



May 22, 2020

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RE: Cortez Parklet Location Recommendation

Purpose of this Memo:

The intent of this memo is to recommend a suitable location for a parklet in the Cortez neighborhood of Downtown San Diego. This parklet would be supportive of an existing business, expand the pedestrian right-of-way, and provide amenities to enhance the user experience. Improvements to the pedestrian environment was a key feature of the Cortez Mobility Assessment and Recommendations Report, released in November 2019. The information included below outlines the purpose and benefits of parklets in an urban neighborhood, as well as the recommendation for the parklet location. Next steps for implementation also takes into consideration appropriate adjustments in response to COVID-19 requirements.

Benefits of Parklets

Parklets are public seating platforms that convert curbside parking spaces into vibrant community spaces. Most parklets have a distinctive design that incorporates seating, greenery, and/or bike racks and accommodate unmet demand for public space on thriving neighborhood retail streets or commercial areas.¹ While parklets are foremost intended as assets for the community, their presence has also been shown to increase foot traffic, and in some cases revenues, for adjacent businesses.² These co-benefits provide great opportunity for cities to partner with businesses and implement parklets for economic and community well-being. In a case study by Smart Growth America, the business revenue at the Green Line Café on Baltimore Street in west Philadelphia, PA jumped 20% after a parklet was installed next to it. Additionally, Long Beach, CA has a program that allows business owners to sponsor and use parklet space specifically for their customers, which increased business at two adjacent restaurants and resulted in staff expansion creating two new full-time jobs and two new part-time jobs.³

Due to the recent Covid-19 pandemic, creative solutions are in order to provide urban residents with safe and accessible outdoor space, as well as support the revival of businesses impacted by social

¹ NACTO. "Urban Street Design Guide." 2013.

² Id.

³ Smart Growth America. (n.d.). Smart Growth America's Local Leaders Council - Parklets. <https://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/app/legacy/documents/parklet-policy-toolkit.pdf>

distancing restrictions. Parklets are a unique urban feature that provide solutions to these challenges for minimal cost.

The cost of a parklet varies based on the design and size, and costs for the parklet can be managed through grant opportunities and support from partner organizations. The City of San Diego has created several permitting processes that support the implementation of parklets and related pedestrian enhancements. In 2015, the “Pedestrian Plaza” permit was released through the Development Services Department. This permit allows for the temporary use of space in the dedicated public right-of-way (parking spaces, unused bus stops, or other vehicular areas) for public use as seating or bicycle racks. Pedestrian Plazas are publicly accessible to all and are intended to provide a space for enjoyable public interaction. In 2018, the City released a permit for “Placemaking,” also through the Development Services Department. This permit allows for the temporary use of public right-of-way and private property that activates streetscapes by enhancing the pedestrian experience and providing neighborhood-serving activities, experiences, or spaces and includes temporary, small-scale development. The exhibit of these permits exemplifies that a parklets are a desirable and feasible enhancement feature for San Diego to include as a part of the streetscape.

Cortez Recommendation

The Cortez neighborhood is largely residential, with businesses scattered throughout. Cortez is a walkable downtown, with Ash Street and 4th, 5th, 6th Avenue identified as “high pedestrian demand”⁴ areas in the Downtown San Diego Mobility Plan and the Cortez Mobility Assessment and Recommendations Report. Despite the walkability of the neighborhood, there is a lack of resting areas for pedestrians, stemming largely from social concerns about attracting homelessness. Therefore, introducing seating options in an area of Cortez that has ample foot traffic throughout the day can enhance the pedestrian experience and help deter undesirable activities. It is recommended to position a parklet in a “high pedestrian demand” area and adjacent to a well-visited business.

⁴ City of San Diego and Civic San Diego. “Downtown San Diego Mobility Plan.” June 2016. <https://civicsd.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/Downtown-San-Diego-Mobility-Plan.pdf>



Figure 1 Cocina 35 at 11:30am on a February 14, 2020

Location

The recommended location for a parklet is in front of the business Cocina 35 on 6th Avenue. Cocina 35 is a popular eatery that attracts ample foot traffic and is centrally located in Cortez. It is typical for this business to attract a crowd, causing spill-over into the recently installed cycle track on 6th Avenue, as shown in Figure 1 above. The efficiency of the cycle track is hindered by pedestrians occupying this space as they wait, and puts pedestrians a potential risk. This parklet location is ideal from a business partnership perspective, as well as providing pedestrian amenities in an area of displayed need. Additionally, the business is adjacent to TownePlace Suites Hotel, which supports 24/7 services and provides additional surveillance to help ensure a positive pedestrian experience.

Concept

This parklet location is unique because of the cycle track and protected parking area design. The recommendation for this parklet is positioned in the parking protected parking area, allowing pedestrians to cross over the cycle track to access the parklet. This is not a common design for parklets, but there are several examples of this “floating” design for bus stops, as shown in Figure 2 below.



Figure 2 Floating Bus Stop Design (Toole Design Group, McMahon Transportations Engineers & Planners, RIPTA)

To help ensure the safety of all road users, pedestrians and bicyclist especially, a high-visibility pedestrian crossing zone is recommended to reduce conflict. The design for this parklet will have to be adapted to meet permitting standards and input received from the business, but a conceptual example of this design is shown in Figure 3 below.

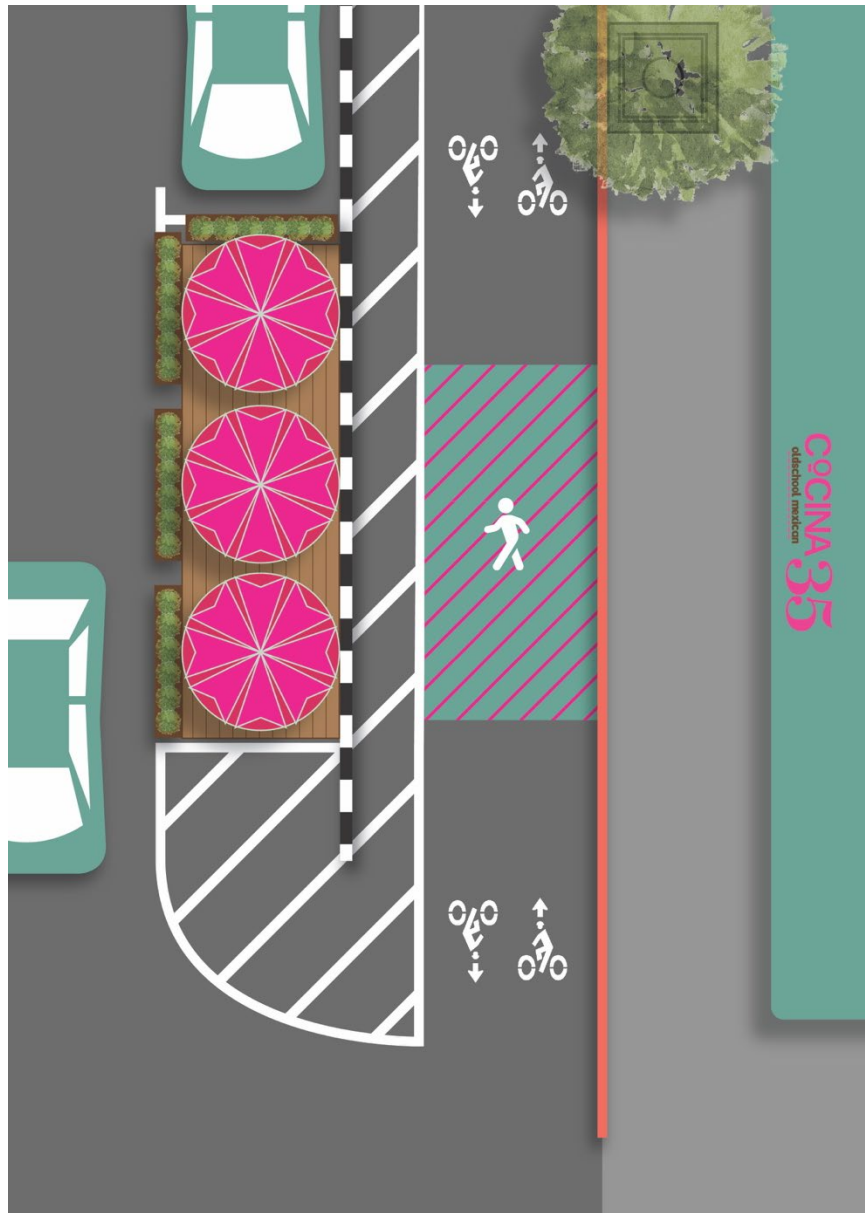


Figure 3 Conceptual design for the Cocina 35 parklet on 6th Avenue

The conceptual design for this parklet shows the pedestrian crossing in the cycle track zone and the shaded parklet area within the parking-protected parking area. The parklet can serve as a waiting area for Cocina 35 patrons, as well as other pedestrian users. The floating parklet design lessens the congestion on the sidewalk and permits the flow of pedestrian traffic passing by. The concept above is a depiction of the parklet, but as the design is finalized, permitting guidelines will have to be followed for the design and use of the space. Per the “Pedestrian Plaza” permit, “Pedestrian Plazas must remain publicly accessible and require signage to this effect. Table service is not permitted at a Pedestrian Plaza.”⁵

⁵ City of San Diego Development Services Department. “Placemaking Permit.” June 2015. <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/dsdib565.pdf>

Next Steps

This parklet recommendation is a part of the effort led by the Downtown San Diego Partnership to provide safe and beneficial pedestrian improvements to the Cortez neighborhood and throughout Downtown San Diego. This document should be used in conversations with the City of San Diego and the Cocina 35 business to negotiate the feasibility of implementing a parklet at this location, as well as other location in Cortez. This type of intervention is increasingly important due to the recent COVID-19 epidemic and the necessary support for businesses and the provision of safe outdoor spaces for pedestrians. Figure 4 below demonstrates adaptations to the design of the parklet to better accommodate COVID-19 requirements.

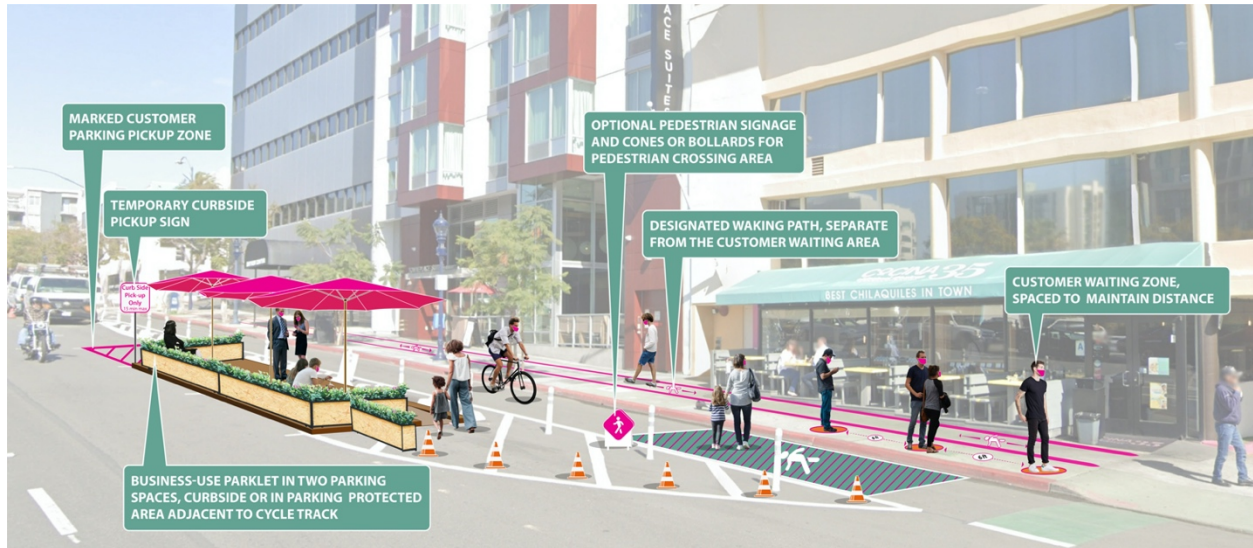


Figure 4 COVID-19 adaptation example

These next steps towards implementation would include securing funding, designing the preferred parklet with the intended uses, and applying for a permit with the required documentation. It is also encouraged as a part of this process to develop a standardized parklet design manual with design concepts and information about this process to assist other businesses who may be interested in the installation of a parklet at their business front. This manual can be made available by the Downtown San Diego Partnership and the City of San Diego to make the program more appealing and affordable.