

BUSINESS

One-way pilot study on West Cliff Drive moves forward

\$700,000 will be allotted for the project



One way, westbound traffic begins at Columbia Street and West Cliff Drive due to recent collapses. (Aric Sleeper / Santa Cruz Sentinel)

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SANTA CRUZ — Weeks after winter storms took chunks out of scenic West Cliff Drive, the city of Santa Cruz will move forward with a study of a one-way pilot program on the scenic street and seek out ways to dampen traffic concerns in nearby neighborhoods.

During the [West Cliff Drive update](#) at the Santa Cruz City Council meeting Tuesday, city residents who live near the storm-damaged street spoke during public comment to voice concerns about the increased car traffic in the Westside neighborhoods.

Residents at the meeting complained that many drivers ignore the detour signage posted around Almar Avenue, Delaware Avenue and Woodrow Avenue, and roll through stop signs undaunted.

“We are under siege and we need immediate traffic calming measures,” said Westside resident Glenn Seiler at the meeting. “I know that it’s a complicated situation but the residents here are really under siege with all the traffic and we need more than just a few detour signs. We do need armor, cul de sacs and barriers.”

The city’s temporary traffic control plan for West Cliff Drive already in place includes one-way westbound vehicular traffic between Columbia Street and Woodrow Avenue with two-way bike and pedestrian access open in the closed lane in that stretch. West Cliff Drive between Almar Avenue and the bridge east of David Way is open to local traffic only with shared lanes for bicycle and pedestrian traffic. The bridge at Bethany Curve remains closed to vehicular traffic but is open for bicycling and walking.

At the meeting, Santa Cruz Assistant City Manager Laura Schmidt and Public Works Director Nathan Nguyen explained the scope of repairs and outreach efforts, costs and the potential future for a one way pilot program on West Cliff Drive.

“With the extensive damage that happened as a result of the storm surge, we cannot promise, nor would it be responsible for us to say, that it is going back to the way that it was,” said Schmidt. “We hit thresholds that we weren’t expecting to hit for several decades.”

Schmidt said that the scale of the approximately \$5 million in storm damage on West Cliff Drive, coupled with its many uses for residents and visitors, compelled disparate departments in city government to work collaboratively, and with the community, to find the safest road forward.

“One of the things that we’re doing as an internal, city-wide team is approaching West Cliff holistically as one of our great city treasures,” said Schmidt. “It’s not a public works issue. It’s not a climate issue. It’s not a recreation issue. It is an asset and something that we want to make resilient and accessible to all.”

Nguyen pointed out that roughly 5,000 tons of riprap were displaced during the successive storm events, which led to the collapse and devastation of portions of the sidewalk and street at six different sites.

“A few of those locations received extensive damage because there was no coastal armoring,” said Nguyen. “We actually had three projects in our CIP to perform revetment projects out there that were supposed to be formulated this summer and potentially done next year, but unfortunately Mother Nature came quicker than we could get those projects implemented.”

In addition to providing an update, Nguyen and Schmidt asked the City Council to retroactively approve the measures already taken in response to the storm damage, transfer \$700,000 from city stabilization fund to the city’s general fund and help direct staff with the one-way pilot program, which they hope to design and bring back to the council in May for approval before being put into practice.

Through the use of an emergency coastal development permit, the pilot project does not have to be approved by the planning commission, which will expedite the process.

“We are asking for your direction to pilot a one way, so to move away from the emergency protective measures and actually do a pilot of a one way on West Cliff,” said Schmidt. “We’ve already reached out to the California Coastal Commission and they graciously agreed to meet with us last week and they had given us direction that we could do the one way pilot under an emergency coastal development permit.”

Nguyen said the emergency permit allows for the city staff to work through different variations of one way traffic flow on West Cliff Drive before one path is set in stone.

“It allows for a pilot program that isn’t static,” said Nguyen. “Under the emergency permit, there is a lot of autonomy.”

Because she received extensive traffic complaints from residents in the 6th District, which comprises the west side of the city, Vice Mayor Renee Golder proposed more specific language to the motion presented by city staff. Golder’s motion narrowed the area of the study from, “in and around the West Cliff storm damage area,” to “in and around the West Cliff storm damage area between Columbia Street, Almar Avenue and Delaware Avenue.”

Councilmember Sonja Brunner suggested a substitute motion that struck out some of Golder’s added language after Nguyen recommended that city council stick with the motion’s original language.

“The additions that are being made do restrict the study that we’d like to perform on West Cliff,” said Nguyen. “We want it to be much more robust, not just the streets identified in red, but into the neighborhood streets themselves.”

Despite the recommendation by the public works director, Brunner's substitute motion failed after no other councilmember was able to second the motion in the approximately two seconds that Mayor Fred Keeley provided for other councilmembers to support the motion before announcing that it had failed.

After further comments by city staff about traffic enforcement around the detours, the amended motion passed unanimously.

For details, updates and to provide comments about West Cliff Drive, visit cityofsantacruz.com.

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