



City of Palo Alto City Council Staff Report

(ID # 13871)

Meeting Date: 1/31/2022

Title: Fourth Progress Report on Palo Alto's Community and Economic Recovery Workplan

From: City Manager

Lead Department: Administrative Services

This is the fourth informational memorandum to transmit updates for each of the eleven (11) work items in the Community and Economic Recovery Workplan as it was approved by the City Council on March 22, 2021. No action is required.

This report is provided on a regular schedule to keep the City Council and the community up to date on developments of the workplan. Additionally, individual items will continue to be brought forward to the City Council for discussion and action as appropriate to make progress on the workplan.

With COVID-19 cases rapidly increasing in the Bay Area, the City of Palo Alto is continuing to take steps to protect community health. The City is monitoring service levels in light of the amorphous pandemic, notably the extremely contagious Omicron variant, and potential staffing limitations. This report provides a snapshot in time and with the ever-changing pandemic conditions, the information summarized may not be as current as other communications as a result.

More information on the City's Community and Economic Recovery Workplan can be found at www.cityofpaloalto.org/communityrecovery . Information on upcoming events can be found at the City's calendar online here: <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Home/Calendar>.

Community and Economic Recovery Workplan Updates:

Manage through the Pandemic

- a) Maintaining services while managing daily pandemic needs such as testing, contact tracing, exposures, and other tasks necessitated by COVID-19 is currently the highest need of the City.



UPDATE: With COVID-19 cases spiking in the Bay Area, staff is continuing to take steps to protect community health. The City is monitoring service levels in light of the pandemic, notably the extremely contagious Omicron variant, and potential staffing limitations. To support community safety: the City is encouraging the public to limit in-person interactions by scheduling a virtual appointment or handling service needs online. In-person/walk up services are subject to change such as library hours, walk up services at City Hall, and potential non-emergency public safety services as resources and safety permits.

COVID testing and care –

Testing: The City continues to [host free COVID testing sites](#) by Curative every Tuesday at the Mitchell Park Library parking lot and every Wednesday at City Hall. County testing continues at

the Art Center Auditorium on select dates. Recent community dates include January 14, February 11, and February 25. *For testing locations, go to www.cityofpaloalto.org/testing. For Santa Clara County free testing locations and appointments, visit scfreetest.org.* *Note: Palo Alto Unified School District testing at Cubberley Pavilion is now limited to their students and staff. The City is encouraging the community to utilize other City and County testing opportunities.

Vaccination: [COVID-19 vaccines are recommended](#) for anyone above 5 years of age. The [County of Santa Clara Public Health Department recommends](#) all eligible members of the public who live or work in Santa Clara County receive a COVID-19 booster shot. The booster is appropriate for everyone ages 18 and older 6 months following the last Pfizer or Moderna vaccination, or 2 months following the Johnson & Johnson vaccination. COVID-19 vaccination can be obtained at local health providers or for [free through County of Santa Clara Public Health Department](#). In October 2021, the City implemented an employee vaccination policy which mandates all employees to report their vaccination status. Employees reporting their status as unvaccinated are required to test at least weekly, with all sworn Fire personnel testing at the beginning of each shift. Employees who are not compliant with the vaccination policy are subject to disciplinary consequences. The latest update shows vaccination rates at 91% citywide (non-sworn), 87% sworn police and 97% sworn fire. No adverse employee actions have been required, as all employees have remained compliant with reporting and testing requirements.

City operations have maintain high levels of service and communications while responding to evolving pandemic conditions. In early January, the City announced a series of service changes in light of the current COVID-19 surge. They range from changes to library hours and temporary closures, to fully remote-only City Council meetings. For all service changes, go [here](#)¹.

At the time of this memo, the County's health orders require employees and the public to wear masks while indoors. Employees may only remove masks when working alone in an enclosed office, or when actively eating or drinking. The omicron variant is a current concern and other variants may surface. To minimize the chance of workplace exposures, employees are encouraged to continue working remotely when feasible. Departments continue to adjust hours, services, and the work locations of employees to minimize exposure for employees and the public as noted above.

In December 2021, approximately 600 employees reported onsite regularly, 100 were hybrid (on-site for part of the week or on rotation) and 200 were fully remote. It is anticipated that City operations will continue in this manner at least through Q1 2022 (end of March). Air filtration handlers remain throughout City facilities.

- b) Continue high-volume public communications and enhanced community engagement on managing through the COVID-19 pandemic to the City and the Community.



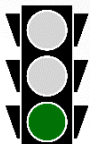
UPDATE: As the level of public activity increases, the community is invited to visit several city sponsored websites promoting civic activities including [Palo Alto Connect](#), [the City calendar](#), and Uplift Local [here](#)² and [here](#)³.

The City's weekly newsletter continues to be sent to more than 50,000 followers. It provides up to date and real time information on the pandemic, community impacts and resources. It also offers

information about community's recovery; specifically connecting the community together to City service changes and programs; wellbeing, wellness and family resources; community events or activities; community engagement and ways to get help or help those in need through volunteer opportunities. The goal will be to further the City's community recovery efforts and connect the whole community - residents, non-profits, public art opportunities, and business - together. Online resources continue to grow including blog posts and department specific content.

Since the last reporting period, activities took place with enhanced communications to engage and inform the community of a number of significant events occurring as outlined in the Community Wellness and Wellbeing section. Major efforts included but were not limited to planning and coordinating the opening of major new infrastructure such as the 101 Bike and Pedestrian Bridge and the New Junior Museum and Zoo, and a Town Hall on hate Crimes. The Library and IT Departments initiated a new technology platform ([Biblioboard](#)) to engage the community – most recently with a Thanksgiving recipe swap. Finally, the blog updates from the City have continued to update the community on all aspects of recovery such as wellness and well being, public safety, fire and emergency preparedness, climate action and sustainability and include: [Spend Time with Family & Friends in Palo Alto this Holiday Season](#), [Fall in Love with Palo Alto this Season](#), [Fire Prevention Week](#), [Celebrating Being Together Again](#), [Earthquake Preparedness](#), [Palo Alto Community and Economic Recovery Progress](#) and [New Year's Resolutions to Keep in 2022](#). All current blog posts can be found at <https://medium.com/paloaltoconnect>.

- c) Provide an updated, clear, comprehensive Workplace Activation Plan (including remote staffing models) (\$500k)



UPDATE: In response to the latest safety recommendations by County and State health officials, the City continues to require all visitors (as well as all employees and contractors) to City facilities to wear face coverings indoors, regardless of vaccination status, and to continue recommended social distancing protocols.

City Hall services are open by appointment from Monday through Friday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., for business with public works, transportation services, police records services, utility billing services, and revenue collections. Walk-in hours are available Monday-Thursday from 10am-4pm for City Hall lobby service counters. In addition, to assist walk-up customers, the City is offering a new virtual assistant as another layer of customer service in the City Hall lobby. Customers can reach a City assistant with the touch of a button. As of January 10, 2022, Planning and Development Services has paused in-person appointments due to the rise in omicron cases and to limit spread of COVID; customers can make virtual appointments or speak with staff by phone.

To save the public time, reduce carbon emissions, and continue business efficiencies found during the pandemic, City Hall will continue contactless services, which were well received during the pandemic restrictions when walkups or appointments are not possible. This includes City services such as [registering for classes](#), [parking permits and tickets](#), [building permits and planning appointments](#), [utility bill payments](#), and [police reports](#).

The City has been conducting hybrid Council Meetings (in person and online) since November 2021 when possible with online access found at the beginning of the [published agendas](#). In response to the recent Omicron variant, the Council has moved to virtual only meetings in January 2022 with continual

review on future plans. Boards and Commissions meetings remain online based on City Council direction in December 2021. The City is actively tracking legislation at the state level that may impact the ability of the City to continue to hold hybrid and/or remote meetings.

Community Wellness and Wellbeing

- d) Support Community Wellness and Wellbeing through development of a series of community events, presentations, and engagement opportunities.



UPDATE: As part of the City's ongoing work to support Community Wellness and Wellbeing, the City, partner organizations, and local businesses have or will participate in special events, community health, and race and equity initiatives. For up-to-date information, and a list of resources available to this community, see [here](#)⁴.

Special events – The City continues to offer safe, yet interactive community events to support wellness and wellbeing through art, music, education and nature. CODE:Art2 brought interactive and engaging art to the downtown area for three days in October. The Art Center hosted several events including the Great Glass Pumpkin Patch, Clay and Glass Festival, and most recent exhibition, *The Art of Disability Culture*, which closed on December 11th. The next exhibition, *Creative Attention: Art and Community Restoration* is set to open on January 22nd. The exhibition will showcase alternatives to our chaotic world of stress and anxiety, through practices of mending, healing, restoration, belonging, sustainability, and resiliency. The December Holiday Tree Lighting event also brought people to the downtown area. The Palo Alto Junior Museum & Zoo opened to the public in November, offering families a place to explore science and nature. A multitude events, programs and classes are offered by the Library and Community Services Departments to engage all members of the community. Planned events for calendar year 2022 are being transmitted to the Council in a separate information memo this month as well.

Race and Equity – The City Council continues this work through the [Policy and Services Committee](#) on an ongoing basis. The next update by the committee is expected at the February 2022 P&S meeting. Other updates since the last report include: Enhanced reporting on hate crimes announced by the Police Department along with a [presentation](#) by local law enforcement on the issue and a city post [here](#)⁴. Continued engagement with the [King Artist Residency](#) by the [Human Relations Commission](#). (For background, the selected artist will be asked to engage the community in conversations about equity, inclusion, and belonging in Palo Alto, resulting in a final artwork that will be displayed on Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Coretta Scott King Plaza in front of City Hall for a period of 6 months to one year.) Mitchell Park Community Center took part in hosting the UNAFF 2021 International Documentary Film Festival Oct. 21 – 31 with this year's theme "Moving Forward"; the celebration of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Finally, the Police Chief launched the first [quarterly update](#) in October including information about how the City continues to advance police reform. The Human Relations Commission will present the results of 100 Conversation on Race initiative that took place throughout the city in Summer of 2021.

Community Health – Through a collaborative engagement by Santa Clara County and the City of Palo Alto, the Police Department deployed the long-awaited Psychiatric Emergency Response Team (PERT). The unit went out for their first shift on 11/21/21. See a recent news release on this effort, [here](#)⁵.

Unhoused - Supporting the unhoused continues with the following update: staff is issuing Request for Proposals in early 2022 for contracted homeless outreach services with the goal of having a provider selected and services underway by summer 2022, funding and staffing an In-Field service team staffed by police officers – to begin 12/6/21, application submitted for the [Project Homekey](#) funding to the County in coordination with the Santa Clara County Community Plan to End Homelessness 2020-2025. An additional resource for support for housing and unhoused initiatives was added as part of the FY 2021 Preliminary Q1 Financial Status Report; staff anticipates this recruitment to being in the first quarter of 2022.

Sustainability and Climate Action – Each month, the Sustainability and Climate Action Plan (S/CAP) Ad Hoc Committee will delve into various topics related to the [S/CAP update](#) and includes the City’s roadmap of strategies needed to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions 80 percent by 2030 and other community-wide sustainability goals.

Seeking to understand – Palo Alto Mayor Tom DuBois and Bloomington, Illinois Mayor John Hamilton announced a proposal to establish a [Sibling Cities relationship](#), the first domestic relationship of its kind between United States cities. The relationship seeks to foster community building, further goodwill and enhance civic dialogue and public policy discussions in the two cities through a new organization, [Sibling Cities USA](#). The Palo Alto City council approved the relationship on November 15 and Bloomington City Council considered and approved the relationship shortly thereafter.

Focused Business Support

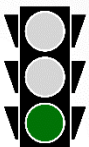
- e) Continue, and further promote, Uplift Local and other retail supportive strategies



UPDATE: The [Uplift Local initiative](#) was originally an effort to connect the community with outdoor activities. As this initiative has evolved, it has been used to also connect the community with businesses in the City. Monthly community check-in meetings were held in order to hear from the community on their experience with the program and for Staff to share County progress and recovery updates, Uplift Local changes, parking program updates and upcoming events and art exhibits.

The monthly meetings are transitioning from City hosted to [Chamber of Commerce](#) developed agendas. The City will continue to support the recovery effort through attendance and participation in the meetings including relevant program updates, seeking input from business and building owners and informing businesses of upcoming local events and ways businesses can partner with event sponsors to promote and advertise their business.

In December, the City assisted Cal Ave. with holiday decorations to help establish a vibrant holiday environment. Staff also supported University Avenue and surrounding downtown businesses with promoting a Holiday Cheer campaign featuring local discounts and offerings during the holiday season. More information on City support of retail business can be found [here](#)⁶.



- f) Provide technical support for workplace environmental upgrades to mitigate risks for local businesses

UPDATE: The City's consultant for technical support for workplace environmental upgrades has completed the assignment. No further actions expected.

- g) Refine the scope and breadth of the City's economic support activities



UPDATE: The City Council addressed this item through a discussion facilitated by the Good City Company on June 1, 2021. Council provided Staff further direction on September 13, 2021 that included engaging a new consultant to analyze shifts in Palo Alto's business mix, clean-up and analysis of the business registry, strategies to deal with any market shifts caused by the pandemic, strategies for supporting hotels, and discovery of potential revenue sources to fund City services. With the support of Good Cities Company staff finalized a scope of work for an RFP that was posted to the City's procurement portal prior to the holidays. Submittals are expected in January 2022 and staff will work to evaluate and bring forward a contract for Council review and approval before the end of FY 2022. In the meantime, Staff continues to build out a job description and job posting, with the assistance of Teri Black & Co, for an economic coordinator position to be employed by the City. This effort has been impacted by other priorities and overall recruitment backlogs, and recruitment is anticipated to begin in the first quarter of 2022.

City Priority Initiatives

- h) Further accelerate [Fiber to the Home](#) (FTTH) and pursue expanded community engagement



UPDATE: The City launched the [Palo Alto Fiber Community Hub](#) in September to inform and engage residents and businesses on Fiber-to-the-Home (FTTH). The fiber forum includes frequently asked questions, factsheets and other resources for both residents and businesses. The community can be involved by registering for alerts, notifications and receive email updates about the project. There is also an interactive map where residents and businesses can express their interest in FTTH and other feedback. The next step in the community engagement process is to launch the residential and business surveys in March 2021. Those survey results will be presented to the UAC and City Council as part of the next milestones of this effort.

The City launched a social media campaign, began a video series about fiber, and will begin recruiting public ambassadors to host small group meetings to discuss fiber in early 2022. The City will be sharing information throughout the City's regular communication channels as well as connecting with local organizations to promote the work. In the meantime, the City and its principle advisor, Magellan, are working on the details of the network layout for maximum effectiveness with minimal construction. The construction will be subject to all customary City requirements.

- i) Downtown redesign for cars, pedestrians, and bicycle travelers and visitors (\$150k, design work only)



UPDATE: While this item is specific to Downtown, this memo will also address work on California Avenue.

In the [September 13, 2021 City Council meeting](#), City Council opened University Avenue to vehicle traffic beginning October 15, 2021 while the 500 block of Ramona and 300-400 blocks of California Avenue remain closed to motor vehicles until June 2022. Further direction was provided that included modifying the parklet program, promoting Downtown and creating an RFP for public improvement of University

Avenue between Alma St. and Middlefield Rd. The RFP was issued, vendors responded and Staff is currently evaluating the proposals, anticipating Council approval of consultant contract in Q3 of FY22.

The goal of the public improvement project is to adapt the public realm to maximize pedestrian and bicycle use, and accentuate and enhance the retail environment, while maintaining vital two-way vehicular access, parking opportunities, delivery and loading zones, ride share spaces, and other amenities including performance space. The priority is to create a more vibrant and inclusive space to support residents and local businesses.

Staff is also planning next steps for California Avenue; an update is expected to City Council in early 2022 in response to [Council’s June 22, 2021 direction](#). The Council directed Staff to return with a process recommendation to pursue options for California Avenue including the design of the permanent parklet program. Working with the ARB, local businesses, and community members, the City can create a unique permanent parklet program that enhances the streetscape and pedestrian environment along California Avenue.

- j) Exploration of potential ballot measures



UPDATE: The Finance Committee provided direction, on [September 21, 2021](#), related to potential ballot measures. The ballot measures would seek new sources of revenue to support new and existing City services. In that meeting, the Committee directed Staff to model a business license tax, based on a business’s square footage, to include recommendations of size thresholds and criteria for exemptions. It also directed staff to research the feasibility of a utility use-based tax to modify the 2009 GFET formula to transfer a percentage of gas utility gross revenues. Finally, Staff was directed to initiate polling for both potential ballot measures. The first round of polling was completed in November 2021 and December 2021 with results presented to the Finance Committee on January 18, 2022. In addition, the Finance Committee reviewed additional analysis and modeling of potential structure for a business license tax, an outreach and engagement plan, and solidified recommendations for next steps for the City Council consideration January 24th.



- k) Research and return to Council with recommendations for updates to the Foothills Fire Management Plan and certain other measures, including a Foothills Fire Early Warning Systems (FFEWS).

UPDATE: On August 30, 2021, Staff prepared report [CMR 13479](#) for a Study Session regarding wildland fire. That study session - which included partners from CAL FIRE, Santa Clara County Fire, Midpeninsula Open Space, and Stanford University – can be viewed [online](#). The report highlighted risks and reported on actions regional agencies, residents and non-profits are doing or can do to mitigate the risks, including education. An update is scheduled for the Council in January. That report will be responsive to the topics from the Study Session and the prior Informational Report, noting that implementation stretches existing resources and new projects require additional resources.



Legend

As seen in the updates above, a stoplight symbol is displayed to the left of each individual work item. This indicator is meant to provide a visual indication of the status of each work item as described below.

- Green – Progress on this work item is underway, consistent with what was described in the Community and Economic Workplan as adopted by the City Council.
- Yellow – Progress on this work item is underway, but may have upcoming vulnerabilities or decisions that need to be made to impact future progress.
- Red – Progress on this work item is not underway; this represents when work has stalled or encountered barriers that need to be overcome in order for work to continue.

Links

1. <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/News-Articles/City-Manager/Service-Level-Changes-in-Response-to-COVID-19-Safety-Concerns>
2. <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Residents/Public-Safety/Coronavirus-COVID-19/Reopening-Together/Uplift-Local-Business-Support-Details>
3. <https://www.upliftlocal.org/>
4. <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Residents/Public-Safety/Coronavirus-COVID-19/Community-Support-Services>
5. <https://medium.com/paloaltoconnect/steps-the-community-can-take-to-help-stop-hate-crimes-9ab65ff6f24c>
6. <https://www.cityofpaloalto.org/Residents/Public-Safety/Coronavirus-COVID-19/Reopening-Together/Businesses-Reopening-City-Support>