



CITY OF SALINAS

TRAFFIC AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION

STAFF REPORT

DATE: JUNE 12, 2025

DEPARTMENT: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT

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TITLE: SALINAS NEIGHBORHOOD TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT PROGRAM (TRAFFIC CALMING POLICY) STUDY SESSION

RECOMMENDED MOTION:

No action required. The Traffic and Transportation Commission is requested to provide feedback on the Traffic Calming Policy.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

At its October 6, 2009, meeting, City Council adopted the Neighborhood Traffic Management Program and establishing the City's Traffic Calming Policy. Starting in 2016, the first traffic calming projects began to be implemented. Shortly thereafter requests exceeded city resources and on November 7, 2017, City Council approved prioritization criteria based on quantifiable conditions rather than "first come, first served". In most recent years, the City has received numerous comments and questions regarding the processes identified in the Traffic Calming Policy. Staff is providing possible alternatives for updating the policy and requests feedback from the Commission.

BACKGROUND:

In October 2009, the City Council adopted the Salinas Neighborhood Traffic Management Program (NTMP) to address residential neighborhood traffic concerns. Traffic calming devices are generally not considered traffic control devices¹ as defined by the state and federal Manual of Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD). The City began compiling traffic calming studies in 2002 and found there were very few applications in California. To assist in the development of the City's policy, the City hired a consultant to develop the Salinas NTMP. The resulting Traffic Calming Policy ("Policy") contains a toolbox of traffic calming measures² that can be used to address neighborhood problems associated with speeding and vehicle volume on residential streets. The adoption of the Policy also included the adoption of the traffic calming toolbox. The

¹ Traffic Control Devices are markers, signs and signal devices used to inform, guide and control traffic, including pedestrians, motor vehicle drivers and bicyclists.

² Traffic Calming Measures are physical alterations to the road layout or appearance to actively or passively reduce traffic speeds including roadway narrowing, vertical deflection, horizontal deflection, and block or restrict access.

Policy also provides the process for consideration of projects under the program which sets resident support as a priority.

Initially, projects were completed with a “first come, first served” basis with criteria based on speeds and volume. To qualify for traffic calming, a neighborhood had to meet two criteria: (1) 85th percentile speed had to be 35mph or over and (2) average daily traffic (ADT) had to exceed 3,000. Following the implementation of the first projects requests for traffic calming projects rapidly increased exceeding city resources. Staff responded with surveying other agencies on their traffic calming prioritization rating systems to help develop a well-informed, objective and effective priority rating system for the City. On November 7, 2017, following the influx of traffic calming requests received, the City Council approved criteria for prioritizing traffic calming requests based on traffic conditions, collision history, nearby land uses, and roadway geometry. These criteria provide a more holistic way of analyzing and prioritizing requests given the City’s limited resources (both with staffing and budget). Given the number of pending requests, staff annually presents a recommended traffic calming prioritization list, based on the criteria, to City Council. Staff then proceeds with obtaining community support based on the Council-approved prioritization list.

In the past few years, the city has received numerous comments and questions about the Policy. These comments or questions include, but are not limited to, the length of time the process takes for implementation, reprioritization of projects, plan support requirements, and proactive response to traffic calming requests. Below is the description, comments/questions, and considerations of the process framework.

Process Framework

The Policy has four main phases that a petition goes through: Plan Initiation, Plan Development, Plan Support and Plan Implementation.

Plan Initiation

The Plan Initiation phase begins when a resident approaches City staff with a complaint about speeding or cut through traffic in their neighborhood. The resident is requested to solicit support for traffic calming from their neighbors on the affected street or streets with a petition. Once the petition is verified by staff, the request is logged for analysis. Petitions are received on a calendar year basis and prioritized the following fiscal year (“FY”). For example, a petition received in 2025 will be prioritized in the FY 26-27 budget cycle.

The process of developing the prioritization list begins with the collection of field data (vehicle speeds and traffic volume). This data is collected by student interns. The Traffic and Transportation division provides ongoing training opportunities to students exposing them to traffic concerns, teaching them the process of data collection and educating them on methods to relieve traffic concerns. Field data gathering is conducted with consideration of and in coordination with school schedules, the agricultural season, and holidays. This scheduling allows for peak conditions to be measured, but limits staff’s ability to collect data to only a few months in spring (March – May) and a few months in fall (August – October). This has resulting in a backlog of requests pending data collection.

Once field and research data are processed, projects are scored and ranked based the 2017 prioritization criteria. The prioritization list is presented to the Traffic and Transportation Commission and City Council for approval.

Comments received for this phase have included: (1) concerns that prioritization alters the ranking of streets from one year to the next; (2) concerns that requests are backlogged; and (3) concerns that the process takes too long. Typically this process may take up to 18 months.

Staff believes that the focus of traffic calming is to address potentially dangerous traffic behaviors, as such, the concern that one request may change ranking once others are analyzed and ranked higher is not something that can nor should be prevented.

To expedite the development of the prioritization list, staff is requesting the Commission to consider two items: (1) alter the timeframe for collection of field data to year-round and (2) change the timeframe for receiving petitions from April to March, i.e. petitions received from April 2025 through May 2026 would be prioritized for the FY 26-27 prioritization list. This change would allow for more petitions to be analyzed and the backlog to be reduced or eliminated. These considerations may cut the time required to develop a prioritization list by several months.

Following approval by City Council of the prioritization list and based on available budget and staff availability, the process moves to the Plan Development phase.

Plan Development

The Plan Development phase includes scheduling a meeting with the residents of the affected street/neighborhood to develop a plan. To accommodate residents, staff typically conduct the meetings at nearby schools. Conducting a meeting at a school requires coordination, not only with the school, but also the school district.

This step also includes coordination with Councilmembers as Councilmembers typically request to be included in the meeting with the community to understand residents' concerns and assist in the process. Unfortunately, scheduling a meeting that aligns with both a school schedule and with a Councilmember's schedule is challenging and may take several months, typically 2-4 months.

At the meeting, participants are asked to assist in the approval draft traffic calming plan or of a traffic calming plan. In preparation for the meeting, staff draft a plan that is economical but that would address the concerns identified in the petition. The meeting allows residents to participate in further developing and approving the plan that will move forward.

Comments received for this phase include concerns about how long the process takes to move forward.

As a solution, staff is requesting the Commission to consider conducting all meetings at city-owned facilities and providing a notification, but not coordination, with the Councilmember. This would expedite the process allowing staff to conduct multiple meetings in a short timeframe.

The Policy currently does not set a limit as to how much effort is to be set aside for each project. As such, one project may cost \$40k to implement while another may be well over \$100k. This

inequality may be a result of lack of understanding of traffic calming measures, lack of regulations as to the application of traffic calming measures, or differing roadway conditions which allow for one measure to be more applicable than another. In most cases, residents request that the plan include a physical vertical deflection, such as a speed cushion.

To eliminate this inequality between neighborhoods and extend the available budget, staff proposes to set a \$50k limit to each project, allowing more projects to move forward in any given year based on the approved budget.

Following Plan Development, the process moves forward to the Plan Support phase.

Plan Support

Before mailing ballots for plan support, staff confirms with the petitioner that the proposed plan developed with residents from the meeting or meetings correlates to the discussion at the meeting. After confirmation, staff prints and mails ballots to all affected residents requesting a vote for their support of the plan. The mailing includes the ballot, a letter explaining the concerns and project, the proposed plan, and a prepaid envelope for the ballot. Typically, four weeks are allocated for the voting period unless holidays are within the voting period in which case, the voting period is extended up to six weeks.

The Policy requires that the neighborhood must return 50% of the ballots mailed and 67% of the returned ballots must be in favor of the proposed plan.

Comments received during this phase question the need for the return rate and the rate in favor of the project. Commenters have indicated that if staff view some projects as a safety concern, then these should not require support from the residents. Other comments question why either a return rate or in favor rate are required. At times petitioners and Councilmembers assisting them have had challenges with residents wanting to submit a ballot.

To address these concerns, staff proposes to move forward with a project that presents evidence of a high safety concerns to be addressed immediately once analyzed without going through the Plan Development phase with the community nor the Plan Support phase. Alternatively, staff proposes that plan support be based on the results of the community meeting. A notification of the proposed project would then be mailed to the affected residents, if, within two weeks, most residents do not oppose the project, then the project would move into the Plan Implementation phase. Changing this process, would save staff time, allowing staff to work more efficiently.

Plan Implementation

Currently, once the plan support requirements are met, staff proceeds with a presentation of the findings to the Traffic and Transportation Commission for their recommendation to City Council to approve the plan developed. Following the presentation to the Commission, staff develops a staff report and resolution for the City Council to consider and approve. This process can take an additional two months depending on the Commission's and Council's meeting schedule.

Once approved by City Council and depending on material delivery times or traffic calming device, implementation can vary from 6 months to a couple of years. Recently, projects that requested to implement traffic calming measures, other than speed cushions, have been delayed

because staff has had difficulty securing a contractor. Staff has now consolidated multiple projects, in an effort to entice contractors to bid on the traffic calming projects.

Comments with this phase are consistent with the other phases indicating that the process take too long. To expedite the process, staff proposes to consolidate approval of the prioritization list with authority to implement the projects from the Traffic and Transportation Commission and City Council. Combined with an approval to limit project expenditures, eliminating the need for the Commission and City Council to individually review each project would reduce the overall timeframe for implementation by several months.

In summary, staff believes that improvements are required to the Policy and that there is opportunity to reduce the timeframes for implementation of traffic calming measures. The Commission is asked to consider the proposed changes and provide feedback.

CEQA CONSIDERATION:

Staff has determined that the project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines (Section 15301, Class 1). The project consists of the operation, repair, or minor alteration of public streets involving no expansion of use. There would be no significant effect on the environment.

STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVE:

The Traffic Calming Program supports Council's goal of "Public Safety".

DEPARTMENTAL COORDINATION:

Public Works staff coordinate with the Salinas Fire Department on the recommendation of the traffic calming plan. Staff also coordinates with the Salinas Police Department if traffic calming enforcement assistance is necessary.

FISCAL AND SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

There are funds in the Traffic Calming budget for staff to update the policy.

ATTACHMENTS:

Attachment 1: Current Process Framework