

Memorandum

To: PATRICE THERIOT
Principle Engineer
Watsonville Public Works & Utilities
PHONE: 831-768-3113

Date: February 24, 2025

File: 05-1Q150

From: ADAM DIGIOVINE
Environmental Scientist
Caltrans District 5
Division of Environmental Analysis

Subject: **DOWNTOWN WATSONVILLE SAFETY PROJECT; SECTION 4(F) DETERMINATION**

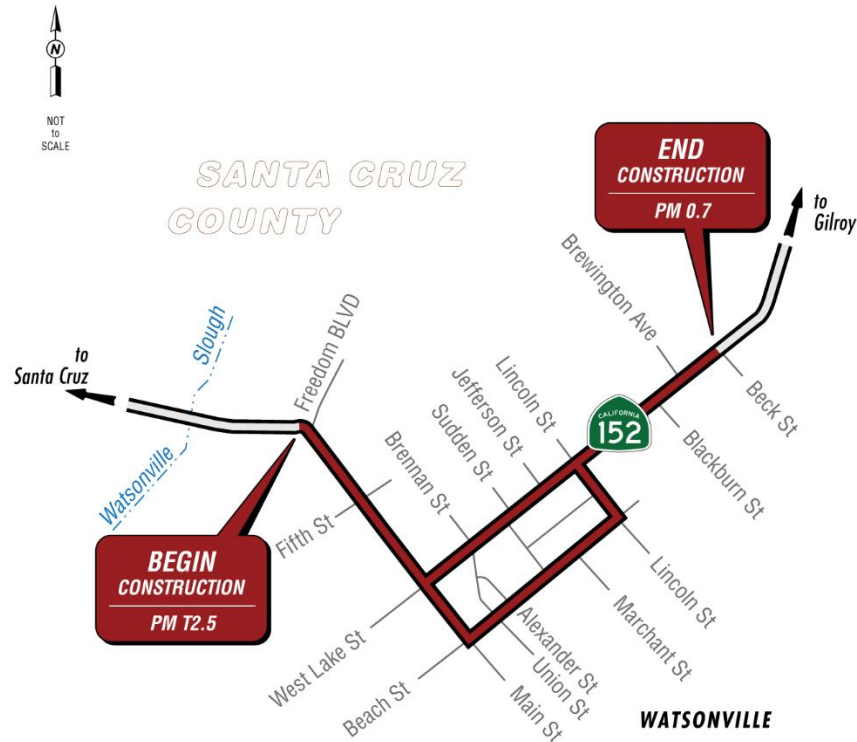
Project Description and Background

The California Department of Transportation District 5 is proposing to construct bulbout curb extensions and construct high visibility ladder style crosswalks with curb ramps on State Route 152 in Santa Cruz County, from approximately 250 feet northwest of Freedom Boulevard near Memorial Park to Beck Street. The postmile limits are from postmile T2.45 to postmile 0.714.

Figure 1 – Project Vicinity Map



Figure 2 – Project Location Map



The proposed project would construct bulbout curb extensions and high visibility ladder style crosswalks with curb ramps to enhance pedestrian safety. Bulbouts are curb extensions that increase the sidewalk area and reduce the roadway width at pedestrian crossings. The proposed project would construct 31 bulbouts at 11 intersections in downtown Watsonville, aimed to reduce pedestrian's time of exposure to traffic. High visibility ladder style crosswalk and curb ramps aim to enhance visibility between pedestrians and motorists. When combined with high visibility crosswalks and curb ramps, curb extensions, also known as bulbouts, greatly enhance pedestrian-motorist visibility, help reduce pedestrian fatalities and injuries, and have a traffic calming effect by requiring more driver attention, inducing speed reduction for turning maneuvers, and narrowing the roadway width.

Additional features include drainage system modifications, and pavement restriping. Utility conflicts are anticipated, and utility relocation plans would be

developed during the project design phase. No tree removal is required and only minor vegetation trimming, if any, is anticipated.

A portion of the project is located adjacent to the Watsonville City Plaza and would require an encroachment permit within city owned land. The Watsonville City Plaza is both a historic site of local significance and a publicly owned public park and recreational area, making it a Section 4(f) property and therefore requires a Section 4(f) analysis by the lead agency of this project. Caltrans seeks concurrence on a de minimis impact finding from the City of Watsonville, the agency of jurisdiction over the 4(f) property. This letter outlines the anticipated temporary impacts of the project to the 4(f) resource and summarizes Caltrans' findings that the project would have a de minimis or minimal impact on the resource.

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966

Section 4(f) of the Department of Transportation Act of 1966, codified in federal law at 49 U.S. Code 303, declares that “it is the policy of the United States Government that special effort should be made to preserve the natural beauty of the countryside and public park and recreation lands, wildlife and waterfowl refuges, and historic sites.”

Section 4(f) specifies that the Secretary of Transportation may approve a transportation program or project requiring the use of publicly owned land of a public park, recreation area, or wildlife and waterfowl refuge of national, State, or local significance, or land of an historic site of national, State, or local significance, as determined by the federal, state, or local officials having jurisdiction over the park, area, refuge, or site, only if:

- there is no prudent and feasible alternative to using that land; and
- the program or project includes all possible planning to minimize harm to the park, recreation area, wildlife and waterfowl refuge, or historic site resulting from the use.

The Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act, a federal transportation reauthorization bill signed into law in 2005, simplified the procedures for projects that would have de minimis impacts on Section 4(f) properties. An analysis is not required, and the Section 4(f) evaluation is complete once it is determined that the use of a Section 4(f) property would result in de minimis impacts.

The definition of a de minimis impact, as set forth in 23 Code of Federal Regulation Section 774.17, specifies that “For parks, recreation areas, and wildlife and waterfowl refuges, a de minimis impact is one that will not adversely affect the features, attributes, or activities qualifying the property for protection under Section 4(f).”

Responsibility for compliance with Section 4(f) has been assigned to Caltrans pursuant to 23 U.S. Code 326 and 327, including determinations and approval of Section 4(f) evaluations, as well as coordination with those agencies that have jurisdiction over a Section 4(f) resource that may be affected by a project action.

Summary of the Section 4(f) Resource and Temporary Impacts from the Project

Watsonville City Plaza is a 1.4-acre public space in the center of downtown Watsonville with State Route 152 along its southwest border. According to NoeHill, an advocational website which explores historic sites and other points of interest, the plaza has a long history, resting on a portion of the Bolsa del Pájaro Spanish Land Grant which was owned by the Rodriguez family and given to residents of Watsonville in 1860. In 1880, the Butterfly Social Club donated a fountain to the plaza, followed by a drinking fountain from the Women's Christian Temperance Union in 1893, modernized in 1913. The current bandstand, designed by William Weeks in 1906 to replace an earlier wooden structure, had a cover added in 1916 by Ralph Wyckoff, which was later replaced in 1965 by a design from architect Robert Wong. According to the Watsonville Parks and Community Services webpage, the park hosts community events such as the Strawberry Festival, an annual 4th of July Parade, and Music in the Plaza every Thursday night.

In total, the project would require the temporary occupancy of 0.041 acres, which is equal to 1786 square feet, of the 1.4 acre Watsonville Plaza lot. Construction of the project would take an estimated 160 working days. Although no long term or substantive impacts to the Watsonville City plaza are expected, implementation of the project could result in minor impacts to biological, historic, and visual resources.

From a biological resource perspective, no permanent impacts or temporary impacts are anticipated. No tree removal, or vegetation removal is anticipated. Almost all work would occur on previously paved or disturbed surfaces at two locations, as shown in attachments, along Beach Street adjacent to the Watsonville City Plaza. There could be temporary impacts to nesting birds if it is

determined that minor vegetation trimming, or removal is required during the nesting bird season, which is February 1 - September 30. If so, a qualified biologist will conduct a focused nest survey for active migratory bird nests in the vegetation to be removed or trimmed no more than three days prior to work activities. If an active nest is found, Caltrans will coordinate with California Department of Fish and Wildlife to determine an appropriate work buffer until the nests are vacated. Additionally, staging areas, equipment, and material storage will be located in paved or previously cleared areas, or level areas where grading and vegetation clearing are not required.

Due to the historic nature of the Plaza and the downtown area as a whole, Caltrans conducted Section 106 consultation with the State Historic Preservation Office. A Finding of Effect is under review, and it is anticipated that a **No Adverse Effect without Standard Conditions** determination will be made because the project would not destroy any elements of historic significance or alter any historic properties' integrity or ability to convey their historical significance. If appropriate, Caltrans District 5 would develop nonstandard method specifications to best address the preservation of the individually eligible buildings and the district and achieve the construction of the new pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure with all associated improvements in the most unintrusive and feasible manner.

From a visual resources perspective, implementation of the project would result in visual changes as seen from public viewpoints such as Route 152 roadway from driver and bicycle vantage points and from pedestrian vantage points on sidewalks, the public square, and intersecting local streets. The project would change the visual scale of the highway facility primarily with the introduction of modified paved surfaces, including increased sidewalk paving for bulbouts, high visibility crosswalks and curb ramps. Although some of these visual changes would be noticeable, they would not be unexpected or uncharacteristic elements in the downtown roadway environment. At several locations, widening sidewalks and adding bulbouts would make them visually consistent with the adjacent paved areas and these elements are not uncommon along street thoroughfares. The removal of some asphalt while increasing decorative paving could create a positive visual change. Decorative high visibility crosswalks could improve the visual quality of the route.

Sources of temporary impacts would primarily be from the use of construction equipment such as construction noise, minimal increases in air emissions from

equipment, minor reduction of scenic quality due to presence of equipment in the project vicinity, and minor vegetation trimming, if required.

Summary of Caltrans De Minimis Findings

Caltrans has determined under Section 4(f) of the U.S. Department of Transportation Act of 1966 that the proposed project would have a minimal impact to the City of Watsonville property and that this impact would not be considered adverse. The Section 4(f) determination is based on the following:

- There is no prudent and feasible alternative that would avoid encroaching into a small portion of Watsonville Plaza.
- The project has been designed to avoid and minimize environmental impacts as much as feasible and would not adversely affect biological, historic, or visual resources.
- Access to the Watsonville Plaza would be maintained at all times, as construction activities would only occur at the northern and western corners of the Plaza.
- The use of the property is temporary, and no portion of the property would be permanently acquired by Caltrans.

Public Involvement and Coordination with Agencies with Jurisdiction

- On September 7, 2023, a Caltrans-Watsonville Coordination meeting was held. Caltrans Project Manager Madilyn Jacobsen, former Design Manager Jeff Payne, Project Engineer Michael O'Neal, and Regional Planning Liaison Paul Giurguis presented the project to City of Watsonville Assistant Director of Public Works, and Assistant Watsonville Community Involvement Director Justin Meek.
- On December 7, 2023, a Caltrans-Watsonville Coordination meeting was held. Project Manager Madilyn Jacobsen, and Project Manager Assistant Trisha Bennett presented the project and shared the Project Initiation Document with the following City of Watsonville representatives: Courtney Lindberg – Director of Public Works and Utilities, Patrice Theriot- Principal Engineer, Danielle Green – Assistant Director of Public Works and Utilities, Christian Miranda – Management Analysis, Jaime Rodriguez – Consultant-Traffic Patterns.
- On May 22, 2024, Caltrans Regional Planning Liaison Paul Giurguis reached out to the City of Watsonville requesting construction detail for a specific crosswalk design, a red brick aesthetic, requested by the city of Watsonville. City of Watsonville representative Justin Meeks responded on

May 22, 2024 by providing a document that the red brick designs were derived from. Patrice Theriot with City of Watsonville Public Works responded on May 22, 2024 providing plans that include details of sidewalk banding, as well as brick-banded crosswalks.

- On May 28, 2024, Project Manager Madilyn Jacobsen provided a presentation on Caltrans projects within the City of Watsonville, including the Downtown Watsonville Safety Project, EA 05-1Q150.
- On November 14, 2024, Caltrans Regional Planning Liaison Paul Giurguis reached out to the City of Watsonville and Watsonville Public Works to request design documents for thermoplastic crosswalk design.
- Caltrans has determined that a Categorical Exemption (CEQA) and Categorical Exclusion (NEPA) would be appropriate for this project's environmental clearance document. Upon approval of the project's Project Report, Caltrans will file a Notice of Exemption to the State Clearinghouse, where the document will be made available to the public.
- Caltrans shall continue to coordinate with the City of Watsonville as the project enters the design phase.
- Prior to beginning construction of this project, Caltrans Public Information Officers will ensure that the public is made aware of construction activities in advance so that any potential delays can be planned for.

Caltrans de minimis impact finding requires concurrence from the agency with jurisdiction over the 4(f) property. Caltrans kindly requests the City of Watsonville to provide a signature below as a sign of concurrence or provide a separate written response at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

Adam DiGiovine
Environmental Scientist
(805) 458-7916

**CONCURRENCE WITH SECTION 4(F) DE MINIMIS FINDING BY CITY OF WATSONVILLE
REPRESENTATIVE:**

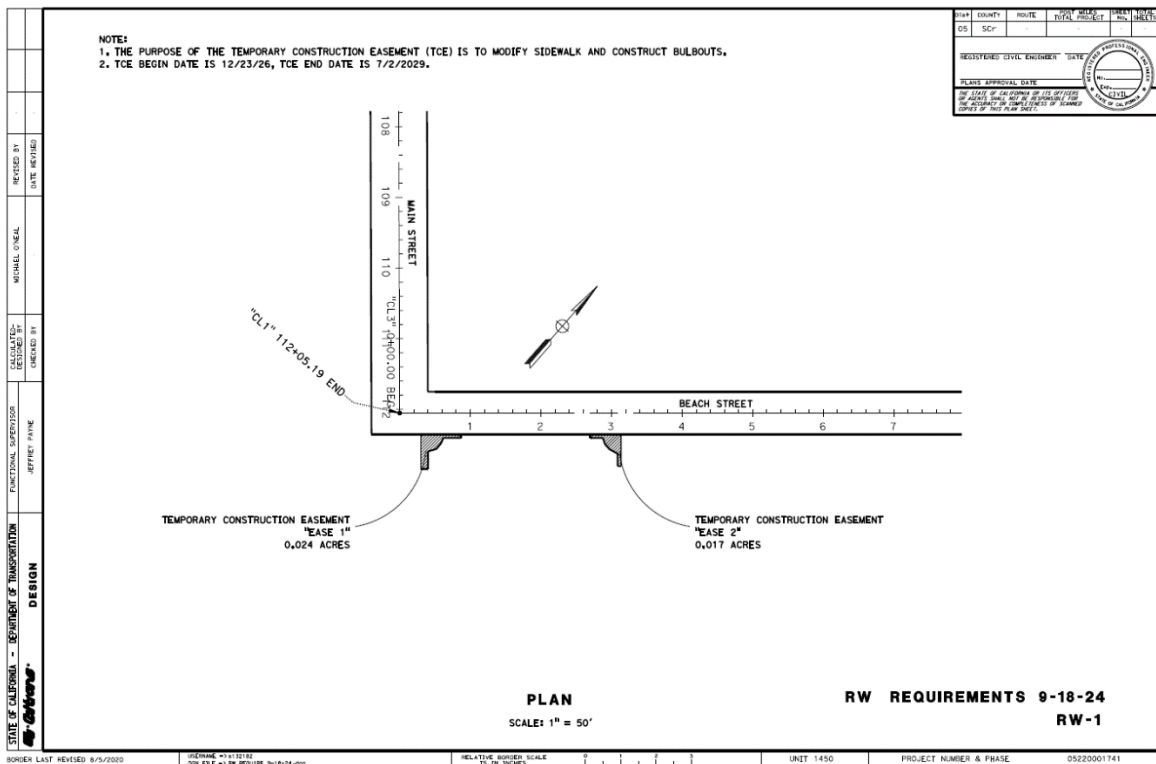
PATRICE THERIOT
Principle Engineer
Watsonville Public Works & Utilities

Date

Attachments

1. Right-of-Way Requirements
2. Watsonville Plaza – Area of Potential Impact Map

Right-of-Way Requirements



Watsonville Plaza- Area of Potential Impact Map



Note – Red polygons are curb ramp extension, bulbout, installation locations