISTING CONFIGURATION - BROADWAY ST.



FIGURE 3: EXISTING CONFIGURATION – MAIN STREET

Staff is seeking input and direction on specific aspects related to the design of this right-of-way. Below are the specific elements and options for consideration. The final direction of these items will define the comprehensive scope of improvements for the Downtown.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In each of the scenarios below, staff is providing a minimum of two design options for various corridor features. The intent is that ultimately the City Council will vote on each of the five (5) items individually. Collectively, the selected elements will be incorporated into the complete project scope of work. While staff is proposing options, with Alternative 1 in each scenario representing the recommended option, we seek input and discussion from the IAC, community, project stakeholders and ultimately the City Council.

1. Evaluation of cross-section details

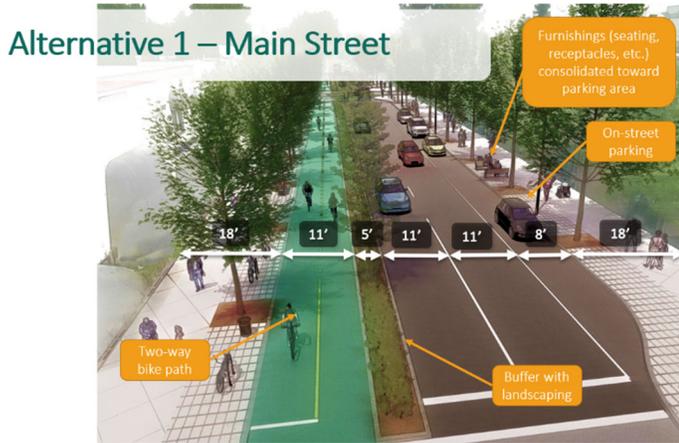
Alternative 1: Class IV bike facilities on Main, none on Broadway (Alternative 4 from **Attachment A**)



This option considers installation of a Class IV (bi-directional, separated facility) bike path on the east side of Main Street and widening sidewalks to provide adequate space for future outdoor dining cafes. Notably, it does not allocate a dedicated biking facility on Broadway in order to facilitate on-street parking on both sides of Broadway. However, biking access will be made to Broadway by connections on 2nd, 3rd and 4th Streets (See Item 3 below), with bike parking facilities intended to be provided at the intersections of Broadway Street and these side streets.

This option is the staff recommendation for preferred alternative as it best provides a separated bike facility that will tie in with the upcoming Esplanade Class IV bike path and connectivity to Park Avenue. This option reduces on-street parking on Main Street on the east side to accommodate the dedicated biking facility, however, will provide dedicated bike parking facilities to increase access to downtown businesses. In addition, the 20' wide sidewalks will accommodate a consistent sidewalk width while accommodating the existing outdoor dining cafes. There are no existing outdoor dining cafes on Main

Street and therefore, there is more flexibility in the sidewalk width dimensions. Therefore, 18' sidewalks are proposed in this scenario, enough to provide a 10' outdoor café, with an 8' sidewalk.



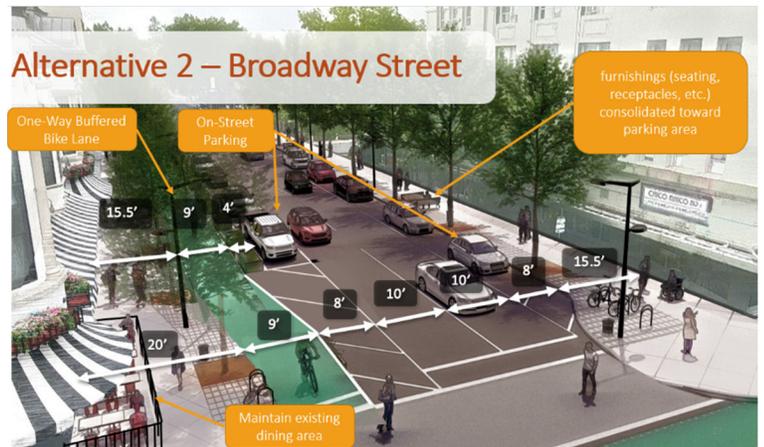
Alternative 2: Class II protected bike lanes on Main and Broadway (Alternative 3 from Attachment A)



In this option, Class II protected bike lanes, single direction and on-street, would be established on both Main and Broadway. Additionally, parking would be available on both sides of the street. While this option is less efficient in terms of bicycle connectivity compared to Option 1, it maintains a higher capacity for on-street parking.

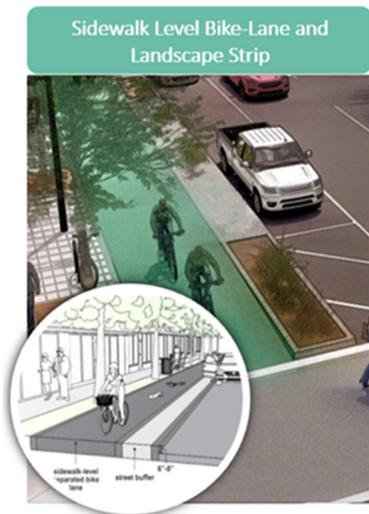
This was the second recommended option from staff as it limits the sidewalk width to 15.5' which is not enough space to accommodate outdoor dining cafes. Therefore, in order to incorporate outdoor cafes, costly repairs would be needed to widen sidewalks, causing the removal of on-street parking and jogging of the Class II bike lane. In staffs experience and opinion, this would cause inconsistent improvements along the corridor, and outdoor cafes would be less likely to be implemented due to the costs and impacts of the limited sidewalk. In addition, 'floating parking' would create a scenario where motorists

would walk across the bike lanes in order to reach the sidewalk area. Lastly, Thursday Night Markets during the summer months close down Broadway. Having the Class II lanes would create conflict with bicyclists through the closure area with pedestrians traversing the market.



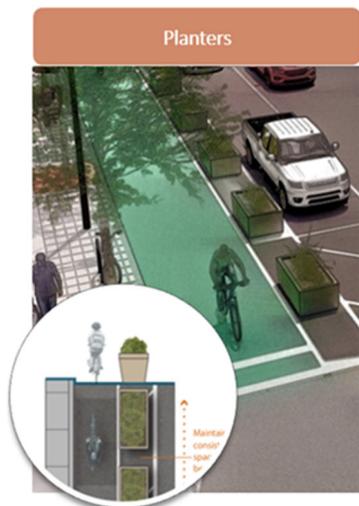
2. Bike Lane Buffer Design Options

Alternative 1: Landscaped median



Medians would consist of standard curbs, providing landscaping within the raised median. Landscaping would consist of trees and shrubs to create a more welcoming and safer environment. This would add to the maintenance responsibilities of the Public Works – Operations and Maintenance staff, however, in discussions with this department, it is believed that this can be incorporated into existing work programs cost effectively. If Alternative 1 is selected above, this would be ideal as there is not adjacent on-street parking. In Alternative 2, parking vehicles would walk across a landscaped median in order to access the sidewalk area.

Alternative 2: Physical planters spaced throughout the buffer area



This scenario would provide physical planters spaced evenly through the corridor. It will provide some greenery and a physical barrier from the adjacent vehicle drive lanes and/or parking spots.

Alternative 3: Concrete median with wrought iron fencing



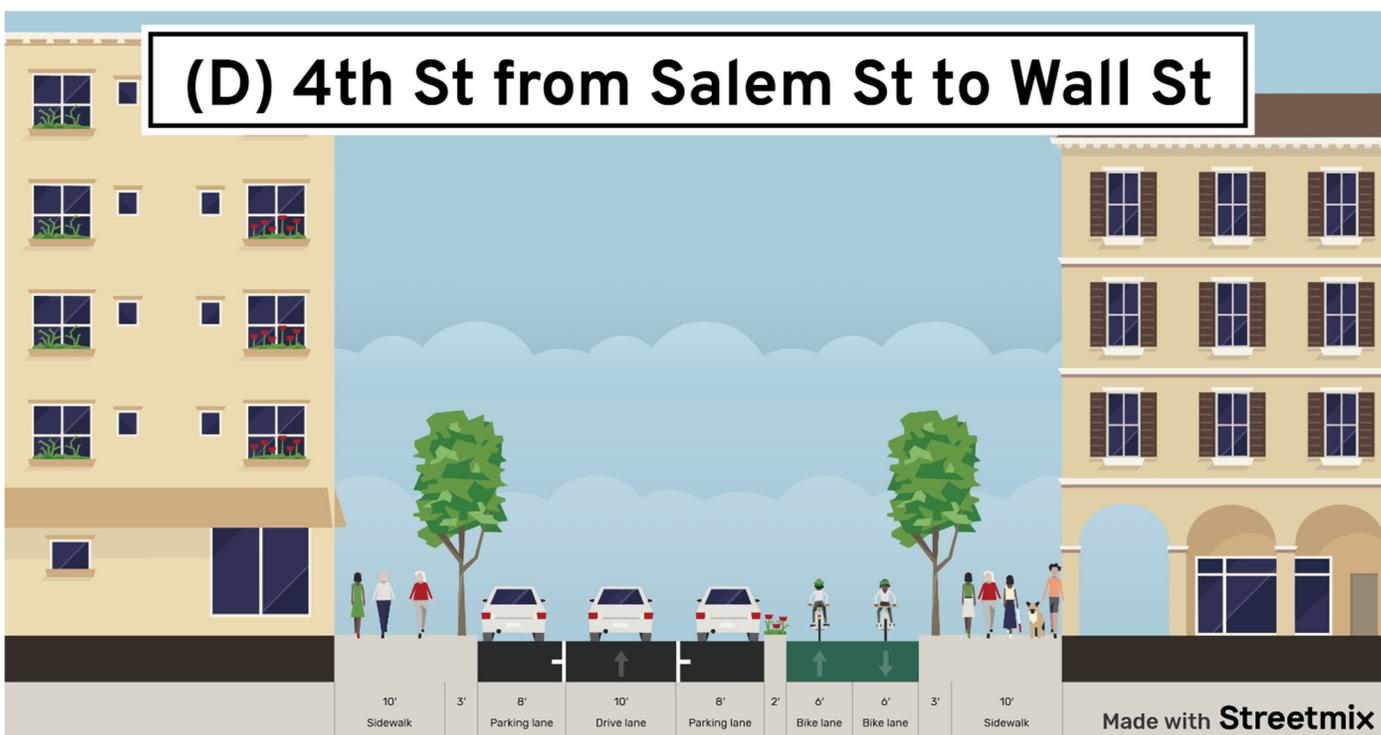
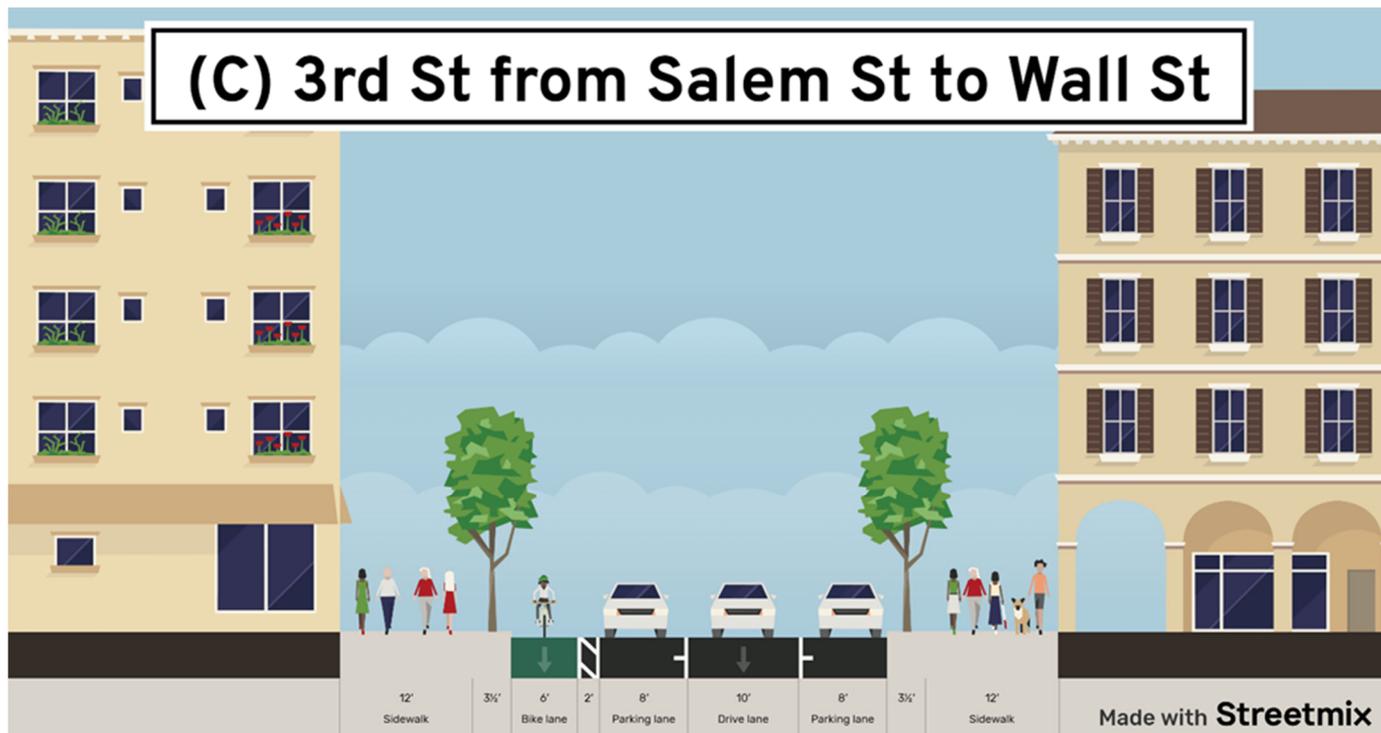
This scenario would construct a concrete median, with the installation of wrought iron fencing that would match the fencing in other downtown locations, such as Children’s Park along Esplanade. This provides a physical barrier from adjacent vehicle travel lanes, however lacks landscaping features that typically provide a more welcoming environment.

3. **Inclusion of 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Streets to connect to Lower Bidwell Park**

This would include improvements as shown here to 2nd Street, 3rd Street and 4th Street connecting downtown to Lower Bidwell Park (see Figure 1: Proposed Project Limits). For 3rd Street, this connection would occur at Orient Street where Annie’s Glen bike path terminates. For 4th Street, this would carry bike facilities to Cypress Avenue at the entrance to Bidwell Park. This would also include widening of sidewalks on 2nd Street, resulting in a lane reduction, however, maintaining diagonal parking on the north side of 2nd Street. This would allow for and accommodate outdoor dining cafes that are otherwise difficult or infeasible currently.

Alternative 1: Include improvements to 2nd, 3rd and 4th Streets





Alternative 2: Do not include 2nd, 3rd and 4th Streets in the project scope

4. Existing Vaults in the Downtown public right-of-way (ROW)

There are approximately 24 existing access vaults within the public ROW project limits. These access vaults provide private property access. In some discussions with businesses, these access vaults are used on a limited basis, however, when used are critical for getting equipment, materials, or goods into the buildings that might not otherwise be feasible. Since they were installed so long ago, there is nothing that outlines the approvals for such items within public property. In today's environment, if this was to be constructed, a Grant of License would be required as it is the private property owners maintenance and liability associated with the equipment in the public ROW. Many of the vaults are old and deteriorated, as well as protruding from the sidewalk surface causing a potential tripping hazard. Consideration on what to do with this feature is included in this section.



Alternative 1: Allow property owners to retain access features within the public right-of-way

In consideration of this item, staff suggests that property owners be responsible for certain aspects of replacing these private facilities. This would include owners paying for new vaults, as well as obtaining a grant of license (GOL) from the Public Works – Engineering department that allows for these vaults to be within the public ROW, however puts ownership and maintenance responsibilities on the private owners benefitting from these access vaults. Estimated costs for the vaults and GOL would be approximately \$6,000 - \$10,000. It would be expected that the City would install the vaults during construction of the project sidewalks to ensure grades are met. Vaults would be selected by Public Works - Engineering staff for consistency and ADA compliance.

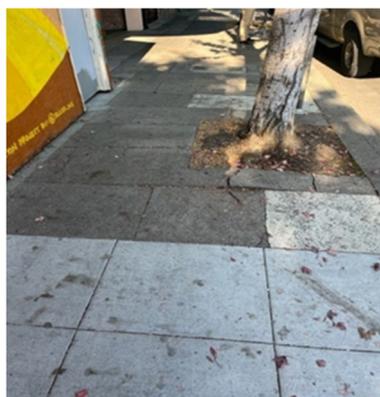
Alternative 2: City pay for all costs of installing new vaults

City would include costs for purchasing vaults and installing as a part of this project.

Alternative 3: Remove all vaults from public rights-of-way, eliminating basement access from ROW

5. Trees within the public right-of-way (ROW)

The downtown area has a mix of existing trees throughout the corridor. Many of these trees are not native species and were not planted with modern practices such as adequate irrigation systems, root barrier (to prevent roots from uplifting sidewalks), ADA compliant grates, etc. In addition, the limited sidewalk widths have caused trees to be planted close to buildings, which has caused many of the trees to grow in an unbalanced manner. Discussions with property owners have resulted in learning that these trees also leave sap and other tree elements on buildings, creating maintenance concerns and obligations of cleaning that off of the buildings on a regular basis. Public Works – Engineering staff have also consulted with our Urban Forest Manager on this item and his input is reflected in the recommended alternatives below.



Alternative 1: Remove existing trees and plant new, mature trees in widened sidewalk

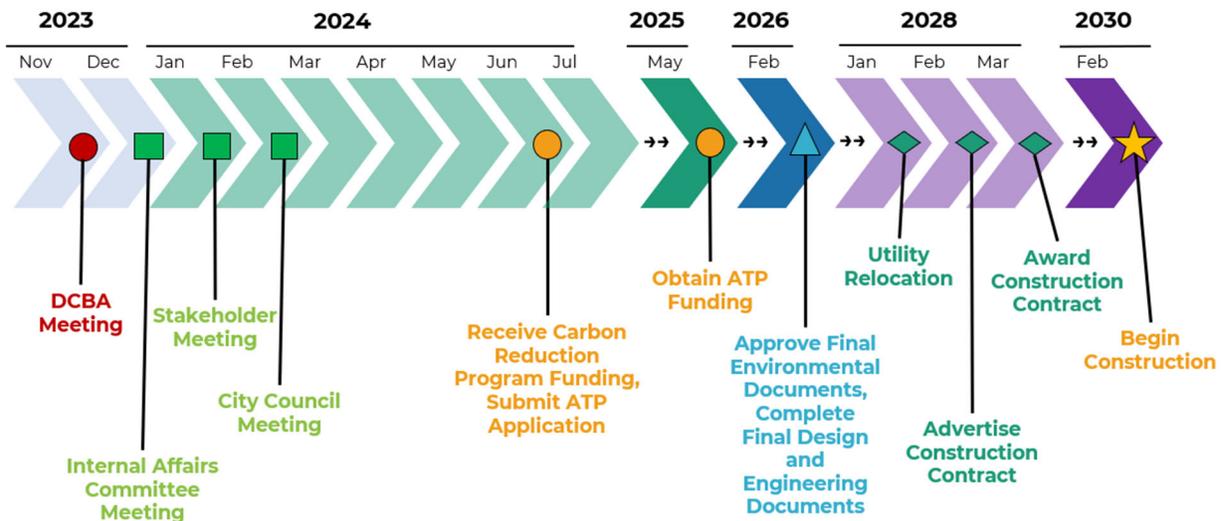
This alternative would remove existing trees within the ROW. New mature, 36" box trees of native species would be planted in the widened sidewalks (up against the new curb alignment, further away from buildings) allowing for a more balanced canopy. In addition, proper irrigation and root barrier protection would be installed to prevent future root intrusion causing heaving sidewalks. Up-lighting would also be considered to provide additional ambiance to the downtown. Consistent and modern grates would be installed at every tree location so that there are no tripping hazards, while also creating a consistent visual aesthetic for the downtown north and south.

Alternative 2: Leave existing trees and work around

This option would keep existing trees. During construction activities, these would be protected in place, causing additional time and costs to construct new sidewalks. In addition, sidewalk elevations would work around these features while also making new concrete sidewalk ADA compliant. In most instances, roots would likely need to be trimmed back under the guidance of a certified arborist. There would still be a potential that trees might not survive through construction activities around these tree root systems, causing them to be over-stressed. In addition, without root barriers, these root systems would likely continue to cause heaving of new sidewalk in the future.

With direction from Council, staff will package the proposed improvements into an anticipated Active Transportation Program (ATP) grant application administered by Caltrans Local Assistance and the California Transportation Commission. Grant applications are anticipated to be due June 1st, 2024. This program focuses on funding for the enhancement of multi-modal infrastructure, so it is important that the proposed improvements meet this criteria to be awarded.

PROJECT SCHEDULE



The estimated project schedule is shown here. A project of this scale requires significant effort and coordination. Although staff strives to provide a projected schedule for project completion, there are often factors beyond the City’s control that can delay timelines. These factors include but are not limited to, utility relocations, right-of-way acquisitions with unwilling property owners, environmental permitting from State and Federal agencies, and more. Delivering a project of this scale typically spans multiple years, from initial concept to final construction. The presence of older infrastructure and buildings in Downtown further introduces unique engineering challenges not encountered in typical new infrastructure projects.

Other design elements that will be included in the project are: loading & unloading zones (including ride share), kiosks, street lights, placement of bollard sleeves in select intersections to make downtown street closures more efficient and safer for all users, aesthetic traffic signal poles, dedicated bike parking corrals, south downtown gateway feature, landscaping and utility relocations.

Due to the magnitude of these permanent improvements, project completion is estimated for Fall 2029. There are interim concepts, such as Quick-Build Infrastructure, that the IAC and Council may wish to consider. This approach allows surface-level treatments by sealing the pavement surface and re-striping to include certain features such as parking, travel lanes, and bike lanes. If desired, the Council may direct staff to complete these surface-level improvements. Depending on the final scope, this cost could range from \$300,000 - \$500,000 and could be implemented as early as Summer 2025. Staff believes there is value in completing interim improvements to verify operational elements of new configurations and allowing opportunities to adjust prior to final enhancements. With this option, there would likely be unutilized space due to incorporating street features without widening the sidewalks.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Staff has engaged with various representatives and stakeholders since the release of the date of this report to discuss its different elements. This list includes, among others, the Downtown Chico Business Association, California State University, Chico, and Chico Velo.

Reviewed by:

Approved and recommended by:

Brendan Ottoboni, Director of Public Works -
Engineering

Mark Sorensen, City Manager

DISTRIBUTION:

City Clerk (3)

ATTACHMENTS:

- A. Downtown Chico Complete Streets – Design Alternatives Analysis Report