

Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP)

TO: HONORABLE CITY COUNCIL

FROM: CITY MANAGER **DEPARTMENT:** PLANNING AND COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT

DATE: January 16, 2001

CMR: 105:01

SUBJECT: PROPOSED Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program

REPORT IN BRIEF

The proposed Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP) is a set of procedures and guidelines for traffic calming on a citywide basis for individual local and collector streets and entire residential neighborhoods. This proposed program does not apply to residential arterial streets. A \$100,000 annual budget would pay for the "spot treatment" traffic calming projects on one or a few local and collector streets. For complex projects and neighborhood projects, staff will request additional funding on a project-by-project basis within the overall Capital Improvement Program budget. The proposed NTCP would help the City respond more quickly to residents' concerns about traffic problems on residential local and collector streets. To that end, this program proposes the delegation of some traffic calming decisions, which are currently made by the City Council, to the City Manager and (after review and recommendations by the Planning and Transportation Commission) to the Director of Planning and Community Environment. The Planning and Transportation Commission desires that the primary focus of the NTCP be on improved safety for non-motorized street users through speed reduction, rather than volume reduction. Commissioners were also concerned about the large amount of curbside parking removal that could potentially be authorized by staff. Staff has made the necessary modifications to the NTCP to respond to the Commission's concerns, as well as a few other proposed modifications. Staff recommends adoption of the revised NTCP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Planning and Transportation Commission recommends the following Council action:

1. Approve the Negative Declaration for low-impact traffic calming projects on local streets;
2. Adopt the City of Palo Alto Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP), as amended by the Planning and Transportation Commission;
3. Adopt the ordinance amending Palo Alto Municipal Code Section 10.36.080, with staff-developed language in response to recommendations from the Planning and Transportation Commission; and
4. Designate the Chief Transportation Official as the approving authority for: (i) permanent installation of low-impact traffic calming projects on local streets; and (ii) trial installation of local street traffic calming projects that force vertical or horizontal movement for speed control.

With regard to Recommendation 1, staff recommends removing from the NTCP the expedited approval process for low-impact traffic calming projects and the accompanying negative declaration. Any citizen request for low-impact measures would thus be considered following the same procedures as for other traffic calming measures. Therefore, Recommendation 1 would no longer be necessary.

In reference to Recommendation 2, staff recommends the following two revised definitions that were *not* included in the Commission's amendments. Staff believes that these revised definitions promote standardization and clarify the Commission's intentions. The revisions also add the term "neighborhood livability," which staff believes is a desired outcome of traffic calming.

Staff-revised definition of traffic calming: Traffic calming is the combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, improve safety for non-motorized street users, and improve neighborhood livability.

Staff-revised Objective 1: Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and neighborhood livability by reducing traffic speeds, crashes, and cut-through traffic on local and collector streets, primarily through engineering means.

In reference to Recommendation 3, staff has concluded that the proposed ordinance is not required because the City Manager already has sufficient authority to remove parking. In response to the Commission's concerns about parking removal, staff has modified NTCP Guideline 6 to substantially limit the extent of parking removal by staff. Thus, Recommendation 3 would no longer be necessary.

In reference to Recommendation 4, staff recommends that the City Manager be the approval authority instead of the Chief Transportation Official. Discussion of these items is found below under "Planning and Transportation Commission Review and Recommendations" and "Policy Implications."

PROJECT

DESCRIPTION

This project is the development of procedures and guidelines for a Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program for individual local and collector streets and entire residential neighborhoods. For purposes of this report, traffic calming is the combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, improve safety for non-motorized street users, and improve neighborhood livability. Attachment D is the proposed NTCP—an all-inclusive, stand-alone booklet that is proposed for distribution to the public after it is approved by the City Council. The first part of the booklet is comprised of the objectives, guidelines, procedures, and criteria for the program. The second part of the booklet is an appendix that describes a wide range of physical traffic calming measures. The attached NTCP contains the amendments and suggestions made by the Commission, *plus* some further proposed changes not discussed by the Commission. All these items are discussed in the following section of this report. Staff has also made numerous editorial improvements to the NTCP booklet.

The proposed NTCP has two subprograms contained in the single document. The first is a "spot treatment" program for calming traffic on one or a few streets. It has an annual budget of \$100,000 (subject to annual renewal) that funds data collection, design, construction and removal (if necessary) of traffic calming measures. The second program of the NTCP is a "complex/neighborhood project" program that addresses traffic calming on several interconnected neighborhood streets, including an entire neighborhood; and any project that is too complex or expensive to be considered under the "spot treatment" program. As a guideline, staff would consider a traffic calming project to be too complex or expensive for the spot treatment program if the cost were to exceed the annual budget (currently \$100,000). These complex and/or neighborhood traffic calming projects require more extensive analytical studies and outreach to residents than do the spot treatment projects. A good example of a complex or neighborhood project is the Downtown North traffic calming project now underway. Requests for complex/neighborhood projects would be qualified and ranked according to the criteria in Chapter VII of the NTCP. They would then be placed on a separate project list that would be evaluated as part of the development of the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) budget. Staff would usually conduct these large projects following the full 12-step procedure of Chapter VI of the NTCP.

PLANNING AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION REVIEW AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission first discussed the NTCP on May 10, 2000, and requested that staff make substantial improvements before it was considered further. Staff revised the program and brought it back to the Commission on September 27, 2000. The Commission's September 27 discussion is the topic of this report. The September 27 discussion focussed on two substantive issues. The first was the role of street closures as traffic calming measures and the degree to which volume reduction should be included as a goal of traffic calming. The second issue was the degree to which the City Manager should be permitted to remove parking for the placement of traffic calming measures. These two issues, as well as other changes requested by the Commission, are discussed below. Staff is proposing other changes that are also included in the following discussion.

Street Closures and Volume Reduction

At least one Commissioner believed that traffic calming should not include volume reduction. That is, traffic calming should primarily focus on slowing down traffic, with possibly some volume reduction as a consequence. Some Commissioners felt that the primary goal of traffic calming should be to improve safety. In general, the Commission desires that the primary focus of the NTCP be on improved safety for non-motorized street users through speed reduction. In the NTCP that the Commission reviewed, the primary objective of traffic calming was:

Objective 1: Reduce traffic speeds, volumes, crashes, and cut-through traffic on local and collector streets through engineering means.

After considerable discussion, the Commission unanimously approved the NTCP (Recommendation 2), but with Objective 1 changed as follows:

Objective 1: Reduce traffic speeds, crashes, and cut-through traffic on local and collector streets through engineering means. Sub-objective 1.5: Emphasize pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Even though the Commission removed "reduce volumes" from Objective 1, the objective of "reduce cut-through traffic" still remains. In the end, the Commission reluctantly concluded that volume control measures (e.g., street closures, turn restrictions, diverters, etc) should remain in the program because they are an effective way to reduce cut-through traffic. Furthermore, volume control measures are specifically allowed by the Comprehensive Plan for special situations. By leaving "cut-through traffic" in Objective 1, it will still be acceptable to reduce traffic volumes that are comprised of high levels of cut-through traffic, as long as the primary goal is to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety.

To make this objective more consistent with staff's suggested definition of traffic calming, staff proposes that Objective 1 be reworded to read:

Objective 1: Improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and neighborhood livability by reducing traffic speeds, crashes, and cut-through traffic on local and collector streets, primarily through engineering means.

This change strengthens the Commission's desired emphasis on safety, loosens the statement about using solely engineering means (to allow the occasional use of police enforcement), and adds an emphasis on neighborhood livability. The above changes suggested by staff have been included in the attached NTCP on pages 3 and 5.

Speed Reduction

Commissioners sought assurance from staff that the primary emphasis in the traffic calming program would be on speed reduction rather than on volume reduction. The Commission requested that additional weighting be given to citizen requests involving speeding problems.

Staff has made the weighting change in the first four ranking criteria on page 24 of the NTCP booklet. The number of points assigned to each speed ranking criterion has been doubled compared to what the Commission reviewed. Once a traffic calming request has been received and staff determines that it meets the minimum qualifying criteria, it will be placed on the project list. A qualified request with high speeds would now score more ranking points than one with high volumes (assuming other factors are equal), and would thus be placed higher on the project list. (Note that the minimum *qualifying* criteria for speeds on page 23 of the booklet have *not* been changed. They remain at 32 mph for a local street and 35 mph for a collector street. Staff believes that lowering these qualifying criteria would overwhelm the program with more requests than staffing and budget resources would allow to be processed.) In addition to the revised ranking system, emphasis on speed reduction over volume reduction is inherent in the proposed NTCP. Guideline 4 (page 8 of the NTCP) restates the Comprehensive Plan policy about maintaining open streets. Guideline 9 states that speed reduction will be the primary objective for collector street projects. Finally, where street closures are discussed in the NTCP (Chapter IV and measure No. 19 in the Appendix), there are full statements of the Comprehensive Plan policy discouraging their use.

Parking

Removal

Considerable Commission discussion resulted from the proposal that the City Manager be authorized to remove up to one block of parking in order to implement permanent installation of low-impact traffic calming projects (refer to pages 10 – 11 of the attached staff report). Commissioners were concerned about the potential for a large amount of staff-authorized parking removal and that there would be no citizen recourse to a higher authority. Staff is now recommending deletion of the expedited process for low-impact traffic calming projects (see discussion below under “Low-Impact Traffic Calming Projects”) However, the parking issue is still germane because staff-authorized parking removal is still necessary for trials of spot treatment traffic calming projects on local streets. (For clarification, all other trials and permanent installations of traffic calming measures would be subject to Commission or Council review.)

In responding to the Commission’s concerns, staff has concluded that Palo Alto Municipal Code (PAMC) Chapters 10.36.080(a)(3) and 10.40.020 already give the City Manager sufficient authority to prohibit curbside parking. No changes to the code are necessary to implement this part of the NTCP. To accommodate the Commission’s concerns, staff has modified Guideline 6 (page 8 of the NTCP) to state that staff-authorized parking removal for traffic calming projects would be limited to a maximum of 60 feet on each side of a local residential street, within every 400-foot length of street. This is equal to the maximum number of spaces that would be required to install one typical traffic calming measure in each typical city block of a traffic calming project (60 feet, or 3 parking spaces, per block face, for a total of 6 spaces per typical city block). Usually about 14 to 15 vehicles can be parked per block face in a 400-foot block, for a total of about 28 to 30 spaces per block. Thus, Guideline 6 would allow the removal of up to about 20 percent of the available parking on a local street for a traffic calming project. If Council desires, staff could prepare an ordinance in order to codify staff’s proposed parking removal guidelines, which would most likely be placed in PAMC Chapter 10.36.080.

Pedestrian

Generators

In the NTCP that staff presented to the Commission, one of the qualifying criteria for a traffic calming project was that the street had to be within 1000 feet of an elementary, middle or secondary school. Some Commissioners requested that other pedestrian-generating sites be included on that list. In response, on page 23 of the NTCP, staff has changed criterion (c) to read: “Location within 1000 feet walking distance of a school, senior citizen facility, facility for the disabled, park, community center, or other site with significant pedestrian activity.” (For clarification, it is not mandatory for a traffic calming request to meet this or any other single criterion in order to qualify for the project list. It is sufficient for a request to meet *any two* of the five criteria listed in Chapter VII of the NTCP.)

Complexity of the Program

Starting with the Commission’s first review of the proposed NTCP, many Commissioners felt

that the program had too many steps and seemed too bureaucratic. Staff made a few significant changes after the first Commission review, but the same 12 steps in the procedure still remain and the overall length of the document is unchanged. Staff is now proposing another change that will somewhat reduce the program's complexity. This is the removal of the expedited procedure for low-impact traffic calming projects.

As explained in Chapter VI of the NTCP, most traffic calming projects will not actually require the full 12-step procedure. Furthermore, residents are not responsible for navigating the steps required to process a request. It is staff's job to determine which steps apply to which requests, and to guide residents through the process. One Commissioner suggested that a simpler document be prepared for citywide distribution. Staff believes that a one-page pamphlet could be prepared to introduce the program and explain to residents how to get started. However, one page of information cannot possibly explain the procedure or describe the various types of traffic calming measures.

Low-Impact Traffic Calming Projects

In the NTCP presented to the Commission, staff had proposed an expedited procedure for low-impact traffic calming measures--e.g., gateways, bulb-outs, on-street parking, and signing. These measures do not greatly alter speeds or volumes, so the negative impacts are relatively minor. That process did not require a trial period, thus considerably shortening the time to implementation. Since the September 27 Commission review of this project, staff has concluded that relatively few citizens would request these types of measures exclusively. Unless low impact measures are combined with more aggressive measures, they are not particularly effective at calming traffic. Inclusion of the special process just for low impact measures increased the complexity of the NTCP. Staff believes that simplifying the NTCP by removing this special procedure is more important than the loss of expediency for the few cases to which it would apply. Thus, staff now proposes that requests exclusively for low-impact traffic calming measures be considered following the same procedure as for other spot treatment traffic calming projects on local streets. (That is, there would be a four-month staff-approved trial period. The Planning and Transportation Commission would review the results of the trial and recommend approval or disapproval to the Director of Planning and Community Development. City Council action would not be required.) Staff's proposal to delete the expedited procedure for low-impact projects also makes it unnecessary to have a program negative declaration for low-impact projects. Thus, Recommendation 1 of this report would no longer apply. This procedure is summarized in Attachment A of this report, Table 1. These staff-proposed changes have already been included in the attached NTCP.

Other Commission Requests

In addition to the major issues included in the Commission's approval motion discussed above, individual Commissioners requested some other smaller changes to the program that are discussed in Attachment B.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Planning Commission Recommendations to the Director of Planning and Community Environment

For certain traffic calming projects, the NTCP provides that the Planning and Transportation Commission review and make recommendations to the Director of Planning and Community Environment. In these cases, the Director would make the final decisions, which are currently made by the City Council. This procedure would shorten the time and complexity of the traffic calming project process. (It was not clearly explained in the attached staff report that these Commission recommendations must be approved by the Director, as the City charter does not permit the Commission to make final approvals.) As shown in Table 1 in Attachment A to this report, staff proposes that the Director of Planning and Community Environment (after considering recommendations from the Commission) be the final approving authority for (i) permanent installations of spot treatment traffic calming projects on local streets that do not employ street closures, diverters, or other measures that substantially divert traffic to other streets; and for (ii) trial installations of all the following: complex projects, collector street

projects, projects with street closures or diverters, and neighborhood projects. This procedure would be similar to the provisions of PAMC Chapters 16.48.070 and 080, in which the Architectural Review Board makes recommendations to the Director of Planning and Community Environment, who then makes the final decision based on those recommendations.

Citizen Appeals

As discussed above, staff proposes deleting the expedited procedure for staff approval of permanent installation of low-impact traffic calming measures. With this change, all permanent installations of traffic calming measures would either be reviewed by the Planning and Transportation Commission, or approved by the City Council (refer to Table 1 of Attachment A). Thus, no provision is made in the NTCP for citizen appeals of these approvals. Staff has not included a citizen appeal procedure for City Manager approval of a trial of spot treatment traffic calming projects. This is because subsequent Commission review is required before a permanent installation could proceed, at which time a citizen would have the opportunity to address the permanent project before the Commission.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

For each trial of a traffic calming project, staff would prepare an analysis of potential project impacts. The trial project is categorically exempt from environmental review per CEQA Article 15306. If the trial is successful and staff recommends its permanent installation, staff would prepare an environmental review for the permanent project, based on results of the trial, and would likely adopt a negative declaration. The City Council or the Director of Planning and Community Environment would approve the environmental review if and when that body approves the project for permanent installation.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Table 1 (“Overview of Project Implementation and Environmental Assessment”) and Table 2 (“Summary of Citizen Support Requirements”)
- B. Additional Commission Requests
- C. September 27, 2000 Transportation Division Staff Report to the Planning and Transportation Commission
- D. Revised Neighborhood Traffic Calming Program (NTCP) booklet, including Appendix of Traffic Calming Measures

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CITY MANAGER APPROVAL: _____

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cc: Attendees of Neighborhood Traffic Calming Workshop

Table 1. Palo alto neighborhood traffic calming program

Overview of project implementation and environmental review

Type of Traffic Calming Project	Trial Installation	Permanent Installation	Environmental Review
Spot treatment projects on local streets using any traffic calming measures except street closures, diverters, or other measures that substantially divert traffic to other streets.	City Manager approval	Planning and Transportation Commission recommendation. Director of Planning and Community Environment approval.	Trial installation is categorically exempt. Environmental review for permanent installation to be approved by Director of Planning and Community Environment, based on recommendations of the Planning and Transportation Commission.
Complex projects on local streets; all projects on collector streets; all projects with street closures or diverters; all neighborhood projects.	Planning and Transportation Commission recommendation. Director of Planning and Community Environment approval.	City Council approval.	Trial installation is categorically exempt. Environmental review for permanent installation to be approved by City Council.

Table 2. Palo alto neighborhood traffic calming program

summary of citizen support requirements

Type of Traffic Calming Project	Trial Installation	Permanent Installation
Spot treatment projects on local streets using any traffic calming measures except street closures, diverters, or other measures that substantially divert traffic to other streets.	50+% of <u>all</u> households on primary street(s), (plus on cross streets if intersection measures are proposed). Property owners not included in survey. City Manager approval.	50+% of survey responses from households and property owners in full project area (i.e., including adjacent streets that may be affected by traffic diversion), including 50+% of <u>all</u> households and property owners on the primary street(s). Planning and Transportation Commission recommendation. Director of Planning and Community Environment approval.
Complex projects on local streets; all projects on collector streets; all projects with street closures or diverters; all neighborhood projects.	50+% of survey responses from households in full project area (i.e., including adjacent streets that may be affected by traffic diversion). Planning and Transportation Commission recommendation. Director of Planning and Community Environment approval.	50+% of survey responses from households and property owners in full project area (i.e., including adjacent streets that may be affected by traffic diversion), including 50+% of <u>all</u> households and property owners on the primary street(s). City Council approval.

ATTACHMENT B

ADDITIONAL COMMISSION REQUESTS

Enforcement

The Commission briefly discussed whether enforcement should be part of the traffic calming toolkit. The former definition of traffic calming excluded enforcement by defining traffic calming solely as engineering measures. Staff had purposely excluded enforcement from the toolkit because enforcement cannot solve most of the speed and cut-through problems from which citizens are seeking relief (refer to the second paragraph of page 2 of the NTCP). Staff agrees, however, that enforcement could be included in traffic calming efforts under some circumstances, but the primary tools of traffic calming will still remain the physical measures. Staff's suggested revised definition of traffic calming is slightly "looser" in its reference to the use of physical measures, so this would be more suitable to permitting the use of enforcement.

Neighborhood Associations

The NTCP presented to the Commission required that a traffic calming request be received either from a neighborhood association, or through a petition signed by at least 25 percent of the households on each block where action was requested (NTCP Chapter VI, Step 1). This requirement ensures that there is a minimum level of resident support for a request before staff invests time in gathering the qualifying data. At least one Commissioner thought that

some neighborhood associations might not be truly representative of the neighborhood, and suggested that a traffic calming request come only through the petition. Staff has made that change in Step 1, but only for the spot treatment traffic calming requests. For requests that involve many streets or an entire neighborhood, staff believes that the request should still come from the neighborhood association (if there is one) and through the 25 percent support petition. This change is included in the attached NTCP.

Error Allowance for Speed and Volume Measurements.

When staff makes the speed and volume measurements to determine if the minimum qualifying criteria are met, staff will multiply these measurements by ± 5 percent and ± 10 percent, respectively. This is because the typical speed or volume could vary slightly from the actual measurement due to measurement errors and random daily fluctuations. For example, if staff measures an 85th percentile speed on the street to be 31.8 mph, the actual speed could lie between 30.2 and 33.4 mph ($31.8 \pm 5\%$). Thus, this measurement, with the error factor applied, would meet the minimum speed criterion of 32 mph. At least one Commissioner felt that the statement of this error range was too confusing.

The alternative to the percentage factors is to set an absolute minimum for speed and volume requirements, with any measurement less than that, no matter by how little, deemed to be not qualifying. In the above example, the measurement of 31.8 mph would just barely miss meeting the minimum speed criterion. Staff prefers to give the benefit of the doubt in the measurements to the requestor by applying the percentage factors. To keep these factors, yet make the minimum qualifying criteria seem less complicated to the public, staff has moved the percentage factors to footnotes where they are less obvious to the casual reader (refer to Chapter VII of the NTCP). Requesting citizens do not have to figure this out for themselves. The burden is actually on staff to make the measurements of the qualifying criteria and to explain to the requestor why the request does or does not qualify to be placed on the project list.

Length of Trial Period

Staff had originally proposed that the trial period for traffic calming projects be limited to three months, whereas trial periods in past projects have been a minimum of six months. This would reduce the amount of time to reach a permanent installation. In the first Commission meeting, a Commissioner requested that the three-month trial be lengthened. Staff did not make that change for the second Commission review, nor did Commissioners raise this issue again. However, staff now believes that a four-month trial period would be preferable for the spot treatment traffic calming projects on local streets. For all other more complex projects, collector street projects, projects with street closures or diverters, and neighborhood studies, staff proposes to maintain the six-month trial length currently used.