



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

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REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Approve Updated Design Vocabulary for Gateway Signs in Downtown (File # 2022-7483)

BACKGROUND

Since the adoption of the first Downtown Specific Plan (DSP) in 1993, gateway features have been envisioned for key intersections to help identify Downtown as a special place. Significant updates to the DSP in 2003 expanded the streetscape standards to cover Gateways and Wayfinding. Gateways and Wayfinding are also included in the 2020 DSP update stating, *“the purpose of Downtown gateways is to announce arrival to the Downtown Core while the neighborhood entries/gateways establish neighborhood boundaries.”*

In November 2005 the City Council considered a Study Issue for a New Streetscape Revitalization Plan for the 100 Block of South Murphy Avenue (RTC No. 05-351). The first concept for a Downtown gateway feature (for Murphy Avenue) was included in the Design Plan approved by the City Council.

Redevelopment of the Town Center site (Sandhill Properties and their partners) was approved in February 2007 which included the demolition of the enclosed mall and reinstatement of the street grid. McKinley Avenue was approved to connect from Mathilda to Sunnyvale avenues and serve as a main entry to the new mixed-use development. The project was conditioned to install Downtown Gateway elements in or adjacent to the public right of way at: 1) S. Mathilda Avenue and W. McKinley Avenue; and 2) S. Mathilda Avenue and W. Washington Avenue (a major entry to the Downtown). These gateway elements are subject to the review and approval of the Director of Community Development and City Transportation and Traffic Manager (if located within the public right of way). The entire development project was stalled due to bankruptcy of one of the financial partners.

In 2007, City staff worked with a consultant to study gateway and wayfinding options throughout the Downtown. The consultant developed design alternatives, which are contained in Attachment 1. The proposed options were presented at a City Council Study Session on July 31, 2007. A specific design was not selected by Council; however, feedback was provided to staff; and, due to the recession, that started in 2007, the Gateways project was put on hold and no additional funds were budgeted to the item. Temporary signs based on the design alternatives presented to City Council were installed in 2007; a few of these signs are still installed along Sunnyvale Avenue.

In May 2009 the City Council awarded a contract for Historic Murphy Avenue Streetscape and Utilities Replacement (RTC No. 09-130) and referenced that this project would implement the 2005 Streetscape Design Plan. At each end of this block a gateway arch was constructed based on the 2005 Study Issue as further refined in the 2007 Design Vocabulary (see photos on page 1 of Attachment 3). These gateways were completed in 2011.

Capital Project 826800 - Downtown Wayfinding and Gateways includes funding in FY 2024-25 and FY 2025-26. The project will *“provide for the installation of coordinated signs and gateway features that provide a unified and clear signage program to navigate to and within the downtown area. The purpose is to highlight and demark the major entry points into the downtown area to identify this area as an important and distinctive part of the community.”* The selected gateway design could serve as the basis for remaining gateway signs in the downtown and provide a design vocabulary for new wayfinding signs.

EXISTING POLICY

In addition to the conditions required for Block 18, the Downtown Specific Plan (DSP) contains Section 3.7 on Gateways and Wayfinding (see Attachment 2) with the intent to announce arrival into the downtown. Wayfinding will assist with locating parking, pedestrian and bicycle access, public open spaces and historic Murphy Avenue. Figure 3-4 (Downtown Gateways) of the DSP indicates proposed Downtown and Historic Gateway locations. This section of the DSP also includes examples of directional and wayfinding signs. Lastly, Figure 3-5 (Neighborhood Entries) indicates proposed locations identifying the beginning of residential neighborhoods.

More specifically, the DSP contains the following goals and policies to support methods to announce arrival into downtown and wayfinding opportunities.

Gateway Features

- **GG-F.10** Gateway features should be located to define and mark the entries into the Commercial Core and North of Washington districts to indicate arrival to Sunnyvale’s Downtown. (Refer to Figure 3-4 for the proposed gateway locations and Figure 3-5 for wayfinding locations.)
- **GG-F.11** Arrival signage, public art, water features, planting, special landscape and paving treatments, or a combination thereof, could all contribute to establishing a pronounced statement and welcoming entries into the Downtown and enhancing the pedestrian and driver experience.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

As part of the review of the 2020 amendments to the DSP, the City prepared a Draft and Final Environmental Impact Report (collectively, "EIR") (State Clearinghouse #2018052020) pursuant to the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Certification of the EIR included the adoption of a Statement of Overriding Considerations for significant and unavoidable impacts, and adoption of a Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program (MMRP). The project description in the Draft EIR (Section 2.3.1, p.10) stated that the amendments to the DSP would "Enhance the design guidelines for buildings, streetscapes and other public spaces." The 2020 DSP calls for enhanced design treatment at gateway intersections such as signage, monuments, public art, water features, planting, special landscape and paving treatments (see DSP, Section 3.7 and Policy GG-F.11). Therefore, the adoption of the Updated Design Vocabulary for Gateway Signs implements the goals and policies of the DSP and does not require additional environmental review. Formal plans for specific projects will be reviewed individually for compliance with CEQA. It is anticipated that individual gateway projects will likely be exempt from CEQA under the Class 1 (existing facilities), Class 3 (small structures) and/or Class 4 (landscaping) categorical exemptions.

DISCUSSION

STC Venture LLC, developer of the former Sunnyvale Town Center site, has been making progress on completing the project. Cityline is aware of the conditions of approval for gateway elements and is eager to complete these requirements. As there has been a large gap of time since the Design Vocabulary was reviewed by the City Council staff determined that it would be desirable to consider updated design standards. Staff and Cityline developed three gateway design options that range from modern to a style that complements the existing Murphy Avenue Gateway. The designs were reviewed by City staff for proper alignments over Washington Avenue to maintain traffic signal visibility. Once three options were refined, staff initiated an Open City Hall online survey. The survey was open to the public from April 27, 2022 to May 16, 2022.

The survey asked participants to vote for their favorite design option. The three new design options also showed the existing Murphy Avenue sign as a point of reference (see Attachment 3, Gateway Sign Package). The three options included the following styles (please see Attachment 3 for additional illustrations associated with each option, including single-post gateways):

- **Gateway Option 1** is both civic and contemporary in style. Elements of this sign include:
 - **Columns** - Rectangular shape with a solid face, small top element and stone base.
 - **Arch** - The arch spans the two columns with two arched metal beams with “Downtown Sunnyvale” within the arch.
 - **Lighting** - The lettering in the arch will be lit as will be the signs on the column.
 - **Materials** - Limestone base, dark metal finish and sunburst pattern at the top of the column. The limestone bases relate to the existing buildings fronting both Washington and McKinley.

GATEWAY OPTION 1 (night-time lighted view)



- **Gateway Option 2** is slightly more contemporary. Elements of this gateway include:
 - **Columns** - Rectangular shape that is narrower than Option 1. It has metal punched panels to allow for backlighting (lantern look), a small top element, and a stone base.
 - **Arch** - The arch spans the two columns with two arched metal beams, similar to Option 1.
 - **Lighting** - The lettering in the arch and signs will be lit as will be the punched metal material on the column face. The lighted column face is similar to the Murphy Avenue Gateway.
 - **Materials** - Limestone base, dark metal finish and sunburst pattern at the top of the column. The limestone bases relate to the existing buildings fronting both Washington and McKinley.

GATEWAY OPTION 2 (night-time lighted view)



- **Gateway Option 3** is a variation on Option 2. It provides a subtle nod to the more historic feeling of the Murphy Avenue gateway while retaining a unique character. Elements of this sign include:
 - **Columns** - Rectangular shape with a taper from the base up to the top. It has metal punched panels to allow for backlighting (lantern look), a flat cap element, and a stone base.
 - **Arch** - The arch spans the two columns with two arched metal beams, similar to Options 1 and 2.
 - **Lighting** - The lettering in the arch and signs will be lit as well as the punched metal material on the column face. The lighted column face is similar to the Murphy Avenue Sign and will have a pattern effect.
 - **Materials** - Limestone base, dark metal finish and metal punched column face with backlighting. The limestone bases relate to the existing buildings fronting both Washington and McKinley.

GATEWAY OPTION 3 (night-time lighted view)



The survey was open for 19 days and 66 members of the community voted on the options. The most popular design was Gateway Option 3, which is a modern interpretation of the Murphy Avenue gateway sign. See Attachment 4 for a summary of the survey results.

The above illustrations and Attachment 3 enable wayfinding signage for major businesses (or business areas such as Murphy Avenue) on gateway features. Staff recommends wayfinding to business areas only, unless the gateway feature is on private property; Council should indicate if this is a concern.

Final design of any gateway element would be subject to review and approval by City staff to assure visibility and safety are maintained. Safety includes sufficient height for vehicle clearance, not blocking views of traffic signals, and maintaining adequate space for pedestrians on sidewalks.

FISCAL IMPACT

Selection of an updated design vocabulary does not have a fiscal impact on the City. If a general design vocabulary is established through the subject effort, it will save the City a little time and funding when Capital Project 826800 commences in FY 2024/25.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Public Library, Senior Center, Community Center and in the Department of Public Safety Lobby. In addition, the agenda and report are available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, Office of the City Clerk, and on the City's website. Email notices were sent to Charles Street 100, Sunnyvale West and Heritage District Neighborhood Associations and the Sunnyvale Downtown Association.

Public outreach also included the Open City Hall online survey from April 27, 2022 to May 16, 2022. The Sunnyvale Downtown Association has indicated that they support Gateway Option 3.

ALTERNATIVES

1. Approve the Design Vocabulary for the Gateway Signs and Wayfinding based on Option 3 and direct that the Public Works Wayfinding Project use the Option 3 design as a basis for future gateway and wayfinding sign designs Downtown.
2. Approve the Design Vocabulary for the Gateway Signs and Wayfinding based on Option 3 and direct that the Public Works Wayfinding Project use the Option 3 design as a basis for future gateway and wayfinding sign designs Downtown, with modifications.
3. Approve the Design Vocabulary for the Gateway Signs based on Option 1 or 2 (with or without modifications) and direct that the Public Works Wayfinding project use the selected option's design as a basis for future gateway and wayfinding sign designs Downtown.
4. Do not approve any of the presented options for the Downtown Wayfinding and Gateway Design Vocabulary and provide direction for staff on preferred elements and options.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Alternative 1: Approve the Design Vocabulary for the Gateway Signs and Wayfinding based on Option 3 and direct that the Public Works Wayfinding Project use the Option 3 design as a basis for future gateway and wayfinding sign designs Downtown.

Staff recommends Option 3 for the updated design vocabulary to guide wayfinding and gateway design in Downtown. This design reflects present and past eras in Downtown's history and allows the Murphy Avenue gateway to be a unique design due to the Heritage Landmark District Status of

Murphy Avenue. The Gateways will provide announcement into Downtown at various entrance points, the monuments will assist with marking the transition to residential areas and the wayfinding signs will assist downtown clients and visitors to the appropriate locations for parking, public transportation, parks, historic Murphy Avenue and various other elements as they come online over the next few years.

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Reviewed by: Jennifer Ng, Assistant Director, Public Works/City Engineer

Reviewed by: Chip Taylor, Director, Public Works

Reviewed by: Teri Silva, Assistant City Manager

Approved by: Kent Steffens, City Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. 2007 Downtown Sunnyvale Design Family
2. 2020 Downtown Specific Plan Gateway and Wayfinding (Section 3.7)
3. 2021 Block 18 Gateway Sign Package
4. Open Town Hall Survey Summary