



## CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

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**TO:** Honorable Mayor and City Council                      **DATE:** February 9, 2021

**FROM:** Matthew Bronson, City Manager

**PREPARED BY:** Bruce Buckingham, Community Development Director  
Greg Ray, Public Works Director/City Engineer

**SUBJECT:** West Grand Avenue Master Plan Review

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### **RECOMMENDATION**

Review the West Grand Avenue Master Plan and provide direction to staff on proposed improvements to be incorporated into the Capital Improvement Program and other items included in the Plan.

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### **BACKGROUND**

#### **Overview**

The City's General Plan Land Use Element update was adopted in February 2010 and a major focus was the revitalization of West Grand Avenue that serves as the City's main commercial corridor. The Land Use Element contained an implementation measure to prepare the West Grand Avenue Master Plan (Plan) and the Plan was prepared in 2010 and adopted by the Council in 2011. The Plan, which can be viewed at <https://www.grover.org/DocumentCenter/View/1836>, is primarily a visioning tool for the revitalization of the West Grand Avenue corridor and provides a list of recommendations on page 10 that focus on physical improvements but also recognizes the need to have strategies for promoting and attracting visitors.

The Plan envisions three distinct activity nodes along the corridor to focus activity into specific areas. The visitor serving node extends from Highway 1 to 5<sup>th</sup> Street and is envisioned to become a destination for tourists and locals offering unique outdoor spaces, specialty retail, restaurants, lodgings, and entertainment venues. The downtown node from 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Streets provides services and amenities that primarily serve the community such as personal and professional services, and restaurants. The area between 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Oak Park Boulevard serves as the commercial node and provides more auto-centric uses such as grocery stores and fast-food restaurants. The remaining blocks from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Streets and 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Streets are zoned Central Business Open (CBO) and allow for commercial and mixed-use projects but is unique because it allows multi-family residential projects to encourage more housing along the corridor.

With regards to physical improvements, the Plan provides flexible and high-quality guidelines for the development of the streetscape (i.e., public realm) and design guidelines for the development of private properties to create vibrant activity centers to serve both residents and visitors. The concepts and recommendations outlined in the Plan provide guidance for development of the streetscape that over time can transform the corridor into a more vibrant, economically viable, and pedestrian-friendly corridor creating a "complete street" to better serve pedestrians and cyclists. The Plan is essentially a vision document for the Council to determine what type of public improvements should be constructed and the locations of those improvements. The Plan does not

specify any specific improvements and includes several concepts for future consideration such as a reduction in travel lanes.

It is important to note that the Plan is not a formally adopted policy document like the General Plan nor is it an ordinance like the Development Code that contains development standards that must be adhered to. The implementation of the Plan is primarily through Council actions to either incorporate public improvements into the City's Capital Improvement Program (CIP) or amendments to the General Plan or Development Code to advance recommendations of the Plan. The Plan has been the primary factor in many Development Code updates including the recently adopted sign ordinance update that include several of the recommendations provided in the Plan.

Over the last 10 years, two major public infrastructure projects on West Grand Avenue have been completed. The first involved the area between the railroad tracks and 4<sup>th</sup> Street that included center medians with palm trees, bulb-outs, street trees, enhanced crosswalk and sidewalk hardscape treatments and the extension of a major storm drain. The cost of this project was \$1.7 million and was funded almost exclusively by grant funds.

View of Improvements Along West Grand Avenue



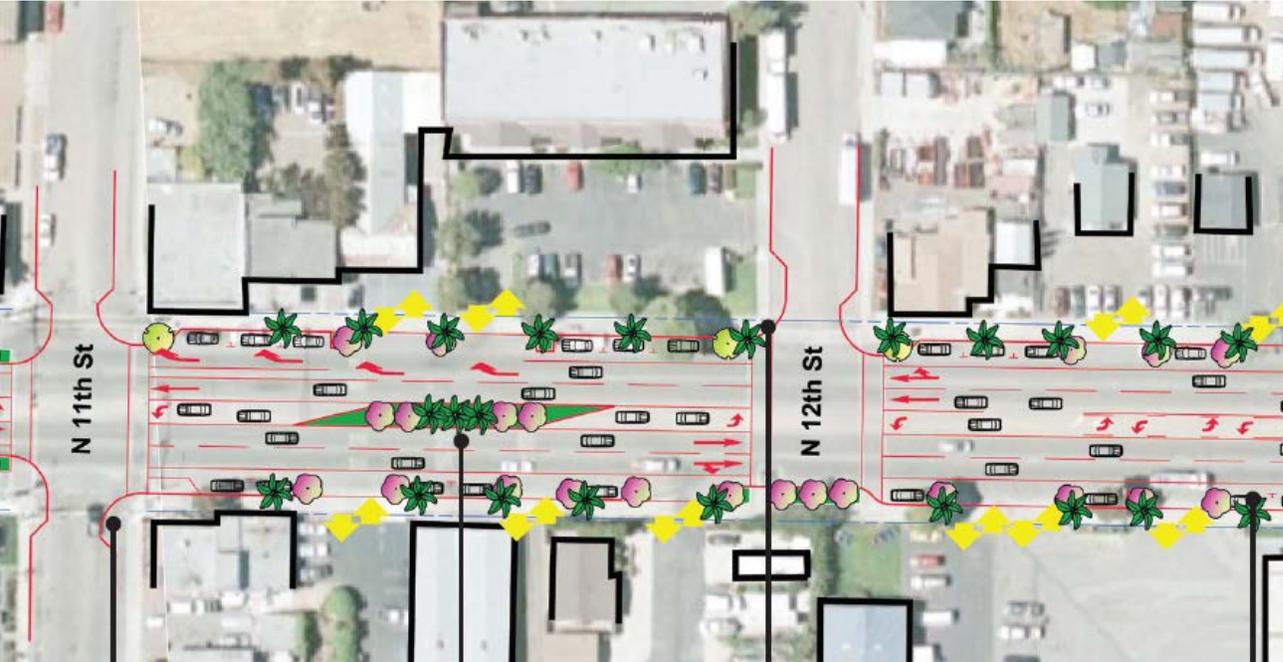
The second project involved improvements to the existing public infrastructure between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets and included new decorative crosswalks and intersections, palm trees and landscaping in the medians and landscape lighting. The cost of this project was approximately \$1 million and was also funded almost exclusively by grant funds. While these past projects were funded primarily through state and federal grants, these funding sources for enhancements administered by the San Luis Obispo Council of Governments (SLOCOG) are scarce today in comparison to regional needs and have become so competitive that the City is less likely to fully fund these projects by grants in the future. However, the recent passage of Measure F-20 and other projected revenues provide a new source of funds which the Council could invest in making improvements to the West Grand Avenue corridor along with any future grant revenue received.

Recently, there has been an increase in the inquiries received by staff regarding potential redevelopment of several key properties on West Grand Avenue. Further, staff has observed an increase in Council and community interest for improving the West Grand Avenue corridor including input as part of the FY 2021-23 Council goal-setting process. This renewed interest in improving the corridor makes this an ideal time for the Council to revisit the public improvements identified in the Plan and consider additional improvements to enhance the corridor and implement the Plan vision. Therefore, staff is bringing the adopted Plan to the Council for review and direction on potential public improvements projects to incorporate into the draft FY 2022-26 Capital Improvement Program (CIP) that the Council will consider in the budget development process. Staff is also seeking Council direction to affirm the overall vision of the Plan as well as provide direction on any additional initiatives from the Plan the Council would like to discuss further.

**Public Infrastructure Improvements**

The Plan provides a vision for public infrastructure along the West Grand Avenue corridor from Highway 1 to Oak Park Boulevard spanning one mile. The public infrastructure envisioned along the corridor varies depending on location but includes center medians, corner bulb-outs, and street trees collectively referred to as the streetscape. The Plan also discussed the possibility of roundabouts at the intersections of Highway 1 and 4<sup>th</sup> Street, diagonal parking on side streets in the downtown core, and the reduction of West Grand Avenue from four to two travel lanes between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets referred to as a road diet. The public infrastructure components are discussed below in greater detail and include a preliminary cost estimate for determining the magnitude of costs associated with each improvement. However, if the Council provides direction to incorporate improvements into the CIP, staff will conduct a more thorough analysis and provide a cost estimate to include all costs including, design, environmental review, construction, and project management.

Illustrative Concepts of Streetscape in Plan

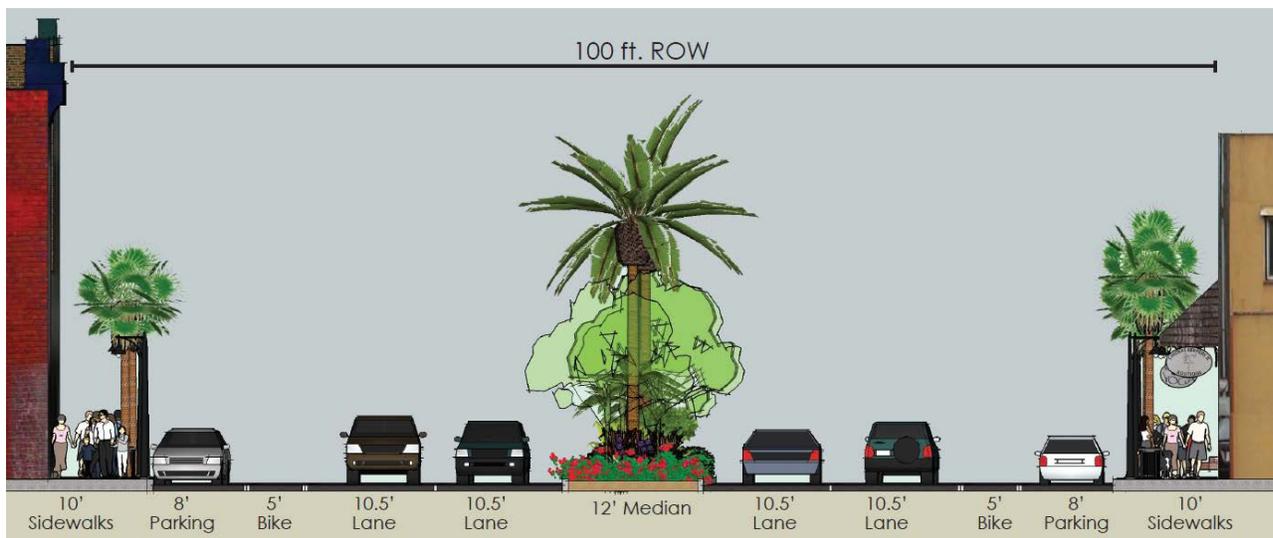


Center Medians

The Plan recommends landscaped center medians with Hybrid Washingtonia Palms from Highway 1 to 12<sup>th</sup> Street which serve as an aesthetic enhancement and to slow vehicle speeds also known

as traffic calming. As mentioned, medians have been installed in seven blocks as part of previous CIP projects with the remaining blocks located between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets and 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets. The construction plans for the center medians between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets were previously prepared and though the plans should be reviewed for possible revisions, the majority of the design costs have already been incurred. The estimated cost to construct a center median including landscaping is \$175,000 per block or \$700,000 for this four-block section. If the Council wanted to move forward with the construction of center medians, direction would be sought to include this improvement as part of the draft CIP. Completion of this section of center median between 4<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Streets would provide an uninterrupted center median from Highway 1 to 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Center medians can be constructed more easily than other improvements and do not need to be part of a larger street reconstruction project.

Proposed West Grand Avenue Street Section

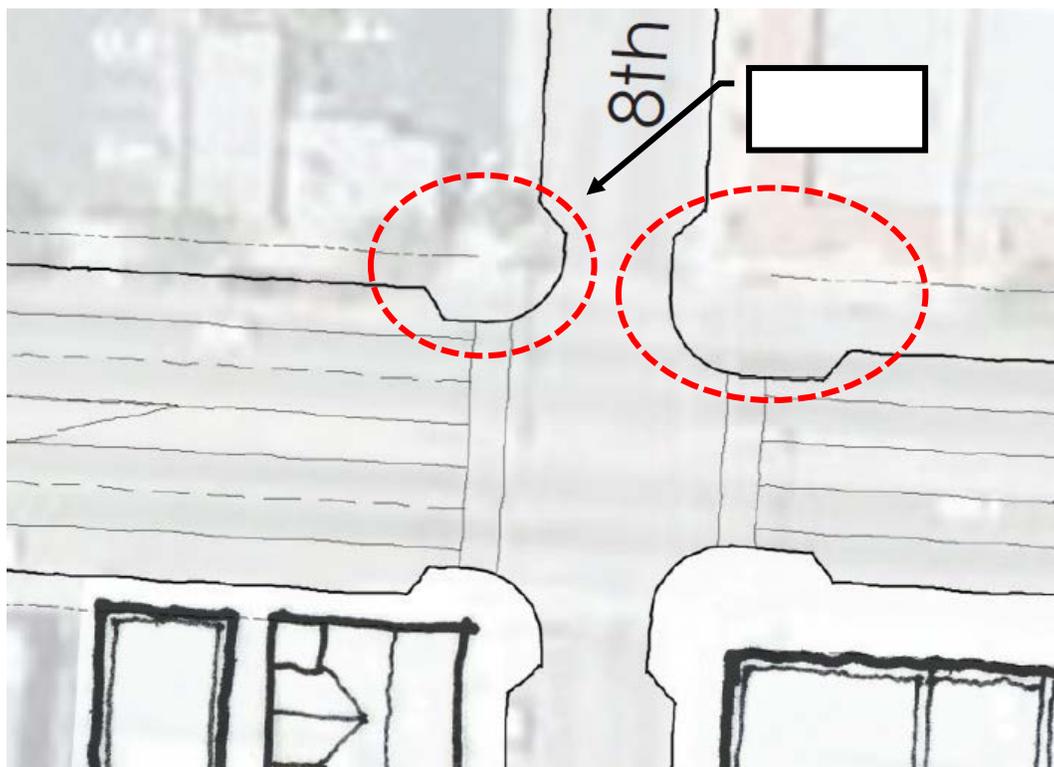


### Bulb-Outs

The Plan recommends the construction of corner bulb-outs at all intersections with the exception of Highway 1, 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Oak Park Boulevard (reference pages 30, 31, 44, 45, 56, and 57). Bulb-outs serve several purposes including traffic calming, reducing the pedestrian crossing distance and visual streetscape enhancement. The construction of bulb-outs have a significant constraint in that they impede the flow of surface water in the gutter along West Grand Avenue, which currently has significant flows during winter storm events like the storm event that occurred recently. The only bulb-outs constructed to date at 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Streets were possible as a result of constructing a major storm drain system from Meadow Creek to the east side of 4<sup>th</sup> Street as part of a previous CIP project.

The estimated cost to construct four bulb-outs at a single intersection is \$125,000 and the estimated cost of constructing a storm drain per block is \$200,000. Based on the Storm Water Master Plan, the storm drain would extend to 12<sup>th</sup> Street and a section would extend up North 9<sup>th</sup> Street terminating at Ramona Avenue. Though the storm drain costs are much greater than the costs to construct the bulb-outs, it would improve safety for motorists and cyclists by significantly reducing localized flooding along West Grand Avenue and could be built in phases or constructed concurrently with future West Grand Avenue pavement rehabilitation projects. The estimated total cost to design and construct bulb outs and storm drain improvements between 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Oak Park Boulevard is \$4.8 million and does not include pavement rehabilitation costs. The following page includes a conceptual sketch of a bulb-out at 8<sup>th</sup> Street and West Grand Avenue.

Conceptual Bulb-out Sketch at 8<sup>th</sup> and West Grand Intersection



The Plan also discussed the concept of mid-block bulb-outs to increase the sidewalk width to provide for outdoor dining and activities (reference page 43). These would also trigger the need to install a storm drain prior to construction. Council could provide direction to move forward with the construction of bulb-outs and the recommended storm drain improvements as part of the draft CIP.

#### Street Trees

The Plan recommends the planting of additional street trees along the corridor as follows (reference pages 30, 44, 45, 56, and 57):

- Highway 1 to 5<sup>th</sup> Street – Hybrid Washingtonia Palms
- 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> Streets – Brisbane Box Trees
- 8<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Streets – New Zealand Christmas Trees
- 11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> Streets - Brisbane Box Trees
- 14<sup>th</sup> to Oak Park Boulevard – Evergreen Pear Trees

Street trees provide many benefits including serving as a visual enhancement, improving air quality and adding to the City's urban forest. The FY 2020-21 budget includes \$45,000 for the planting of street trees on West Grand Avenue to replace recent tree removals. The most significant cost of planting street trees is the installation of irrigation systems that typically require trenching within the street. Therefore, the cost can vary significantly if a new irrigation system needs to be installed. The cost of planting approximately 12 street trees in a block would range from \$40,000 to \$60,000 with the cost of planting Hybrid Washingtonia Palms between 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Streets costing significantly more based on the size of the palms. The total cost of planting additional street trees along the entire corridor between 4<sup>th</sup> Street and Oak Park Boulevard would be approximately \$1 million. Staff is planning to move forward with planting one block of street trees this fiscal year given the budget

allocation already included. Council could expand the installation of street trees and provide direction to include this as part of the draft CIP or the operating budget if less than \$50,000.

### Diagonal Parking

The Plan recommends diagonal parking spaces be added on one side of 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets and to be considered on other streets (reference page 41). This would provide additional on-street parking, slow traffic and create more of a downtown feel. Diagonal street parking can be added by simply restriping or it could include temporary landscaping (e.g., planter boxes) or permanent landscaping which would be more costly and could affect drainage. Below is an example of a combination of diagonal and parallel parking on a street.

Example of On-street Diagonal and Parallel Parking



The estimated cost to install diagonal parking by restriping would cost approximately \$7,000 per block. The cost to provide temporary landscaping would not be a significant cost but would require hand watering by the Public Works Department. The cost of permanent landscaping would add significant costs for additional curb and gutters and potential drainage improvements. If the Council wanted to move forward with diagonal parking, staff would suggest doing it as a pilot program by restriping one block at minimal cost. Council could provide further direction to provide diagonal parking on several streets as part of the draft CIP.

### Lane Reduction

The Plan discusses the possibility of reducing from four to two travel lanes on West Grand Avenue between 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> Streets (reference pages 41-42). Known as a road diet, the reduction in lanes serves several purposes including slowing traffic, enhancing pedestrian safety, and significantly increasing the sidewalk area for outdoor dining and activities. While this general concept was discussed when the Plan was adopted and raised recently with the South Oak Park street

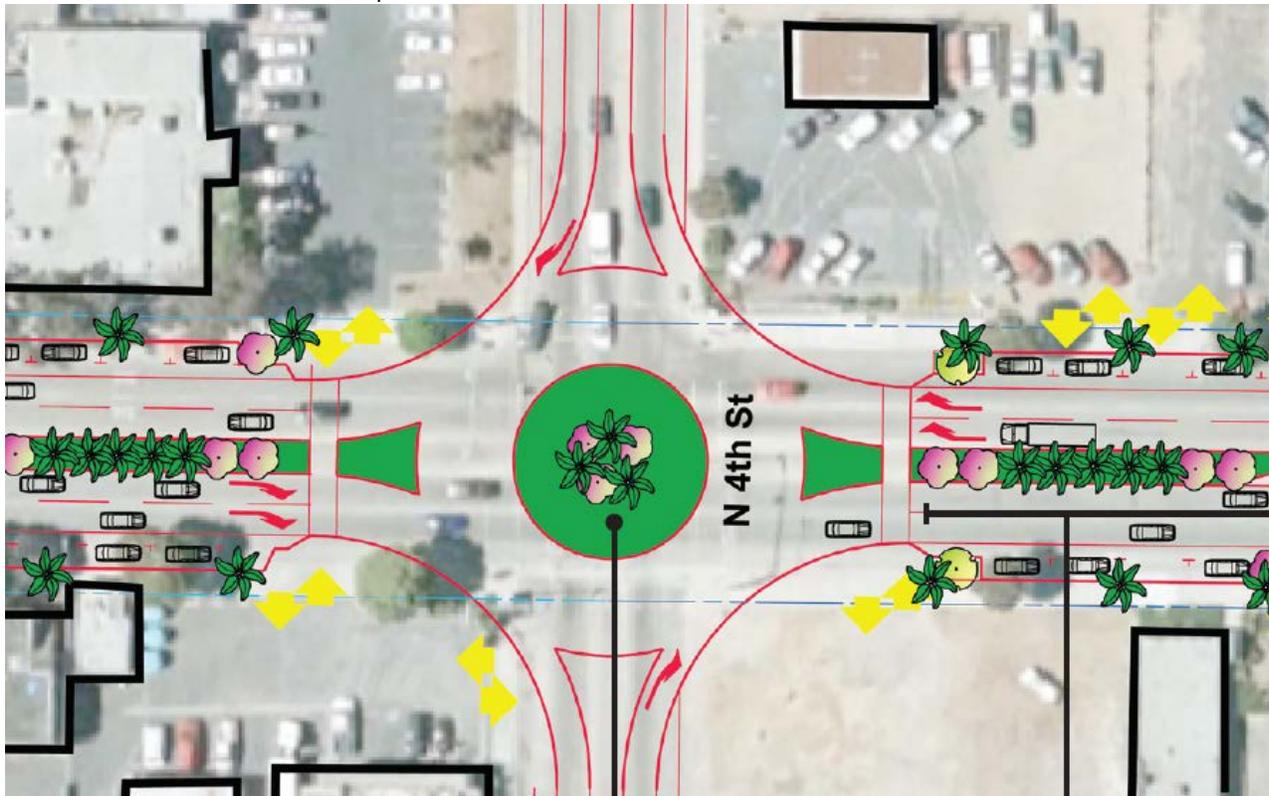
improvement project, the Council would need to provide direction to initiate project design which would likely begin with outreach and public meetings for input from stakeholders and the community.

Staff estimates the construction cost would range between \$50,000 and \$150,000 per block (or \$150,000-\$450,000 for the three-block section) and would depend on the level of enhancements such as sidewalk treatments, street trees and other enhancements. As discussed with bulb-outs, the realignment of the curb and gutter would likely necessitate storm drain improvements before a lane reduction could be constructed and that cost is estimated to be \$200,000 per block or \$600,000 for this three-block section. Council could provide further direction to move forward with a lane reduction project as part of the draft CIP.

### Roundabouts

The Plan discusses the possibility of roundabouts at Highway 1 and 4<sup>th</sup> Street which both serve as a major entry points into the City (reference pages 33 and 34). Roundabouts serve as an alternative to signalized intersections and provide traffic calming and greater intersection capacity along with opportunities for gateway landscaping and hardscape improvements. The roundabout at Highway 1 would be very complicated to implement as permitting would be required by Caltrans on Highway 1 and Union Pacific Railroad because of the at-grade crossing. In addition, it would likely require the acquisition of adjacent land owned by State Parks at the southwest corner which is designated as environmental sensitive habitat area (ESHA) and removal of existing vegetation would likely not be supported by the Coastal Commission. Based on these factors, staff does not recommend the Council pursue the design and construction of a roundabout at Highway 1. If a roundabout was considered at this intersection, it would be best if Caltrans took the lead with such a project.

Illustrative Example of Roundabout at 4<sup>th</sup> and West Grand Intersection



The other identified location for a potential roundabout is at 4<sup>th</sup> Street. The most significant constraint for a roundabout at this intersection is the need to acquire private property at several if

not all four corners. The acquisition of land at the developed corners could adversely impact the existing parking lots closest to the intersection. The remaining corners are likely to be developed/redeveloped in the near future and the Council would need to adopt a plan line to determine the required land dedication necessary to construct the roundabout. Preparing a plan line would require funding for preliminary design of the roundabout. Based on the potential impacts to developed and undeveloped properties of dedicating land and the cost of constructing a roundabout, staff does not recommend the Council pursue the design and construction of a roundabout at 4<sup>th</sup> Street but instead recommends consideration of corner enhancements to include trees, landscaping and hardscape improvements.

#### Pavement Rehabilitation

Lastly, though not specifically a part of the Plan, staff would also highlight the condition of the pavement and striping on West Grand Avenue between 11<sup>th</sup> Street and Oak Park Boulevard. The pavement condition in this section is in poor condition and in 2019, the Council provided direction to begin design of pavement rehabilitation on this section of West Grand Avenue along with design of North 4<sup>th</sup> Street and South Oak Park Boulevard. The Council subsequently provided direction to prioritize pavement improvements on South Oak Park Boulevard for the first such “major street” project. The estimated cost of pavement rehabilitation on this segment of West Grand Avenue is \$1.8 million and is not included in any of the cost estimated included previously in this report.

#### **Design Guidelines**

Chapter 3 of the Plan provides detailed design guidelines for private development. The recent grant funding received by the City (SB2 and REAP) to facilitate housing development will result in significant updates to the Land Use Element and Development Code. Consistent with the State Housing Accountability Act, this update will require the City to eliminate subjective design guidelines which will require the Plan design standards be revised to be “objective” design standards removing the discretionary element of the current design guidelines. Therefore, staff is not requesting the Council provide input on the Plan design guidelines since they will be updated as part of the upcoming Development Code amendment process.

#### **Parking Program**

The Plan recommends the Council consider creating a parking district, an in-lieu fee, and/or relaxing parking standards to incentivize redevelopment along the corridor. The Council adopted an updated parking ordinance in 2018 which reduced parking standards along West Grand Avenue including a parking credit based on linear feet of frontage. However, no direction was provided to pursue the creation of a parking district or in-lieu fee at the time which would take considerable staff time and effort to create. If the Council is interested in exploring these mechanisms, staff recommends the Council provide direction to return with additional information.

#### **Programs and Events**

The Plan includes recommendations that programs, and events be used to further attract visitors and boost business exposure. The City currently does hold several popular and well attended programs and events throughout the year. If the Council is interested in discussing new programs/events, staff recommends scheduling this for a future Council meeting.

## **Tourism Strategy**

The Plan recommends the City would benefit from a coordinated tourism strategy to attract visitors. The City is working with the South County Chambers of Commerce on developing such a strategy and materials and will provide additional information to the Council at the February 22<sup>nd</sup> meeting.

## **Public Art Program**

The Plan recommends the addition of public art such as murals to add to the visual appeal along the corridor. The Council has recently implemented a public art program with an initial focus on utility box art and has also supported the painting of private murals. The Council could also explore creating a funding source for public art such as through the General Fund or through a fee assessed for future development. If the Council is interested in discussing additional public art programs or funding sources, staff recommends scheduling the item for a future Council meeting.

## **Gateways and Wayfinding**

The Plan recommends both gateway signage and wayfinding signs. The Council has installed several gateway and wayfinding signs to date and there has not been discussion by Council on updating existing gateway signs or installing new gateway signs. If the Council is interested in discussing either of these items, staff recommends scheduling the item for a future Council meeting.

## **Conclusion**

Given recent development inquiries and community interest in the West Grand Avenue corridor, staff believes that this is an important time to review the West Grand Avenue Master Plan with the Council and seek Council direction on identifying the scope and timing of priority items with regards to public improvements as well as overall affirmation of the vision of the Plan. As a summary, the list of identified public improvements include:

- Center Medians
- Bulb-Outs
- Street Trees
- Diagonal Parking
- Lane Reduction
- Roundabouts
- Pavement Rehabilitation (not specifically in Plan)

Staff would note that the Council could also provide direction on any additional public improvements for the West Grand Avenue beyond those identified in the Plan. It is important to recognize that these public improvements collectively have a significant cost and likely would need to be implemented over a multi-year basis. Pending Council direction, staff would develop a West Grand Avenue capital project to include in the draft CIP for FY 2022-26 presented to Council on March 22. Lastly, the Council could also provide staff with direction to bring back information on any of the other programs from the Plan listed on the previous page realizing that the timing of such work would need to be balanced with other work program items.

## **ALTERNATIVES**

The Council has the following alternatives to consider:

1. Provide direction to staff on proposed public improvements to be incorporated into the Capital Improvement Program and other items included in the Plan; or
2. Provide alternative direction to staff.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact from this agenda item beyond initial cost estimates for specific public improvements identified. A West Grand Avenue capital project in the FY 2022-26 CIP if directed by the Council would have a defined fiscal impact based on the specified improvements.

## **PUBLIC NOTIFICATION**

The agenda was posted in accordance with the Brown Act.