STAFF REPORT

To: Public Safety Committee Date: October 24, 2016

Via: Paul J. Fetherston, Assistant City Manager

From: Dana Frankel, Downtown Development Specialist

Subject: Wall Street Pedestrian Programming

Summary: The purpose of this agenda item is to provide an update to the Public Safety Committee (Committee) on outreach with stakeholders to consider temporary closures and programming of Wall Street.

Background

At the Public Safety Committee's Forum and Special Meeting held on June 22, staff recommended public space management measures to improve pedestrian safety and enhance the pedestrian experience downtown. Those staff recommendations were preceded with a thorough stakeholder engagement process.

One recommendation presented as a place-making tool was the consideration of temporary vehicular closures on Wall Street and implementation of an artist market or other programming, with goals of reducing pedestrian/vehicular conflicts, activating underused areas with pedestrian-friendly uses and supporting local businesses.

Along with other feedback on proposed measures, the Committee asked staff to initiate outreach with stakeholders to determine interest and feasibility of vehicular closures on Wall Street and propose possible frequency and programing.

Staff proceeded to develop a survey and meet with stakeholders including Wall Street merchants, Asheville Downtown Association (ADA) and Downtown Asheville Residential Neighbors (DARN) to discuss the idea and gather feedback.

All 23 Wall Street business owners were contacted and 18 of those have provided feedback through individual meetings, surveys and participation in 5 group meetings. (ADA was also represented at the 5 group meetings.)

Feedback from discussions and survey results indicate the following:

Access Needs

- Most Wall Street businesses rely on street access for deliveries, and some depend on curbside access for clients and customers, some of whom are elderly and handicap.
- Access for deliveries is primarily needed during weekday business hours (Monday through Friday, 9 AM – 6 PM) with some needs on Saturdays and Sundays, including Sunday morning service at Jubilee.
- Many Wall Street business owners have major concerns about loss of parking, and loss of access for clients and customers arriving by vehicle and also for drop-offs and deliveries.

Programming Preferences

- Food, drink and merchandise vending from outside vendors is the least desirable in terms of programming, and an artist market is also not favored.
- Programming most desirable includes a farmer's market, performances (music, dance) and other (cultural festivals, yoga, story-telling, comedy).
- While mixed responses, most respondents prefer programming on weekend days or weekend evenings as opposed to weekday and weekday evenings if closures are to take place.
- In terms of frequency, nearly all respondents support a trial of 4-8 closures during time period of one year.
- Most respondents view the primary benefits of successful programming being an enhanced sense of community and increased foot traffic.

Other Considerations

- Other priorities for Wall Street business owners when considering possible closures include added signage (at entrances to Wall Street), attractive (welcoming) barricades, and the need for infrastructure and place-making improvements if regular closures are to be considered in the future (including attractive bollards, street and sidewalk repair, hanging baskets, street pole banners, additional parking available nearby).

Pilot Series – "Walkable Wall Street"

Stakeholders would like to try series of seasonal events with programming led by Wall Street merchants as a way to test the impact of closures. Proposed closure/event dates and the associated theme of each are as follows:

- Saturday, November 19 (Holiday celebration in coordination with the Holiday Parade)
- Saturday, February 11 (Valentine's Day theme)
- Saturday, May 13 (Mother's Day theme)
- Saturday, August 12 (summer theme)

Exact hours are to be determined, but would take place in the afternoon into the evening.

On those dates, participating businesses would organize special programming in the street and/or in their stores, expand outdoor seating, invite buskers to perform, and keep stores open late. The slogan "Walkable Wall Street" would be used to promote the events, and to increase awareness of Wall Street in general.

As one of the City's Strategic Event Partners, ADA may be able to include the first closure in this series as part of their permit for this year's Holiday Parade. In doing so, insurance would be provided, and the cost of City services can be covered by ADA's 2016 budget for in-kind services. Those services may include barricades, traffic signage, meter bagging and possibly sanitation and police. ADA may also be willing to serve as the permit holder for the remaining events, though increased funding through the Strategic Event Partnership Agreement could be required in order to pay for city services.

Next Steps

Staff will continue to meet with merchants and assist with event planning and promotion, using the City's communications tools as appropriate.

A mechanism for permitting and funding the proposed 2017 events will need to be determined.

Engagement with Wall Street merchants and other stakeholders will continue throughout the year in order to determine the impact of closures, and interest in continuing or expanding the series.