



To | Gopika Nair, Associate Planner, City of Piedmont Planning & Building Department
From | Niko Letunic, Principal
Date | March 18, 2021
Subject | Proposed approach to developing the recommendations for the Piedmont Safer Streets plan

Overview and background

The Piedmont Safer Streets project is in the process of updating Piedmont's original Pedestrian and Bicycle Master Plan (PBMP), while including an additional focus on broader traffic safety issues. The most important aspect of the project is the update of the recommendations included in the PBMP to improve walking and biking conditions throughout the city. The PBMP, adopted in November 2014, identified an extensive list of proposed projects and other recommendations. These were organized into five categories:

- 1 **High-priority projects:** The most important and promising physical improvements for improving conditions.
- 2 **Lower-priority projects:** Other important projects to be implemented once the high-priority projects were addressed and if sufficient funding became available.
- 3 **Programs:** Non-infrastructure activities, campaigns and special events in the areas of safety, education, enforcement and encouragement/promotion.
- 4 **Policies,** or changes to City of Piedmont practices.
- 5 **Other implementation actions:** Smaller-scale recommendations to further advance walking and biking in Piedmont.

This memorandum describes a proposed approach to updating the PBMP recommendations under each of the five categories listed above. The updated recommendations will aim to address the community's more current needs, concerns and expectations with respect to walking and biking. Given the wider focus of the Piedmont Safer Streets project, the outlined approach also considers new, additional recommendations to address residents' broader traffic safety concerns, not just those directly related to walking and biking.

At this time, we are looking for feedback on the proposed approach from City staff and members of the City's Pedestrian and Bicycle Advisory Committee, or PBAC (acting individually, not as a group in their official capacity). Because we are still early in the process of developing the specifics of the recommendations, the approach outlined here is general in nature and lacks detail in several places. The proposed approach will be revised based on feedback from staff and PBAC members, and it will be finalized as we further develop the recommendations.

1 High-priority projects

The PBMP included five high-priority recommendations. As mentioned above, these were considered at the time to be the most important physical improvements for improving walking and biking conditions throughout the city:

- i. **Enhanced street crossings at 27 key locations around the city** (see pages 73–76 of the PBMP for detailed information about this recommendation). Some of the proposed locations identified in the PBMP have been enhanced for crossing safety but most have not, mostly due to lack of funds. For the Piedmont Safer Streets plan, we will update the list and map of locations to remove from further consideration those locations that have already been improved. More importantly, to address the issue of insufficient funds, the new plan will include resources for City staff on the design and installation of low-cost intersection improvements. Resources could include examples from other jurisdictions; online guides and toolboxes; custom conceptual designs; and best practices from the profession.
- ii. **Road diets on Grand and Highland Avenues** (see pages 77–81 of the PBMP). The Grand Avenue road diet (south of Cambridge Way/Greenback Avenue) was installed in 2016 but the Highland Avenue one has not been realized. Highland Avenue continues to be a good candidate for a road diet with bike lanes: it has relatively low traffic volumes (lower than Grand Avenue) and is one of very few flat, direct routes in Piedmont. For this reason, we intend to recommend the Highland Avenue road diet as part of the Piedmont Safer Streets plan, subject to a traffic study.

We are sensitive to some residents' complaints that the Grand Avenue road diet has increased traffic delays and caused some drivers to use neighborhood streets instead. However, the road diet has also improved safety for pedestrians and cyclists; has made biking on the street a viable option for many more people; has made left turns easier for drivers; appears to have considerable support; and could possibly be tweaked to minimize traffic back-ups. Implementation of the Highland Avenue road diet would be subject to the results of a study that evaluates the pros and cons of the project to cyclists, pedestrians and drivers, and that provides recommendations to mitigate any adverse effects on traffic.

- iii. **Sidewalk railings on the Oakland Avenue bridge** (page 77 of the PBMP). This project is almost complete and is expected to be fully completed in the next few months. For that reason, this recommendation will not be carried over into the Piedmont Safer Streets plan.
- iv. **Study for the reconfiguration of the Highland Avenue bend** (page 77 of the PBMP). The PBMP recommended a traffic study of Highland Avenue roughly from Vista Avenue to Piedmont Court and subsequent reconfiguration of the mini-corridor in order to improve pedestrian, car and bike circulation and improve safety. This project is still considered a high priority, since it would serve a large percentage of the city's residents and address traffic safety in the Civic Center, a key concern of Piedmonters. This recommendation will be refined and incorporated into the Piedmont Safer Streets plan.
- v. **Designated citywide bikeway network** (pages 83–89 of the PBMP). Some of the proposed bikeways recommended in the PBMP have been installed while others have not. We will update this recommendation to: (i) revise the list and map of bikeways to identify those that have completed; (ii) look for opportunities to create new or improved route alignments; (iii) look for opportunities to upgrade or improve the previously recommended bikeway facility types; and (iv) suggest ways to install the remaining proposed bikeways.

2 Lower-priority projects

In addition to the above projects, the PBMP recommended four types of lower-priority projects (pages 90–91 of the PBMP). While desirable, they were considered less important than the high-priority projects, and were not expected to be accomplished in the near or mid-term future due to insufficient funds. These projects are:

- i. **Additional enhanced street crossings**, beyond those recommended under the high-priority projects.
- ii. **Sidewalk improvements and new curb ramps** beyond the City’s customary level of effort on sidewalk and curb ramp maintenance, repair and construction.
- iii. **Improvements to footpaths and stairway** beyond the City’s customary level of effort on maintenance and repair.
- iv. **Additional traffic calming measures**, beyond any possibly incorporated as part of the high-priority projects, such as sidewalk bulb-outs (through the enhanced street crossings) or reduction of travel lanes (through the road diets).

While these additional improvements are still valid and important, it has become clear that the City will generally not have the resources to implement them in the near or even medium terms. Under the Piedmont Safer Streets plan, we will document and acknowledge these projects so that they may be considered again in the future (including when the Piedmont Safer Streets plan is updated) but, with one exception, will not incorporate them as formal recommendations. The exception is item 4 above, additional traffic calming measures. Because the community needs assessment for the Piedmont Safer Streets plan identified speeding as residents’ top concern, the traffic calming recommendation will be broadened into a multi-pronged **speed management program**. This program will consider design changes to streets and intersections (including speed humps, among other traffic calming measures), and safety, educational and enforcement-related campaign activities. Depending on how this recommendation shapes up, it could take the form of a “high-priority project” (see item 1, on the previous page), a “program” (next item) or a set of “other implementation actions” (item 5, on the next page).

3 Programs

Besides infrastructure projects, the PBMP recommended a variety of activities, special events and other non-infrastructure efforts to improve walking and biking in Piedmont. These efforts were grouped under five “programs”: (i) Safe Routes to School; (ii) safety and education efforts aimed at the general population; (iii) enforcement; (iv) promotion and encouragement; and (v) spot improvements (pages 91–93 of the PBMP). It was intended that these programs would be ongoing rather than be one-time efforts; that not all activities would necessarily be conducted at all times; and that the number and mix of activities offered or supported by the City would depend on the community’s changing needs and interests, on City staff resources and on available funding.

Like the lower-priority projects, these activities are still valid and important but City staff lack the resources to work on most of them. For the Piedmont Safer Streets plan, we will review the list of activities; highlight a small number with the greatest potential to improve conditions and that can be reasonably expected to be accomplished by staff; identify those activities that could be accomplished by parties other than City staff (namely community groups and organizations such as Piedmont Unified School District and Piedmont Beautification Foundation); and acknowledge the remaining activities so that they may be considered again in the future, though we will not incorporate them as formal recommendations.

4 Policies

The PBMP recommended that the City develop and adopt two new written policies describing the process through which City officials review and act on requests from the public on the **installation of new crosswalks and stop signs** and on **posted speed limits** (page 95 of the PBMP.) The intention was that these policies would help inform and educate the public on the constraints and trade-offs involved in making such changes to street operations, while reassuring residents that the City gives due consideration to requests from the public in a fair, informed and transparent manner.

The City has since adopted a written policy regarding the installation of new crosswalks and stop signs, so this recommendation will not be carried over into the Piedmont Safer Streets plan. The City, however, has not adopted a policy on speed limits. Given how important of a concern speeding is to residents, that recommendation will be carried over into the Piedmont Safer Streets plan. The policy will focus on prioritizing streets for speed reduction projects or streets where a speed study is warranted. The policy will be coordinated with the speed management program mentioned on the previous page.

In addition, we intend to recommend two other policies. The first would set guidelines for improving driver visibility and sight lines at intersections and along street segments where necessary. This was one of the key new community concerns identified through the lens on broader traffic safety used for the Piedmont Safer Streets needs assessment. The second would create Transportation Demand Management (TDM) requirements for new public facilities and multi-family developments, to reduce traffic and parking demand from such developments. (Rather than policies, these recommendations could end up taking the form of a “high-priority project,” a “program” or additional “implementation actions.”)

5 Other implementation actions

Besides projects, programs and policies, the PBMP recommended 12 additional “implementation actions” (pages 96–97 of the PBMP). These are smaller-scale actions that the City could take to further advance walking and bicycling, and which should be implemented as opportunities arise and as City staff time and other resources permit. The actions were organized under four time frames: near term, medium term, longer term and continuous. For the Piedmont Safer Streets plan, we intend to review the actions; remove any that have been accomplished or that might no longer be relevant; refine the remaining ones as needed; and possibly add new ones that address new areas or topics of interest or concern.

Next steps

As mentioned near the beginning, at this time we are looking for feedback from City staff and from members of the PBAC (again, acting individually, not as a group) on our proposed approach for developing the recommendations under the Piedmont Safer Streets plan. We will revise the approach based on the feedback we receive. We will then present a revised version of the approach, along with more specific information about the recommendations, at the next meeting of the PBAC, which is tentatively scheduled for the second week of May.