

May 23, 2023

San José City Council  
City of San José  
200 E. Santa Clara Street  
San José CA 95113

Comments for Item 8.1 File 23-748 – Update on the Future of San Pedro Street

Dear Mayor Mahan, Vice Mayor Kamei and Councilmembers:

We submit this letter in continued support of the pedestrianization of San Pedro Street in Downtown San José. Enabling outdoor operations along San Pedro Street as part of the AI Fresco initiative allowed for an expansion of outdoor public life in the center of the city that has become a popular destination for residents and visitors alike.

While we appreciate the work to engage local business owners, evaluate options, and present a concept for the permanent closure of the street, we would also like to express questions and concerns about the nearly \$10 million proposed concept to fully formalize a pedestrianized street that has been closed to cars for the past three years. **Instead, the City of San José should consider new ways to innovate, collaborate, and remove barriers to the creation of high-quality public spaces that uplift the entire community.**

The City of San Diego has enshrined the creation of Promenades as an integral component of its [“Spaces as Places” program](#) that grew out of their pandemic-era outdoor dining initiative. The creation of San Diego’s Promenades are envisioned to be community-driven places that are functional and inviting to all.<sup>1</sup> San Diego’s promenades were presented as an opportunity for incremental interventions within neighborhoods. While San Pedro Street has already established itself as an anchor for the City and our Downtown, **San José should take this opportunity to set a precedent of efficiently and effectively creating a public amenity, and preserving the central spaces for dining and social gathering given this project’s overwhelming community support.**

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<sup>1</sup> For more information about San Diego’s *Spaces as Places*, review the city’s manual for the transition of temporary spaces from an emergency response to a permanent program with established design and safety standards here: <https://www.sandiego.gov/sites/default/files/spaces-as-places-design-manual.pdf> *Promenades begin on page 42.*

San Pedro connects Downtown neighborhoods, but above all it has become a destination for social gathering and dining. The focus should be on preserving and expanding on what made it work during the pandemic through today, and not its older identity as a connecting street.

As opposed to [the pedestrian malls that were common in urban policy efforts in the 1960s and 1970s](#) to bring people back to empty downtowns and central business districts, the success of the pandemic's Al Fresco closed streets relied on steady foot traffic driven by the quality, concentration, and mix of dining, cultural, and social gathering destinations in San Pedro and Post Street. **Now is the time for San José to lead in making sure that this public space success continues to serve the people, businesses, and community, and does so in a way that keeps an eye toward how this could spark the same kind of change in other areas of Downtown and across the city.** Replicating a nearly \$10 million public realm project would be a challenge in most places in the city.

In this spirit, we appreciate the Mayor and Councilmembers' memo that directs staff to phase the project to maintain its viability, and pursue other public sector and philanthropic funding toward realizing its more permanent iteration. The City of Palo Alto is similarly taking an [incremental approach](#) to making their car-free streets permanent. As of April 2023, the city was exploring bollards and demonstration projects alongside the community.

We also support the memo's direction to study the creation of two exits for the Market Street Garage that allows San Pedro Street to continue its pedestrianization from end-to-end, instead of capping it for vehicle exits.

**We ask the City Council and staff to continue enshrining this pedestrianized public space for the benefit of Downtown's economic and public vibrancy and to do so by ambitiously making sure that thoughtful planning, great urban design, and innovative project delivery steer this public amenity forward.** SPUR would be happy to be a resource and collaborator as this project continues to move forward.



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