

## **Summary**

City staff has identified a list of items for consideration by City Council in their discussion about the conversion of two blocks of Cleveland Street to a pedestrian plaza.

## **Background**

In the past, closures have been through a special event permitting process. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the city allowed for restaurants throughout Clearwater to temporarily expand their operational footprint into the Public Right-of-Way under protocols generated by the Planning and Development department. Additionally, the City chose to close two blocks of Cleveland Street, the 400 and 500 blocks, to vehicular traffic to allow businesses to more effectively expand seating outdoors. These actions were taken based on the current state of emergency.

The initial closure was seen as a positive by merchants along Cleveland Street and resulted in the Downtown Clearwater Merchants Association generating a petition for the permanent conversion of Cleveland Street into a Pedestrian Plaza.

A permanent street closure can only be approved by the City Council through the public meeting process after a full understanding of the impacts of closure and appropriate amendments to the code. In response to the DCMA petition, city staff conducted a preliminary review to better understand the impacts of permanent closure. A summary of issues to consider is below:

## **Considerations**

### **Security and Emergency Access**

Providing measures that can effectively mitigate vehicles intentionally or unintentionally entering the designated pedestrian area while still providing

the ability for emergency personnel to access the area within acceptable response times.

Access to emergency infrastructure, such as fire hydrants, within the pedestrian areas is an equally important factor. During the temporary closure access was provided by not allowing placement of tables and chairs in the southern lane of Cleveland Street on both blocks, so that emergency services can use that lane to access the area as quickly as possible. As we discuss the possibility of a permanent closure, a key component is the fire code's requirement to have accessibility to fire infrastructure within 50 feet of a buildings access point. Failing to meet this requirement would result in buildings which not accessible being required to meet bring their buildings up to fire sprinkler protection standards. For some older buildings this could result in a significant expense for property owners and/or tenants.

Additionally, ensuring the required pedestrian clearance and walkaways are properly followed are very important. Experience along Clearwater Beach has shown the importance of visibility and clearance.

Finally, blocking off Waterson Ave at Cleveland Street will effectively turn Waterson into a one-way roadway south of Hendricks Street. Due to the amount of right of way at the Waterson/Cleveland intersection, there is no ability to place a turnaround for fire and solid waste vehicles. After consultation with Solid Waste, this would not impact their ability to provide service, however the Fire code requires that a turnaround be installed. This issue would be looked at during an engineering review of the area.

The above represents the primary factors which would drive a decision on the type of infrastructure used to secure the area, and the city will rely on the public safety departments in consultation with the city engineer to determine how we meet them. Secondary factors to consider in selecting the measures are maintenance requirements, aesthetics, and ease of set up

and breakdown for those applications that meet the primary requirements and staff would certainly work with the community on those items.

## Right-of-Way

The city maintains infrastructure throughout the right of way along Cleveland. Attachment 1 provides a visual of potable water, sewer, and storm sewer infrastructure within the area. This includes the following:

- Sanitary Sewer
  - 400' of 12 inch pipe on the 400 block
  - 406' of 15 inch on the 500 block
- Stormwater
  - 400 block single stormwater pipe
    - curb inlets at the intersections
    - two inlet grates in median on the eastern side of the block
  - 500 block main stormwater pipe
    - Several branch pipes
      - Connects to a total of seven curb inlets
  - Street sweeper operations on both blocks.
- Potable water lines
  - Northern lane
    - 400 block
      - Two fire hydrants
      - Three valves
    - 500 Block
      - Two fire hydrants
      - Three valves
  - Southern lane
    - 400 block
      - One fire hydrant
      - two valves
    - 500 block
      - Two fire hydrants

- Three valves
- Clearwater Gas System
  - No infrastructure

The above infrastructure, as well as those owned by other entities, such as Duke Energy, will require ongoing maintenance and may disrupt use of the roadway or sidewalk area.

### **Code Issues**

Section 3-909 of the code (Attachment 2) does allow for outdoor café's within the public right of way of the Cleveland Café District, which is defined as the area on Cleveland Street bordered by Myrtle Avenue and Osceola Avenue, under certain parameters outlined in that section.

While this section will likely require amendment, a detailed legal review would ensure consistency with state and federal law, appropriate risk mitigation measures, and clear standards for users.

Other engineering and public safety issues may trigger additional amendments in other parts of the code, however it is difficult to determine without a larger understanding of the impacts to the storm water conveyance system.

### **Risk**

- The vertical drop of the curbing along the roadway is a potential trip hazard and would need to be addressed during an engineering review.
- Current insurance requirements exist, however these may need to be amended pending review by risk management once a program is outlined.
- The roadway/gutter is part of the stormwater conveyance system. Along Cleveland they have been designed for to handle a 25 year

storm event, and during heavy rain events water may take some time to fully vacate the street.

- The traffic volume on Ft. Harrison is significant and intersects with both blocks. Outside of the mitigating vehicles from entering the pedestrian area, two additional safety concerns need to be reviewed and addressed.
  - Crossing between the 400 block and 500 block
  - Potential for pedestrians or vehicle occupants to throw objects as vehicles pass by.

## **Parking**

A closure will have the following impacts on parking

- Removal of 25 parking spaces
- Elimination of valet service option along Cleveland
  - It should also be noted that the Capitol Theatre utilizes a portion of the Osceola right of way during shows for artist support.

## **Traffic**

Elimination of Cleveland St as an East/West vehicle corridor west of Garden means that we are limiting vehicle access to Osceola, and subsequently Coachman Park, to Drew St (4 Lanes) and Pierce Street (2 Lanes).

Additionally, there is the potential for added frequency of pedestrian crossing at Ft. Harrison.

## **Areas of Concern**

Based on the initial review there are several areas of concern that need to be reviewed prior to deciding whether to permanently close the 400 and 500 blocks. These are not issues that are insurmountable, however staff

feels that review of these issues is necessary to determine the impacts of a closure on the city, the businesses, and the building owners.

- Waterson Street creating a dead end with no ability to install a turnaround that can accommodate public safety.
- Conversion will require a review of the design of the street, median, and sidewalk areas to determine what improvements could be made while maintaining ADA compliance and the integrity of the stormwater conveyance system.
- Financial impact to private buildings/businesses needs to be clear in areas such as
  - Accessibility by the fire department could be significant considering the age of some building on the 400 and 500 blocks.
  - Impact of unplanned work within the right of way to businesses operating with it.
- Impact to traffic patterns
  - Ingress/Egress to the park
  - Effect of a shift in light timing
- Impact to parking and valet services

While we have had Cleveland consistently open in a non-COVID environment and consistently open (March to June) and closed (June to Current) during the COVID environment, we lack experience with Cleveland being consistently closed during a non-COVID environment. Previous closures have been for days and have typically been associated with special events. Staff feels data collected during this period is crucial to determining impacts.

## **Recommendation**

If Council is interested in considering the requested street closure, we recommend the following path:

1. Engagement process with stakeholders, including:
  - Property owners
  - DCMA
  - City Staff
  - Non-DCMA business owners along the effected area
2. Development of a pilot program
  - Focus of the program would be to have a pilot during a period after the COVID-19 emergency
  - Will include feedback from engagement process
3. Council consideration of pilot program and any associated code amendments.
4. Implementation of pilot program in conjunction with a concept validation process by an engineer of record.

Following the Pilot program, staff would reengage stakeholders and present Council with data and the preliminary costs of a permanent closure.