

February 9, 2022

the**core**project  
A study to vitalize the city of Sebastopol.

Honorable Council Members,

The Core Project has long been advocating for parklets in downtown Sebastopol, from past participation in park(ING) day, to the parklet demonstration project we organized in 2017.



In the past 15 months, we have seen how transformative parklets can be for providing public space. Parklets have flourished during the time of Covid as a means for businesses to serve a clientele they otherwise would not be able to. If there can be a silver lining to this pandemic, it is that it has shown how public space can be reconceived to be more equitable. Our downtown streets are not just for moving cars through as quickly as possible. Public rights-of-way can be used to provide more space for humans outside of cars. The parklets have provided places for people to spend time with each other outdoors, downtown. Other than the plaza, there really are no places for people downtown. Parklets show the town is vibrant with people, connection and commerce.

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As you know, the current parklets are in place thanks to a temporary encroachment permit from Caltrans. Fortunately, Caltrans has twice extended the deadline and the parklets have been allowed to remain. These parklets were installed as quickly and as affordably as possible. The city generously purchased the concrete k-rails to use as a safe perimeter element. Earthtone donated materials for the platforms and volunteers built them. The Core Project donated funds to sponsoring businesses who also contributed their own resources to furnish and maintain the parklets. But it is time to take them to the next level.

Businesses want to make improvements, but not if the parklets are only temporary. As can be seen in cities large and small around the world, there is so much potential to create interesting parklets which will allow the public to further engage with them and visitors to see how vibrant our town can be. While there are many other things than can and should happen to improve the public environment downtown, parklets are an important piece and hopefully will be just the start of a more vibrant downtown Sebastopol.

When the Barlow was proposed, there was a great deal of concern from downtown business owners that it would take away the focus of Main Street. This has happened to a large extent. The Barlow has evolved into a vibrant place where people want to be, because there is space designed for people. Walk down McKinley Street and you encounter a variety of active spaces for people. The 'porch' outside Taylor Lane, the raised deck at Woodfour, the outdoor patio at Blue Ridge Kitchen, the sunken plaza in front of Acre Pizza, the Food Court, Seismic Brewery and the park outside of Community Market, plus the new Barlow parklets at Golden State Cider, Region and the Crooked Goat. These are all places for people. And people like being around other people. We like socializing with each other, and we like to watch other people socialize. There is nothing comparable in the Main Street district. The plaza functions that way a bit, but it is really disconnected from the downtown businesses. And being surrounded by cars makes it a less desirable place to be than those places in the Barlow. The parklets start to provide places people want to be in the Main Street district.

We realize there are some downtown businesses that are not in favor of making the parklets more permanent. It would be unfortunate if those few businesses would thwart what is in the best interest of the broader community. And for the businesses that have not been happy with the parklets, maybe we need to help them learn how to engage with the parklets and use them to their advantage. Having people linger in front of your business should be able to be capitalized upon. Because of the pandemic, cities around the world are reconsidering the best use of the space previously dedicated to cars, transforming spaces from parklets to plazas. After seeing how they improve the public realm, jurisdictions are also making the permitting process easier, beyond Covid, and allowing for private use (e.g. restaurant table service) in addition to public space. Creating more space in the public right-of-way for people is here to stay. And there is a good deal of support in our community for making the parklet installations more permanent. As of February 8<sup>th</sup>, almost 700 people have signed the petition to keep the parklets. The Core Project enthusiastically supports this effort.

The temporary parklet installation of the past 15 months has been successful and should be taken to the next level with more permanency. The past 15 months has shown what can happen when we convert places that had previously only been used for driving and parking to places for living. Now that we have seen the potential of these spaces to create vibrant people-oriented places, we cannot go back to the way it was before. We must carry the momentum forward to make these transformations permanent. Please support the

effort to make these installations more permanent so that they can be taken to the next level in terms of designs and amenities. We need more places for people in our community, and the parklets provide some of that necessary space.

Sincerely,

The Core Project,

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