



CITY OF KIRKLAND

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MEMORANDUM

To: Kurt Triplett, City Manager

From: Christian Knight, Senior Neighborhood Services Coordinator
Kari Page, Senior Neighborhood Services Coordinator
John Starbard, Deputy Public Works Director
Kathy Brown, Public Works Director

Date: April 4, 2019

Subject: CAR-FREE SUNDAYS ON PARK LANE

RECOMMENDATION:

City Council authorizes Park Lane be used as a pedestrian-only plaza on Sundays this summer as a pilot program. Staff seeks direction whether the pedestrian plaza should span both blocks and what the calendar period for car-free Sundays should be.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

Since the new Park Lane opened in 2015 as an award winning "American woonerf" (Dutch for "living street"), the community and businesses along Park Lane have had a continuous discussion about whether to close the street to vehicular traffic. In the days leading up to Park Lane's grand opening, some residents urged the City to have the improved street permanently closed to vehicular traffic. The street was built to be a pedestrian-friendly, festival space, with built-in bollards to regularly close the street for pedestrian/bicycle use only. Some community members voiced the opinion that allowing vehicles might mar the street's attractive surfaces, and that the presence of vehicles would lessen the chance that Park Lane would function effectively as a pedestrian promenade.

There has always been a diversity of opinion among the merchants along Park Lane about whether to close the street. Prohibiting vehicles eliminates 30 parking stalls adjacent to the businesses on Park Lane. As parking downtown is often challenging, especially in the summer months, some of the merchants feel the loss of parking would cost them revenue and would be a disincentive to shoppers and restaurant patrons. Other business owners feel that closure to vehicular traffic would enhance foot traffic, and opportunities for sidewalk cafes and outdoor merchandise stands, improving their businesses. Over the years, restaurants and food establishments have generally been supportive of closure, while retail merchants who rely on convenient parking have generally been opposed.

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.

A March 2019 survey of Park Lane’s 69 business owners by the Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods, however, suggests some of the initial concerns over loss of parking are abating. Fifty-four of Park Lane’s business owners favor a one-day per week vehicular closure on Park Lane on Sundays, while four oppose it. This level of support is consistent throughout each of Park Lane’s five business-sectors: service, food, gifts/art, gift, clothing, and residential. (See Attachment A, Park Lane Survey.)

Further, since 2017 downtown’s parking inventory has increased. The Voda apartment building on Park Lane and Main Street that opened in the spring of 2018 has 60 parking spaces available to the public for \$1 per hour, and the City opened the Wester Lot just north of downtown which is available for free to the public after 5PM and on weekends.

PROPOSAL:

Based on the survey results and the fact that drivers have access to more downtown public parking now, the Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods is proposing car-free Sundays on Park Lane on a trial basis. This proposal is consistent with the design and intent of the City’s showcase flexible street. The proposal is to prohibit vehicular traffic for both blocks of Park Lane but leave Main Street open to vehicles. Doing so would allow some degree of traffic flow through this segment of the downtown core and would also allow vehicles to exit the area at any time (avoiding “trapped” vehicles on car-free days). Approximately 2,500 vehicles per day use Main Street. The vehicular restriction on both of Park Lane’s blocks would create easier pedestrian connections between Park Lane and popular destinations such as Peter Kirk Pool, the Kirkland Teen Union Building, Peter Kirk Community Center, the Kirkland Public Library, and Kirkland Urban.

The analysis below uses three criteria to assess the value of closing both blocks versus closing only the west block. Those criteria include: predictable pedestrian environment and connections, traffic flow and business support.

Options	Predictable Pedestrian Environment & Connections	Traffic Flow	Business Support
Closing west block only	West block provides intuitive gathering spot for public. However, open pedestrian experience between Main Street and Kirkland Urban is interrupted by traffic on east block.	Keeping east block open to automobiles provides an one-way, east-to-west vehicular option between Main Street and Third Street, which approximately 1,200 vehicles use per day.	Leaves some free parking spaces on East block for Park Lane businesses. East block businesses might miss opportunity for enhanced sidewalk cafes or displays. Voda, on the East block, prefers closure as it benefits from foot traffic for potential renters.

Closing both west and east blocks	Creates intuitive pedestrian experience for the length of Park Lane and reduces pedestrian conflict points at Main Street and the transit center from private vehicle movements.	Eliminates the third one-way, east-to-west downtown option for drivers.	While there are fewer traditional street facing restaurants and retail businesses on the East block, full closure treats all businesses along Park Lane equally.
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With Park Lane open to pedestrians only, retailers would have greater options for displaying items outside. The Public Works Director has the administrative authority to approve this kind of use and activity. However, restrictions for the outdoor service of alcohol would remain the same, consistent with state regulatory requirements.

If the Council supports the car-free Sunday pilot, staff recommends that the car-free Sundays program begin on May 26, the Sunday preceding Memorial Day to provide the longest possible summer experience to inform future street closure policy. An alternative would be to initiate Sunday closures on June 21, the first day of summer, which some celebrate as Solstice Day. June 21 also is right after the last day of school for the Lake Washington School District (including snow closure make-up days). Regardless of the start day, staff recommends that the car-free Sundays season end September 22. This is the last day of summer as well as the last day of Kirkland’s Oktoberfest. Staff is seeking direction on whether to start the pilot on May 26, June 21, or some other date the Council prefers.

LOGISTICS:

Closures are proposed to begin at 7 a.m. and end at 11:30 p.m. This schedule would allow Parks Maintenance staff to place bollards or similar obstructions at the beginning and end of their shifts. Bollards or obstructions would be placed on Park Lane just east of the entrance to the Lake & Central parking lot, at the eastbound leg of the Park Lane and Main Street intersection, at the westbound leg of Park Lane and the transit center, and on Park Lane at the alley next to Cactus Restaurant (see Attachment B, “Logistics Map”).

Vehicles parked on Park Lane between Lake Street and Main Street would be able to exit east onto Main Street. On the east block, vehicles could exit in both directions.

Direction Needed:

Does Council support the car-free Sundays pilot?

- If so, should the vehicular restriction be for all of Park Lane or only the western block?
- If so, should car-free Sundays begin on May 26, June 21, or some other date?
- If so, should car-free Sundays end on September 22?

Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods' Park Lane Survey**Park Lane Sunday Closure****Business Survey Results**

- Fifty-four of 69 business owners support the proposal; five are opposed or lukewarm, and 10 did not respond
- Seven of 9 food establishments support. One did not reply.
- Of those businesses that oppose, two are gift shops, one is a coffee shop, and one is a massage therapist
- A Kirkland Alliance of Neighborhoods board member mailed and hand-delivered survey forms—with self-addressed stamped envelopes—to business operators with whom she was not able to talk to directly. The KAN board member did not receive response from several of them.
- Those who oppose closure cited parking concerns. One cited revenue concerns.

By Owners (69) and Managers (6)

Type	Support	Oppose	Lukewarm	No response	Manager supports	Manager neutral
Clothing (4)	1		1	2	1	1
Gift (45)	41	2		2	1	
Services (10)	4	1		5		
Food (9)	7	1		1	3	
Apartment (1)	1					
Total	54 (40 gallery owners)	4	1	10	5	1

By Business Type (28)

Type	Support	Oppose	Lukewarm	No response
Clothing (3)	1		1	1
Gift (5)	1	2		2
Services (10)	4	1		5 (Kirkland Healing Arts practitioners)
Food (9)	7	1		1
Apartment (1)	1			
Total	14	4	1	9

Logistics Map

