

ETHICS SAN MATEO

DEDICATED TO TRUTH, TRANSPARENCY AND ETHICAL CONDUCT IN CITY GOVERNMENT

March 30, 2023

Ethics Watch

Regarding the Bike Lane on Humboldt Street

Ethics San Mateo is watching the activities regarding the bicycle lanes on Humboldt Street between 3rd Avenue and Peninsula Avenue.

The agenda of the City Council Regular Meeting on March 20, 2023, included the item “Complete Streets Plan - Introduction and Community Engagement”. An overview of the plan was presented, as well as a report on the status of the plan’s activities, and numerous members of the public commented. Many of the public comments addressed the bicycle lanes and removal of parking on Humboldt Street.

The history of how the bicycle lanes were approved and implemented is quite lengthy, and somewhat obscured just by the volume of plans, reports, block grant applications, videos, City Council and commission discussions and decisions. What follows is background on key points that have led us to where we are today:

- The City of San Mateo was awarded a HUD Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) based on the information provided in the “City of San Mateo 2018-2022 Consolidated Plan for Fiscal Years 2018-19 to 2022-23” and revisions. HUD/CDBG funding is mandated to be used to make improvements in target neighborhoods (low to moderate income level) to improve the lives of the residents living there. The original grant application did not prioritize bicycle lanes; however, they were mentioned once in the application as part of general street improvements.
- The city’s 2019 Annual Action Plan listed planned activities to be accomplished, and no bike lanes were listed.
- The 2020 Annual Action Plan listed planned activities to be accomplished, and bicycle lanes were added to the street safety improvements to be made.
- The 2021 Annual Action Plan states “The Department of Public Works was consulted for prioritization of funds for community development projects. Pedestrian safety and street reconstruction are priorities in the neighborhood. City Council has asked PW to prioritize implementation of its bike master plan.”

CDBG funding was then used for establishment of bike lanes, causing the removal of approximately 1.2 miles of street parking on one side of Humboldt St., from 3rd Ave. to Peninsula Ave. This street is mainly residential, and the removal of street parking has generated complaints from residents. Many of the residents of the area, and on Humboldt St., are elderly

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and disabled. There have been organized efforts, including a resident-initiated community meeting with Mayor Lee, to get the city to modify or remove the bike lanes and restore the street parking. Residents of the area have also taken council members on tours of the area to show them the issues caused by the bike lanes.

As an apparent result of the complaints and comments from residents of the North Central area, as well as others, at the March 20th meeting, members of the City Council clearly admitted that mistakes had been made. Council members stated that it was the pressure caused by the potential expiration of funding that drove the decisions leading to the implementation of the bike lanes.

In summary, the City Council appears to have come to an agreement that the bicycle lanes, and the resulting removal of parking for residents, need to be addressed and corrections made. Ethics San Mateo is highly encouraged by both Council's willingness to admit errors were made, and their promise to work with the residents to resolve the situation. Therefore, we are issuing this "Ethics Watch" stating our intention to follow the progress of Council's promises and how they use the lessons learned in the future.

Of specific focus will be:

- How the City Council and staff engage the residents directly affected by the lack of parking.
- The influences special interest groups (MOVE San Mateo, SVBC, etc.) brought to bear on Council and staff.
- Communication with HUD/CDBG about the issue, specifically regarding how the grant funding was used and plans to correct any misuse.
- Timeliness of corrective action.
- Effects of corrective action funding.

Ethics San Mateo believes the explanation that the grant funding expiration drove the decision to quickly establish the Humboldt Street bicycle lanes may not be entirely accurate. Numerous interest groups promoting "Active Transportation" modes, for a variety of reasons, have long sought to influence the decisions of the City Council and commissions. Some of these organizations have been very effective and conduct well-funded lobbying activities.

In conclusion, we believe our City Council is starting to take the right steps in this matter, and we applaud their stated willingness to take responsibility for correcting the errors. We are on an "ETHICS WATCH" to ensure that they embrace true accountability

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for this issue and sustain the corrective action.