



CITY OF KIRKLAND
Department of Public Works
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MEMORANDUM

To: Kurt Triplett, City Manager

From: James Lopez, Deputy City Manager
Julie Underwood, Public Works Director
Joel Pfundt, Transportation Manager
Victoria Kovacs, Transportation Planner
Martha Chaudhry, Special Projects Coordinator

Date: July 20, 2022

Subject: FUTURE OF PARK LANE OPTIONS

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council provide direction to staff on options for the future of Park Lane either as a) an open street with parking or b) a street closed seasonally or permanently to vehicle traffic.

BACKGROUND:

Consideration of Park Lane as a pedestrian corridor closed to vehicular traffic dates to 2008. Below is a historical overview of actions and decisions concerning Park Lane, which includes temporary interventions during the COVID-19 pandemic, a summary of community engagement to date, and options for permanent solutions moving forward.

2008 'Flexible Street' Concept – Adopted February 2, 2010:

In 2008, the City Council approved funds as part of the Capital Improvement Program for a study to explore and develop a corridor design for pedestrian enhancements on Park Lane between Lake Street and 3rd Street. The study was driven by considerations relating to sidewalks and infrastructure along Park Lane, as well as redevelopment activities including the Kirkland Transit Center and King County's replacement of the sanitary sewer pump station at 3rd and Park Lane. The results of the [2010 Park Lane Pedestrian Corridor Enhancement Study](#) and the public input process identified the concept of a "Flexible Street" for Park Lane to serve as a pedestrian corridor with infrastructure developed to support flexible use.

2015 Renovated Design:

Park Lane was renovated and reopened in 2015 to be a pedestrian-friendly, festival space with built-in bollards to enable regular closure of the street to vehicles for community events. Investment in the festival street and associated infrastructure was nearly \$2.9 million dollars, including design, contractors' fees and engineering.

2019 Summer Sundays Pilot:

In 2017, the Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods invited 200 business and community leaders to imagine ways to strengthen the bonds of Kirkland's communities. One of the leading ideas was car-free Sundays on Park Lane. The City Council authorized Park Lane to be a pedestrian-only plaza on Sundays as a pilot program to inform future street closure. These "Summer Sundays" closures to vehicles ran on Sundays from May 26 through September 22, 2019. [Council authorization - April 16, 2019](#)

Feedback from the community and business owners on Summer Sundays indicated that the pilot did not increase pedestrian use as expected, and comments referenced lack of street activation and draws for pedestrian engagement and 'dead street' syndrome particularly on the east end of the lane.

2020 COVID Response / Evenings on Park Lane:

In response to indoor restrictions and capacity limits mandated by WA State due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and with input from the 'Outside the Walls' task force, a community group formed in response to the pandemic, staff presented the CARES Act Funding Plan at the [June 16, 2020](#) Council meeting. This included recommendations for Park Lane:

- Close the west half of Park Lane (between Main and Lake St) to be used as streeteries or parklets, either permanently or for 'Evenings on Park Lane';
- Provide picnic benches and/ or tables and chairs;
- Install canopy or rain shelter;
- Create attractive entrance celebrating the public space (using bollards, banners and flags);
- Provide hand washing/ sanitizing stations and public restrooms;
- Provide assistance with getting permits from the Liquor Control Board

At this meeting, the City Council supported "Evenings on Park Lane" to close the west end of Park Lane to vehicles each evening between Lake Street and Main Street from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. seven days a week, from July 2 through November 17, 2020. An interdepartmental team of City staff implemented various strategies to implement this including developing application process for temporary Sidewalk Cafés; temporary allowance for restaurants to expand outdoor seating into adjoining on-street parking stalls (i.e. "parklets"); and processes for expanded outdoor café seating or outdoor retail space. This additional programming to allow for sidewalk cafés and parklets did attract more people to Park Lane than Summer Sundays.

2021 Extending Evenings on Park Lane

Approaching summer 2021, restrictions on business capacity and operations were still in place and health officials continued to recommend social distancing and outdoor rather than indoor activities. These restrictions were expected to continue throughout the summer). At its [April 6, 2021](#), meeting, the Council discussed closure of Park Lane to vehicles for summer 2021 to expand outdoor capacity for businesses and patrons in the downtown core under its newly established Legislative Request Memoranda process as outlined in the Council Policies and Procedures document.

Staff presented four options :

- Option 1: "Similar to last year." Close Park Lane from early May to October only during evenings (beginning at 6 p.m.) and all day during permitted special events downtown.
- Option 2: Close Park Lane from early May through October on weekday evenings (beginning at 6 p.m.) AND full-day closures on weekends and holidays.
- Option 3: Close Park Lane all day and evening every day from early May to October.
- Option 4: No action.

At that meeting, the Council directed staff to return to Council with additional information, including directing staff to conduct an extensive public outreach to gather feedback and comments from City community members and affected businesses relating to various options for Park Lane.

At the [May 4, 2021](#) meeting, staff presented the detailed results of the outreach . From this input, Council directed staff to proceed with Option 1 "Evenings on Park Lane", closing Park Lane to vehicular traffic and parking from early May to October only during evenings and all-day during permitted special events, with the intent to maintain it for the next two years, through summer 2022. For the regular evening closures, Council also directed the street be reopened in the evenings after the last restaurant closes.

DISCUSSION

Staff seek Council direction at this time due to the impending expiration of the two-year Council decision made during the [May 4, 2021 Council meeting](#), which extended "Evenings on Park Lane" through summer 2022.

Additionally, at its recent meeting on [June 7, 2022](#), Council approved the [Active Transportation Plan \(ATP\)](#). The ATP commits to continued evaluation of the closure of Park Lane to vehicles as follows:

"Park Lane in Downtown Kirkland was originally designed to be a "flexible street" and has previously been closed to vehicles during special events. In coordination with the downtown community during the summer and fall in 2020 and 2021, the City started "Evenings on Park Lane" where the street was closed to vehicle traffic and opened to people walking and wheeling beginning at 6 PM. Restaurants expanded outdoor seating into parking spaces, and overall the evening closure to vehicles was well received by the community. City Council will continue to evaluate future closure of Park Lane to vehicles, whether that continue to remain in the evenings and for special events, for longer periods of time or permanently." (page 52, Special Projects)

Finally, the uncertainty of whether Park Lane will be opened or closed is stressful to businesses and community members. Retail businesses for the most part want the street to remain open and see vehicle and parking access as key to the economic success of their businesses. Restaurant businesses are split on their support for street closure to traffic and parking. Most support the summertime evening program at a minimum and express willingness to consider daytime, and longer-term closure to traffic. This support is stronger with the allowance of parklets. Others prioritize parking, and note in particular the need for short-term, pickup and delivery stalls proximate to their storefronts as well as durational parking on the street. Businesses along Park Lane are fatigued from revisiting the issue and need certainty from the City to plan for the future. Residents also want certainty. Each time the City has reached out to the general public about closing Park Lane, responses are numerous and passionate, and the

significant majority of responses have been to close Park Lane to vehicles. Many envision a thriving, welcoming gathering space and express frustration that the City continues to explore interim measures. Both businesses and residents would benefit from a final decision on the future of Park Lane.

The current "Evenings on Park Lane" program is viewed by many downtown businesses as a reasonable compromise option that preserves parking and vehicle access during retail business hours but creates a pedestrian gathering space in the summer evenings. However, staff is not recommending continuing "Evenings" as a long-term program without significant financial investment. The "Evenings" program was always envisioned as temporary option and has provided helpful information and experiences. "Evenings" fails to realize the street's full potential either as a full time auto accessible location or a pedestrian-centered community space free from cars. For example, the community has learned that much of the street, especially the east end, can feel deserted and lifeless without resources for consistent programming and landscaping. Sunsetting the parklet program resulted in a noticeable change in atmosphere and energy to a less lively pedestrian environment. Support for "Evenings" is mixed among community residents who appreciate partial closure but don't see the program as maximizing the benefit of closing Park Lane. In addition, some additional investments for the limited benefits would be required if the "Evenings" program were extended. Permanent gates to provide street barriers in the evenings would be necessary to address safety concerns that require twice-daily volunteer participation to the move hand-made A-frame signs in and out of the right of way. Overall, the true costs of the extending this compromise program will likely exceed the limited benefits to the community and business on Park Lane.

Responding to the above considerations, staff have outlined two general options for a long-term approach to vehicle access on Park Lane. Staff seek Council direction on a preferred option.

RECOMMENDED OPTIONS:

Option 1: Retire the "Evenings on Park Lane" program in October 2022. Do not introduce alternative closure options. Park Lane remains a flexible retail street with existing vehicle access and parking and continues to accommodate temporary closures for special events.

Option 2: Evaluate seasonal or full closure of Park Lane with a final decision in 2023. Authorize staff to hire a consultant to identify investments necessary to close Park Lane to vehicle traffic and successfully activate a pedestrian retail, service, and dining area in the downtown core. Closure options evaluated would be full year-round closure or a full seasonal closure such as from May to October. Staff estimates the cost of this assessment to be up to \$50,000 and would include at least the following considerations:

1. Parking mitigation options and strategies if applicable.
2. Programming and street activation recommendations, including during winter months if applicable.
3. Infrastructure recommendations and requirements, including but not limited to shelter, seating, parklets, vehicle access and barriers.
4. Public safety considerations and planning.
5. Preliminary cost and budget plan for capital and ongoing expense.

Should Council elect Option 2, staff will notify the public and affected downtown business of the decision to further evaluate closing Park Lane to vehicles and the decision date of the first quarter of 2023. Staff will return to the September meeting with a fiscal note authorizing \$50,000 from the Council special projects reserve to fund the assessment. The results of the assessment will be brought to Council during the first quarter of 2023 along with staff recommendations on closure options, closure dates and closure investments and funding sources. At that time, the Council could still choose not to close Park Lane and retain it as a flexible street with vehicular access and parking.

NEXT STEPS:

Staff seeks direction from Council on its preferred Option for a long-term approach to vehicle access for Park Lane:

Option 1: Retire the “Evenings on Park Lane” program in October 2022. Do not introduce alternative closure options.

Option 2: Evaluate seasonal or full closure of Park Lane with a final decision in 2023. Authorize staff to hire a consultant to identify investments necessary to successfully activate Park Lane as a pedestrian, restaurant and retail gathering space.