



**Pacific Beach Planning Group**

The Official Planning Group for the Coastal Community of Pacific Beach

August 15, 2024

Via email only

Councilmember LaCava

Re: Immediate Removal of Diamond Street Bollards

Dear Councilmember La Cava,

Last evening, the Pacific Beach Planning Group (PBPG) Board listened to numerous constituencies regarding the current status of the Diamond “Slow Street” pilot program, and specifically regarding the bollards that the City has placed on Diamond Street at its intersections with Cass Street and Fanuel Street. Individuals who voiced their views included residents who live on Diamond Street and neighboring streets, representatives from Beautiful PB and the PB Parking District, and other concerned citizens. Based on this public input and on what we believe is best for Pacific Beach, the PBPG Board voted unanimously to send you the following message:

*The PB Planning Group supports the concept of traffic calming.*

*The PB Planning Group urges the city to remove the bollards within 30 days and follow its standard traffic calming process.*

By unilaterally installing the bollards without taking public input, it appears the City failed to follow its own established process as reflected on the “Process Flowchart – City of San Diego Traffic Calming Program,” especially with respect to its failure to meet the community outreach requirements. That flowchart can be found at [https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/104\\_san\\_diego\\_traffic\\_calming\\_guidelines.pdf](https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/104_san_diego_traffic_calming_guidelines.pdf)

We want safe and effective traffic calming measures. The Pacific Beach community has been a part of the City’s slow street project since its inception in 2020 during the Covid 19 pandemic. In April of 2022, the PBPG held a joint meeting with the PB Town Council to

address Diamond Street issues and voted recommend that the City work to either significantly improve the project or discontinue it. Subsequently, the bollards were unilaterally erected along Diamond Street at Cass Street and Fanuel Street as the City's solution. We believe we are in the best position to report on its successes and failures. Under the current circumstances, PBPG is declaring that the bollards are a failure and should be removed as soon as possible.

We specifically note feedback we received from representatives of St Brigid's Catholic Church, who have advised us of the serious safety hazard that has been created by drivers using their parking lot as a shortcut to avoid the bollards on Cass Street. This is one example of the complex and unintended traffic complications and safety concerns PBPG has learned about as a result of the installation of the bollards. Again, we urge the City to follow its own traffic calming program procedures, and work to provide PB with good, effective traffic calming measures that PB residents will support.

Thank you in advance for acting on this. PBPG appreciates the great work you do for Pacific Beach.

*Marcella Bothwell, MD*

Marcella Bothwell, MD, MBA  
Chair, PB Planning Group

Attachments

St Brigid's Legal Counsel letter  
City of San Diego Standard Traffic Calming Flowsheet

Cc:

Mayor Todd Gloria  
Vicky Joes  
Councilmember Jennifer Campbell  
Councilmember Stephen Whitburn  
Councilmember Henry L. Foster III  
Councilmember Marni von Wilpert  
Councilmember Kent Lee  
Councilmember Raul Campillo  
Councilmember Vivian Moreno  
Council President Sean Elo-Rivera  
Heidi Vonblum, City Planning Director  
Tait Galloway, Deputy Director, Community Planning and Housing  
Coby Tomlins, Program Manager, Community Planning

Anisha Gianchandani, Program Manager, Public Engagement  
Ryan Stock, Beautiful PB President  
St Brigid's Catholic Church



Office for Civil Affairs

June 23, 2023

*Via email only*

Councilman Joe LaCava

Re: Diamond Street traffic calming proposal

Dear Councilman LaCava :

This office is general counsel to the Roman Catholic Diocese of San Diego and its member parishes and schools, including St. Brigid Catholic Parish, located at 4735 Cass Street in Pacific Beach. I write in opposition to a proposal to restrict or close down motor vehicle traffic on a portion of Diamond Street between Fanuel and Cass Streets (the "Stretch"). The proposal is apparently brought under the City of San Diego's Traffic Calming Guidelines. The proposal's rationale – to turn a portion of Diamond Street into a haven for pedestrians, scooters and bicyclists – finds no support in the Guidelines, which are intended to address traffic safety issues, not recreational needs.

**A. Guideline purposes.**

Section 1.1 of the Guidelines states, in part:

The City of San Diego Traffic Calming Guidelines are a comprehensive set of measures intended to improve neighborhood safety and quality of life through the use of various roadway improvement strategies. Since roadway safety is an important and growing concern for San Diego residents, the City has recognized the need for a comprehensive program to expand upon the Traffic Calming measures included in the City of San Diego Street Design Manual (2002).

Section 1.2 expands on the purpose of promoting traffic safety:

Traffic calming is the process of minimizing the negative impacts associated with neighborhood traffic on residents, pedestrians, bicyclists and school children. When implemented, traffic calming measures can reduce neighborhood speeding, cut-through traffic, and reckless driver behavior on city streets. While roadways ensure both vehicle and pedestrian connectivity, excessive traffic or speeding can cause adverse neighborhood impacts resulting from their original design and placement. To avoid these negative impacts, city streets can be retrofitted to encourage safer driver behavior. Diamond Street between

A stated goal is to promote walkability in neighborhoods and street connectivity, minimizing distances persons have to travel to reach their destinations. Section 2.1 states, in part:

Councilman Joe LaCava  
Re: Diamond Street proposal  
June 23, 2023  
Page 2

Many of the goals and policies relating to traffic calming are contained in the Strategic Framework Element and Draft Mobility Element of the City's Draft General Plan (May 2006), which is the first update of the City's General Plan since 1979.

Two of the overall General Plan stated "Core Values" are:

- Safe and Secure Neighborhoods
- Walkable Communities

Enhancing the General Plan "Core Values" are the General Plan Draft Mobility Element goals which include:

*"A safe and comfortable pedestrian environment. People enjoy walking in places where there are sidewalks shaded with trees, lighting, interesting buildings or scenery to look at, other people outside, neighborhood destinations, and a feeling of safety.*

*"A complete, functional, and interconnected pedestrian network, that is accessible to pedestrians of all abilities. Pedestrian improvements in areas with land uses that promote pedestrian activities can help to increase walking as a means of transportation and recreation. Walkable communities offer public health benefits by providing opportunities for people to be active as a part of their everyday lives."*

*"Safe and efficient street design that minimizes environmental and neighborhood impacts. The quality of the roadway system affects us whether we travel by automobile, transit, bicycle, or foot, and influences which mode of travel we choose. Travel choices and routes are also affected by the connectivity of the street network. A high degree of connectivity is desirable as it allows for shorter travel distances between destinations and greater dispersal of traffic. Travelers benefit from shorter trips and multiple route options, and are more likely to walk or bicycle if distances are short."*

(emphasis in original)

Section 2.2 of the Guidelines specifies policies to achieve these goals. Traffic Calming policies include:

*"Policy ME-C.5. Traffic Calming – Install traffic calming measures to increase safety and enhance the livability of communities.*

- *Use traffic calming techniques in appropriate locations to reduce vehicle speeds or discourage shortcutting traffic.*

Councilman Joe LaCava  
Re: Diamond Street proposal  
June 23, 2023  
Page 3

- *Choose traffic calming devices to best fit the situation for which it is intended.*
- *Place traffic calming devices so that the full benefit of calming will be realized with little or no negative effect upon the overall safety or quality of the roadway.*
- *Design traffic calming devices appropriately, including consideration for accessibility, drainage, underground utilities, adequate visibility, the needs of emergency, sanitation, and transit vehicles, and landscaping.*
- *Weigh the undesired effects of traffic calming devices (increased travel times, emergency response times, noise, and traffic diversion) against their prescribed benefits."*

(emphasis in original)

The City's website lists the following proposed benefits of the Plan:

- Supports Vision Zero goals by slowing the speed of cars and improving safety for people of all ages and abilities.
- Encourages San Diegans to use less-polluting modes of transportation, such as walking/rolling, bicycling, and using scooters.
- Supports the City's Climate Action Plan, Strategy 3: Mobility and Land Use.
- Creates a pathway and connection for youth attending Pacific Beach Middle School, encouraging biking and walking to and from school to reduce congestion experienced during those times.

<https://www.sandiego.gov/sustainability/mobility-and-land-use/diamond-street>

#### **B. Inapplicability of Traffic Calming to Diamond Street.**

The Stretch does not exhibit any of the problems or concerns that are addressed in the goals or policies pertaining to traffic calming. Speed is regulated by existing stop signs at every cross street between Fanuel and Cass. Diamond Street is not used for cross-cutting: all PB streets are set out in a grid. Any difference in traffic volume along Diamond as compared with other neighboring east-west streets in Pacific Beach is minimal, and rationally related to driver's interests: There is no evidence that Diamond Street is used by drivers for cruising or other purely recreational purposes. Tree-shaded sidewalks line both sides of Diamond Street, eliminating any need for converting the street to a pedestrian walkway. There is bicycle traffic along the Street, but the absence of excessive vehicular speed or volume, and the presence of the stop signs along the route, obviate any need to shut down the street to promote bicycling.

Councilman Joe LaCava  
Re: Diamond Street proposal  
June 23, 2023  
Page 4

None of the proposed benefits will be realized by the shutdown. Traffic on the Stretch will not be slowed – it will be eliminated. Instead of slowing traffic, the shutdown will divert traffic to other neighboring streets, adding travel time and distance, thereby likely having the unintended but real effect of speeding up the diverted traffic.

Encouraging less polluting forms of transportation is laudable, but shutting down this particular stretch of Diamond Street will not achieve the objective. The vast majority of persons traversing Diamond Street by vehicle will continue to do so, only using a more circuitous route. The only measurable increase in pedestrian, bicycle or scooter activity will be recreational, which will not impact vehicular use.

#### **C. Negative impacts.**

On the other hand, a shutdown of the Stretch would reduce connectivity in Pacific Beach generally, and would divert traffic to neighboring streets, negating any benefit from reduction along Diamond Street. Connectivity is a particular concern of St. Brigid Parish, located at the northeast corner of Diamond and Cass Streets. The main entrance to the parish parking lot is off Diamond Street. Shutting down the Stretch would close off the most used entrance to the Parish parking lot, and thereby negatively impact the 1000 or more parishioners who attend daily and/or weekend Mass. The added inconvenience might even reduce, however marginally, parishioner registration and/or donations, which are the only source of revenue for the Parish.

Pedestrian and cyclist safety could potentially be diminished, not enhanced, if the shutdown were to reduce awareness and care of pedestrians and recreational users with respect to any traffic that would remain, both from Diamond Street residents and from cross street traffic.

Reduced vehicular access to their homes could also negatively impact property values for affected Diamond Street residents, potentially creating legal liability for the City to those residents.

A proposed shutdown would raise enforcement issues unless impenetrable barriers were set up at the end of each block, which would seriously inconvenience residents and increase legal liability risks. Protests would likely ensue, as have been reported in the news.

#### **D. Policy considerations.**

Councilman Joe LaCava  
Re: Diamond Street proposal  
June 23, 2023  
Page 5

west of the Stretch. While the imposition on each individual may be seen as minimal, policy makers must multiply that imposition by the hundreds of persons whose preferred route is the Stretch – routes numbering in the thousands over time – who will be inconvenienced by the Shutdown. Second are the persons living on neighboring streets whose traffic volume will be increased by the diversion of traffic from the Stretch. Again, the impact on any individual person or family may be de minimis, but it is not zero, and that impact must be multiplied by the dozens of residents of the neighboring streets that will be affected. Third, and most important, is the constituency of families and businesses located on the Stretch. The negative impact on this constituency will be severe, involving not only significant inconvenience for each resident, but also measurable financial impacts on property values. And as stated above, the impact on St. Brigid Parish will be measurable, both in inconvenience for parishioners and financially for the Parish.

Against all these impacts, what benefits will be derived from the Proposal? Substantive policy benefits, as outlined in the Traffic Calming initiative, will be nil. Use of non-polluting means of travel will not be increased. No one who would typically choose to drive down Diamond Street to get to a specific location will be convinced to take up bicycle riding instead. They will choose the easier solution which is to drive around the Stretch, adding two or more blocks of distance to their trip. Vehicular speed will be reduced – eliminated – on the Stretch, but marginally increased on the diverted Stretch, canceling out any overall benefit related to reduction in speed.

Recreational benefit – making the Stretch into a virtual park and recreation space for bicyclists, skateboarders, and scooter users - would be de minimis and have virtually no constituency, and is not a proper policy goal for City streets.

#### **E. Conclusion.**

City streets exist to allow vehicular traffic to and from homes and businesses. They are not designed to function as parks or recreation locations. On behalf of St. Brigid Catholic Parish, I urge policy makers to weight all the benefits and burdens of the Shutdown on all relevant constituencies, and reject the Proposal.

Very truly yours,



## Process Flowchart - City of San Diego Traffic Calming Program

