

New Signals

When a resident complained she hadn't heard of the project, or the point where the decision was going to be made, Coe itemized the overall number of meetings, which in his quick estimation was over a dozen, along with email blasts and updates on the city website.

The majority of public speakers at the meeting were neighbors who live on side streets that intersect at the crest of Reliez, where one of the signals will be located. They urged approval, citing safety reasons, especially noting the paved path that serves children and cyclists crosses from the west to the east side of the street at that intersection.

One speaker summed it up: "A traffic light is the only way to guarantee safe passage, the inconvenience to the community is minimal." The other signal will be at the intersection of Reliez and Olympic Boulevard.

Both signals would stay on green roughly 99.4 percent of the time, Andersson said, only changing to red when pedestrians or bicyclists hit the button at the crosswalk or for cross-traffic from side streets. "Is that too much to ask?"

"Prepare to stop" signs will be illuminated on the approach to the light and the poles will be long enough to be seen from an adequate distance.

Rae Eckholm asked the city council to rely on the independent opinion of traffic engineering experts Stantec, who collected and analyzed data on the corridor and recommended the installation of traffic signals. Eckholm pointed out

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that, "we citizens are not traffic engineers." She said the current situation doesn't meet safety regulations and there is no legitimate reason to question the experts who have evaluated the road.

Another neighbor shared a video taken just a couple of hours before the meeting, that demonstrated actual cars blowing through the intersection at Las Trampas as the flashing lights were illuminated, complaining they are "constantly ignored."

If the city does nothing, it could be liable, due to its knowledge of a dangerous condition. "The city has potential (legal) exposure either way," said city attorney Mala Subramanian, whether a light is installed or not. She explained that vintage Reliez Station Road is not necessarily up to the standard that would be built today.

Mayor Mark Mitchell pointed out an important change the city recently made in truck weight rules on Reliez Station Road. Police can now issue \$1,000 citations as an incentive to encourage getting trucks off that road.

There was also some debate as to the timing of the project. City engineer Tony Coe wanted the project to be scheduled for this summer, when there would be less school traffic to reduce construction impacts for the roughly 14,000 cars that use the road every day. Unfortunately some of the necessary equipment requires a three-month lead time prior to delivery, so he asked the city council to approve the purchase of the items in advance of the construction project itself going out to bid; they

would arrive in time to be part of the summer construction window.

In addition, the decision to order the estimated \$100,000 to \$150,000 signal equipment requires the city commit to the project, since it's not possible to cancel the order.

The vast majority of the funding for the estimated \$762,000 project will come from the Contra Costa Transportation Authority's Measure J Major Streets Program.

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Lafayette Gallery Closes

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Photo Nick Marnell

Instead, the gallery struggled from the outset at its new location, contending with the boulevard construction and the rebuild of Bonehead's Texas BBQ next door.

"We were having a tough time making it," Meredith said. "There was no money for advertising. Press releases can only go so far."

It became a dysfunctional way to run a business, Miller said. "One artist leaves, a new one comes in because they can't afford to stay. We were struggling to pay the bills."

"They asked to lower the rent by half, but I couldn't do that," said Dave Roberson, managing partner

of The Forge, the gallery landlord. "I couldn't support their business. But I offered to let them draw down on their deposit. They gave me a 60-day notice in February.

"I hated to see them go," he said.

According to Miller, two members will take over management of the Diablo Fine Arts Gallery in Walnut Creek, providing a new outlet for the co-op artists to feature their work. Roberson said that potential tenants for the gallery space include a cafe and a menswear retailer.

"It's a big loss for everybody," Miller said.

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