



January 7, 2022

Bill Guerin
Director of Public Works
City of San Rafael
San Rafael, CA. 94901

RE: 2nd/3rd Street Improvements

Dear Bill,

We greatly appreciate the City's willingness to explore ways of saving the valuable London Plane tree in the 2nd Street median that greets those entering San Rafael from the west. We especially appreciate the efforts of April Miller to reach a solution, and her thorough response to Sustainable San Rafael's June 21 letter (attached).

We continue to believe that the key to such a solution lies in balancing the multiple civic values that must be integrated here—those of drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, parkers, neighborhoods, and not least, the contributions made by full-grown trees to the character and environmental health of Marin. Such trees are valuable members of our community.

Reducing the speed limit for these two blocks of 2nd and 3rd Streets to match the 25-mph posted for both streets through the rest of downtown would benefit all parties. Drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians would be safer. Danger would be lessened for people parking in the exposed spaces outboard of the new bike 'facility' (as all who have paralleled-parked on westbound Miracle Mile can attest). Finally, slower traffic would take less space to safely transition to the new street alignment east of the tree, retaining the full width of the existing median to the east dripline, and thereby saving the tree. (The attached DPW drawings clarify how shifting the transition north and perhaps shortening it could save the tree with little loss of parking.)

The reduced speed is further warranted by the reduced lane widths already planned. The additional street trees that are also planned will help signal drivers that it's time to slow down for downtown conditions, including more pedestrians, cyclists, and on-street parking. Saving this mature London Plane, positioned at the entrance of the City, is a first step towards calming traffic for a safe and enjoyable journey through San Rafael.

With the length of these two blocks apparently totaling about 1200 feet, the reduction in speed translates into an increased drive time of merely 9 seconds. We believe that saving this 50-year-old tree is well worth these few seconds of travel time. In our opinion, it is also worth a few parking spaces (2-4) that could be made up for by implementing parking strategies already in the Downtown Parking Study and the new Downtown Plan.

In addition to the many long-known benefits that trees bring to our community—natural beauty, human scale, replenished oxygen, stable property values, biodiversity—this particular tree also

models significant responses to the growing climate crisis. The London Plane is among the most effective species of street tree for drawing down the atmospheric carbon largely responsible for climate change and storing it in branches, roots, and soil. This tree alone sequesters about a ton of greenhouse gas every three years. Its broad deciduous leaves also provide cooling shade during our increasingly dangerous heat events, reducing summer heat islands, while allowing sunlight to warm winter sidewalks. In addition, the species survives and helps mitigate air pollution, particularly important as wildfire smoke becomes a more frequent climate impact.

As you know, Sustainable San Rafael has closely monitored and supported the overall Third Street Improvement Project since it began in 2017, with particular attention to the interests of pedestrians and the fate of the four median trees on Second Street. It therefore came as a surprise when the last and most valuable of these trees was eliminated from the drawings less than a year ago, in February 2021. We suggest that the loss of this beautiful tree is unnecessary, and is not responsive to the full constituency of San Rafael.

For all these reasons, we continue to urge the City to redouble its efforts to make this tree an example of the partnership that has now become critical to the survival of both people and nature. Again, thanks for your close attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

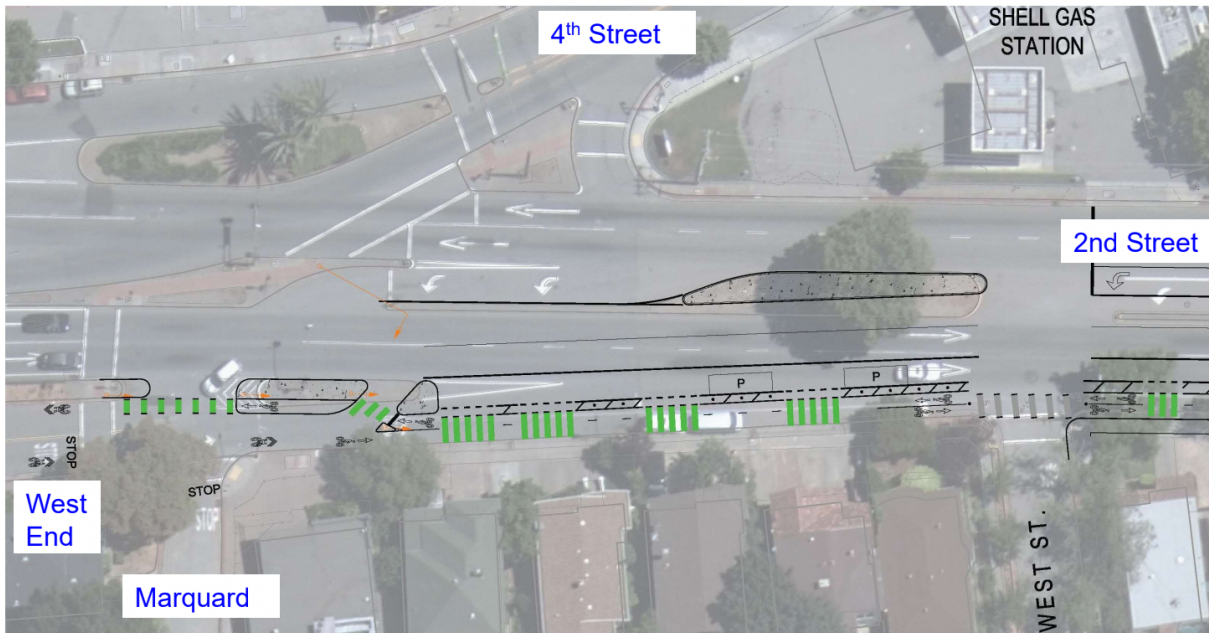
William Carney
President

Attachments:

DPW drawings showing alternative 2nd Street realignments
SSR letter, 6/21/21

cc: Mayor Kate Colin, San Rafael City Council, Jim Schutz, Cory Bytof, Alicia Giudice, April Miller

2nd Street Interim Connection



SAN RAFAEL
THE CITY WITH A MISSION

Concept Design
Exhibits

1. Current proposal eliminates beautiful London Plane tree by cutting a few feet into median to save 2 parking spaces between Marquard and West Streets. The 200' transition to a new lane alignment east of West St. takes place between Marquard and West Streets.

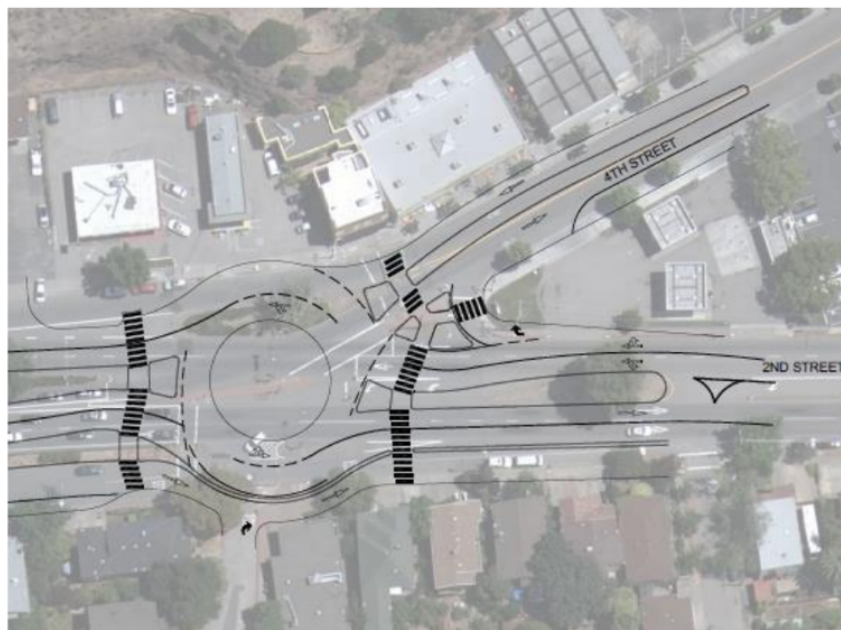


2. The same 200' transition could preserve the tree by starting at its east dripline, eliminating just 2 more parking spaces east of West Street. Reducing the speed limit from 35 to 25 mph (as elsewhere on 2nd St.) could increase safety and save another parking space.

Figure 22: East Street to Miracle Mile/ West End Avenue Proposed Project- Option B



3. An earlier DPW study shows a sharper transition, preserving both the tree and all the parking east of West Street. Even with the wider bike lane now proposed, a similar transition might work with slower speeds, saving the tree and losing only one additional parking space.



4. DPW conceptual sketch of the proposed 4th / 2nd Streets roundabout shows how this mature London Plane tree fits in, helps calm traffic, and marks the 2nd Street entry into San Rafael.



June 21, 2021

Bill Guerin
Director of Public Works
City of San Rafael
San Rafael, CA. 94901

RE: 2nd/3rd Street Improvements

Dear Bill,

With a construction manager on board, we hope that you will take another look at all possibilities for saving the valuable London Plane Tree in the 2nd Street median that welcomes those entering San Rafael from the west.

Following the last Council presentation on this project, I discussed several possibilities with project manager April Miller:

- Consider decreasing the speed along the combined section of 2nd and 3rd Streets for the two blocks east of the 4th Street intersection to 25 mph, which is the speed posted for the remaining portions of these two streets through downtown San Rafael. This would decrease the distance needed for traffic to transition to the new lane alignment proposed east of West Street, potentially resulting in fewer parking spaces lost from retaining the tree. It would also increase the safety of all users of these blocks—pedestrians, cyclists, drivers, and those parking outboard of the new bike facility—a goal repeated frequently during the Council meeting.
- End the median immediately east of the drip line of the tree, further facilitating a safe lane transition.
- Explore lane dimensions and restriping that would avoid removal of the tree.

For reasons stated in our previous letters, Sustainable San Rafael continues to believe that this magnificent tree contributes greatly to the overall character of this portion of the 2nd/3rd boulevard and the project as a whole, outweighing the value of parking a few additional cars in a stretch of public right-of-way already dominated by automobiles. The City's 'complete streets' policy calls instead for balancing traffic, bikes, pedestrians, and natural elements.

Thank you for your further consideration.

Sincerely,

William Carney, President

cc: Mayor Kate Colin