

Why NO Traffic Calming Tools in San Rafael?

“Neighborhood Speak”-----by Steve Patterson—Federation of SR Neighborhoods

With so many neighborhoods struggling with traffic issues, it almost seems the City of San Rafael has developed a more myopic perspective regarding solutions, as time has gone on. Recently, Gerstle Park and their neighborhood association got the City Council to agree to certain traffic and traffic flow mitigation changes after nearly 15 years of discussions. The affected areas involved the north end of D St, near 1st and 2nd streets and also the intersection at 1st and C St. The specific solutions involved mainly stop signs and no left hand turn signs at peak hours. But why only these simple options? So many tools were left off the table as topics of discussion.

If one goes to www.walkable.org and explores the “image library” under traffic calming and management, one can see the plethora of options and tools that can be applied to different problems. One must decide what type of solution is desired and whether you are trying to STOP traffic or CALM/SLOW it down so it can proceed safely without clogging a traffic arterial.

Some solutions can be expensive, but some can also be quite simple and cost-effective. It seems odd that many of these tools are rarely discussed in the City or viewed as part of the “tool-kit”. Only downtown 4th street has seen the use of “bulb outs” on the corners, for example, where trees are planted and sitting areas are provided at designated corners. And while San Rafael’s traffic engineer thinks traffic calming solutions have been embraced in San Rafael and its neighborhoods, the list is paltry limited only to speed humps in a few places. So many other possible solutions could be employed with a more partnership orientation.

Many other tools exist and if applied to certain problems, can create really interesting and creative ways to impact traffic and flow. What are they, you ask?

- Chicanes—small elevated median areas as a way to narrow the street and slow the traffic flow
- Curb radius and intersection reduction—a way to slow and calm traffic through intersections.
- Medians (both planted and unplanted)—used a way to narrow the flow, often trees used to create a more intimate feeling, again to calm the traffic.
- Roundabouts—used at intersections as a way of avoiding stop lights or stop signs. Sometimes space requirement don’t allow this as a solution, but often can be exceptionally effective in low to medium traffic flows.
- Speed bumps and Raised devices—effective in certain areas, raised cross-walks shown to slow traffic. Speed humps have pretty much been abandoned by the City after showing early promise.
- Chokers—the significant narrowing of traffic lanes has been shown to slow down traffic speeds dramatically and increase safety.

These are just a few options but the “image library” (hit photo tab) @ www.walkable.org is an extraordinary way to visualize ALL the tools available in the toolkit. We only wish San Rafael would rigorously investigate these numerous solutions. It is easy to see the problems; it is more challenging to throw a really broad net of engaging solutions. Unfortunately some traffic engineers have never received formal training in traffic calming techniques and have no real comfort level with their solutions.

Many nearby cities have embraced progressive traffic calming techniques and helped make their communities more walkable. Nearby towns and cities include, Sonoma, Petaluma, Cotati, Berkeley, Davis, Healdsburg, and Santa Cruz to name a few. Interesting, that San Rafael has not made the list.

Did you know...??

Everybody knows where the Dominican Neighborhood is, but did you know some of the social history was the centerpiece and the fabric of early San Rafael and its development. The cast of many characters that were part of early San Rafael, had roots in this neighborhood.

1871—William Coleman a wealthy San Francisco merchant purchased a 1,100 acre farm in Magnolia valley (today's Dominican area) for the sum of \$84,000---from Oliver Irwin... (Today's-Irwin Street named after him). Coleman began transforming magnolia valley into a residential retreat for San Francisco millionaires.

Hiring civil engineer Hammond Hall from Golden Gate Park to lay out the subdivision with lots ranging from one to twenty acres. He also invited the famous landscape architect Frederick Olmsted to plan the formal gardens in the area. As gardens need water, one year later Coleman established the Marin County Water company by purchasing the riparian rights on the Lagunitas Creek

1872—Coleman was to help underwrite the new county courthouse, and built the hotel Tamalpais

1874—San Rafael population was 841 and was incorporated. San Rafael elected trustees initiate police protection by hiring a Marshall at \$300 a year

1887—Coleman sold 10 acres to the Dominican sisters for \$20,000, donating half the purchase price / the other half taken out as a loan, the Dominican order moved from Benicia California—once the state capital.

1888—Hotel Rafael was built on 21 acres for \$200,000, Coleman with some other men ,built the Hotel Rafael with 101 rooms, an observation tower , cottages, tennis courts, stables and rolling lawns . The hotel was. destroyed by fire July 29 1928--two pillars still stand at the corner of Belle Ave and Rafael drive ,one completely covered with foliage marking the main entrance to the former hotel.

1889—a new Victorian style building, also financed by Coleman was built on Grand Ave to house the Dominican sisters (destroyed by fire 1990). New living quarters for the nuns were completed a few years later

1890—the summer home of the De Young family was built for \$7,800. The De Young family were the founders of the San Francisco Chronicle, they called there new summer home "meadowlands"...Dominican College purchased the home in 1918 to be used as a dormitory.

1899—Hitchcock military academy was built on Grand Ave between Elm St and Belle Ave (now location of Marin tennis club, ballet school, church and residential homes facing Grand Ave)

PS—1887 Coleman's investments in borax deposits in southern California's Death Valley were adding a million dollars a year to his fortune, but a government decision to remove the borax tariff brought Coleman's financial empire tumbling down in 1888 with more than \$2million invested, Coleman was a ruined man. But Coleman was not a man to give in, simply because fortune had turned on him. Somehow, he was able to pay off all the claims against his estate before his death in 1893 at the age of 69.

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