



City of Arts & Innovation

City Council Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY COUNCIL **DATE: MAY 25, 2021**

FROM: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT **WARDS: ALL**

SUBJECT: CONSIDERATION OF MEDIAN LANDSCAPING PLACED BY RESIDENT VOLUNTEERS AND AN ADOPT-A-MEDIAN PROGRAM

ISSUE:

Approve the development of an Adopt-a-Median program to facilitate resident volunteerism & donation of materials for the beautification of Riverside's median parkways and consider the status of existing non-compliant rocks within medians along Mission Grove Parkway.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the City Council:

1. Direct staff to pursue the establishment of an Adopt-a-Median program; and
2. Provide direction regarding the plantings and rocks placed within medians along Mission Grove Parkway (North) to either:
 - a. Option 1: Stay any action by City staff to remove plants and rocks for six months while staff prepares a Program for City Council consideration.
 - b. Option 2: Direct City staff to remove rocks and plants within the median not installed by City staff or a City contractor.

BACKGROUND:

The City of Riverside grew and flourished alongside the development of grand roadways featuring landscaped medians, including Magnolia Avenue and Victoria Avenue. This model of roadway development is reflected on a smaller scale across many of Riverside's collector & arterial roadways. Major roadways now include landscaped medians, including Alessandro Boulevard, Arlington Avenue, La Sierra Avenue, Van Buren Boulevard, Riverwalk Parkway, Canyon Crest Drive, Martin Luther King Boulevard, and Chicago Avenue, amongst others. Medians along these roadways are generally narrower than those on Victoria and Magnolia and are primarily landscaped with smaller profile street trees and low-lying drought-resistant shrubs.

One such roadway with landscaped medians is Mission Grove Parkway. In March of 2021, the City was contacted by a resident with complaints that non-permitted landscaping features, including rocks and plantings, had been installed within the median along Mission Grove Parkway

between Canyon Crest Drive and Alessandro Boulevard. Riverside Municipal Code section 13.16.010 prohibits the installation of any landscaping within any street dedicated for public use without first obtaining a written permit from the City. When the City receives a complaint of a non-permitted feature within the right of way, it is obligated to investigate and assess the concern. City staff posted signs in April of 2021 notifying residents that the unpermitted rocks were scheduled to be removed in late May with the intent of coordinating the safe return of the rocks to the residents. Following the posting of these signs, many residents have reached out to the City to express their desire for the rocks to remain in place along Mission Grove. Given the public response, staff wishes to seek Council's guidance in its enforcement of the Municipal Code along Mission Grove.

Additionally, in order to support the spirit of volunteerism among residents and their willingness to contribute to the beautification of the City, PW staff proposes to develop an "Adopt-a-Median" program that would provide a clear path forward for residents along Mission Grove and for similar projects in the future.



Figure 1: Resident-led beautification of medians along Mission Grove includes desert-friendly plantings & rocks

DISCUSSION:

Throughout the month of April 2021, following the posting of signage notifying residents of the planned removal of rocks within the Mission Grove median, residents have engaged with the City to request that the rocks be allowed to remain in place. The work completed by residents has done much to beautify Mission Grove Parkway, which had several barren patches of median as a result of both prior traffic collisions and State mandated reductions in watering in 2015.

While it is the duty of staff to enforce the Riverside Municipal Code (RMC) and be responsive to complaints received, staff have withheld removal of the rocks pending Council direction on the application of the RMC in this case. The Municipal Code states:

"Riverside Municipal Code 13.16.010 Permit required.

No person shall grade, prepare subgrade, pave, lay sewer or drain pipe, construct curbs, gutters, driveways, sidewalks, manholes, catch basins or similar structures, or install any trees, landscaping or irrigation in any street, alley, way or easement, which street, alley, way or

easement is dedicated or proposed to be dedicated for public use, within the City, without first obtaining a written permit from the City so to do."

Public safety is likely one reason that the RMC is stringent in its current state regarding unpermitted work within the right of way, both for the safety of those completing work and the public who will experience the work once in place. Under a permit review process, staff would generally not approve the placement of loose rocks within medians because of potential for such rocks to be displaced into the roadway following a vehicle collision. On 12/13/2020 such an incident did occur on Mission Grove Parkway, requiring a PW standby crew member to clear rocks from the roadway that posed a risk to both vehicles and cyclists. Over the past 5 years, 63 recorded collisions have occurred along Mission Grove Parkway between Alessandro Boulevard and Canyon Crest Drive, with 20 injury collisions; 6 of these collisions were fixed object / run-off road collisions. An image of a recently damaged section of median landscaping along Mission Grove is shown below:



Figure 2: A section of median landscaping recently overrun by a vehicle

Because of the potential risk to the public, other agencies have restrictions within their Adopt-a-Median programs prohibiting features such as unanchored rocks. The City of Los Angeles' Adopt-a-Median streetscape guidelines state:

"Boulders, railroad ties, and other decorative landscape materials may be used to provide additional middle height accents; these types of elements must be properly secured to their site and positioned in a manner that will minimize conflicts with pedestrian traffic (in sidewalk areas) as well as minimize vehicular damage (within medians) should an accident occur. A minimum longitudinal set-back of fifty (50) feet from the nose or ends of median islands is required for the placement of these elements. Boulders and other rigid decorative landscape materials must also have a minimum lateral set-back of two (2) feet away from any curb or edge of roadway."

"Any decorative paving used must be properly secured to the site; use mortar to secure any stone or brick that otherwise might be thrown or come loose and end up in the street."

Los Angeles' guidelines require that loose landscaping elements, such as boulders, be secured in place and that they are placed 50 feet back from the end of medians and a minimum of 2 feet away from the edge of a curb. These requirements are intended to mitigate the risk to the City and its residents as rocks, or other decorative features are placed within medians.

Adopt-a-Median programs are mechanisms to allow residents, organizations, and businesses to take ownership of a section of a median through the deployment of landscaping and participation

in maintenance. City staff anticipates that it will take 6-8 months to develop a program with resident involvement that would be brought to the Mobility & Infrastructure Committee followed by City Council for adoption. The City has a history of partnering with organizations volunteering their time towards the improvement of public spaces, including Victoria Avenue Forever, Keep Riverside Clean and Beautiful, and most recently the Salvation Army's First Impressions program.

Given the strong neighborhood support for the median landscaping, staff is seeking guidance in its application of the RMC as staff works to develop the proposed Adopt-a-Median program.

Recommendation 2, Option A:

If the City Council should advise that the rocks are to remain in place, staff would expeditiously work to establish a program that would set clear design guidelines for any improvements needed to secure the rocks in place and/or potentially relocate some of the rocks.

Recommendation 2, Option B:

If the City Council advises that the rocks along Mission Grove are to be temporarily removed by either City Staff or a City contractor, staff would hold the rocks at the Corporation Yard or return them to the resident(s). Rocks could then be redeployed in a manner consistent with the adopted program guidelines. While staff is seeking guidance regarding rocks within the medians, given their lower comparative risk, staff recommends that the plantings placed by residents remain in place to avoid potential damage to the plants.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with this report.

Prepared by: Kris Martinez, Public Works Director
Certified as to
availability of funds: Edward Enriquez, Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer
Approved by: Rafael Guzman, Assistant City Manager
Approved as to form: Kristi J. Smith, Interim City Attorney

Attachments:

1. Mission Grove Parkway Map