



CITY OF CANNON BEACH

Memorandum

To: City Council
From: Bruce St. Denis, City Manager
Subject: Hemlock Closure Discussion
Date: May 25, 2020

Executive Summary

Staff has concluded that it is indeed possible to close Hemlock to vehicular traffic to create a larger pedestrian area that improves social distancing.

However, the re-routing of traffic results in several relatively intense vehicle vs. pedestrian situations that are resolvable but may require on-street personnel to manage.

The effort will require significant signage support to avoid situations that have been identified and are discussed in detail below.

It is recommended that 2nd remain open to vehicles from Spruce to Larch so that a “loop” can be maintained and vehicles heading north that are unable to find parking do not find themselves in a situation where they need to back up to get out.

Eastbound on 2nd St. across Hemlock would also remain open for vehicle and RV parking.

The Post Office will be somewhat less convenient to access but there will be at least 3 dedicated spaces in the city lot to support Post Office business.

It is staff's opinion that to maximize our chances of success in creating social distancing within shops, a positive pedestrian experience and a benefit to shopkeepers requires the introduction of some level of outdoor merchandizing. How much and where will need to be worked out on a case by case basis.

We will need to maintain a 42-inch clear isle on the sidewalk to maintain handicapped accessibility.

There are no provisions for public seating, plantings, or other enhancements in the closed portion of Hemlock in this proposal.

It is recommended that that any test of the concept be for at least 1 month so that people can used to the changes and there will be time to make adjustments that need to happen.

At the Special Meeting on May 27th Council will be asked if they want to continue the effort and if so, direct staff to conduct a set of meetings that will allow the City to collect feedback from residents and businesses.

Why do this?

The restrictions on social distancing are difficult to impossible to accomplish on our narrow sidewalks. Social distancing requirements will also hinder the experience/operations of many of our small shops. And because the number of browsers in each establishment will be limited, so will the sales.

This proposal addresses the public social distancing aspect of the problem by substantially increasing the pedestrian area in the downtown area which will allow more space in between each individual/party.

If outdoor merchandizing is added to the concept it could have two positive effects.

1. It effectively increases the size of the store which helps to maintain social distancing.
2. It also allows more browsers to experience each shop as they can visit from both inside and outside of the store.

I think that most people would agree that a vibrant outdoor retail area can be a positive experience.

The Proposal

Council directed staff to develop a proposal to close-down portions of Hemlock Street to vehicles to improve social distancing, provide opportunities for downtown businesses and enhance the visitor experience.

The framework of the proposal is to create a “loop” from:

- Spruce from 3rd to 1st
- 1st from Spruce to Larch
- Larch to 2nd
- 2nd back to Spruce at Hemlock

We recommend that 2nd remain open from Spruce to Larch to maintain a “loop” instead of a “horseshoe” which avoids creating a “dead end” at the north end of Larch for every vehicle who goes that far.

These are specific descriptions for key intersections. You can more easily follow them on the aerial map listed as attachment “A”.

3rd from Spruce to Hemlock

This is the hardest area to resolve and we are still refining the details.

It must remain partially open to provide access to the private parking on the southeast corner of 3rd/Hemlock, Moon’s Automotive and the Conference Center Facilities. Limited access must be maintained but there will be no turnaround if someone enters inadvertently.

This will be accomplished by placing some degree of barrier, signage, and periodic staffing. The signage might be something like:

- Local Traffic Only
- No thru traffic
- No turnaround
- No parking

2nd and Spruce

This intersection will remain open in all directions.

This is one of 3 intersections of concern as we are potentially bringing together large numbers of both vehicles driving the “loop” and pedestrians coming from major parking concentrations. The other two similar intersections are Hemlock and 1st and Hemlock and 2nd. These will be discussed elsewhere.

The vehicle traffic comes from all the cars coming into the que as they enter or leave the city as well as those still cruising “the loop” looking for parking.

Pedestrians will include those attempting to enter the downtown area from the parking on 2nd Street east of Spruce and those in the downtown area going back to their cars that were parked on 2nd.

This area could be served with the following:

- Parking aide
- Possibly signage announcing additional parking might be found by heading east or west on 2nd and an arrow directing RV's east for parking.

This is one of several locations will be obvious candidates for what we see all over town with pedestrians moving slowly and indecisively while remaining oblivious that they are holding up cars.

Spruce and 1st

Some thought will need to be given as to whether we want to change the current stop sign configuration.

1st and Hemlock

Pedestrians walking from parking areas to the south or from downtown back to that parking will be crossing Hemlock on both sides with vehicles going in both directions on 1st.

Vehicles include those coming from the south deciding on turning east or west on 1st and those from the north facing a left turn of go straight decision.

This could most effectively be managed by parking aides coordinating their efforts while separately managing vehicles and pedestrians.

1st and Larch

This location creates the highest potential for vehicles to enter residential areas from downtown. Signage is proposed that would be located at the point vehicles might continue west instead of turning north on Larch.

- Local traffic only
- PARKING (with an arrow pointing north on Larch)

The “local traffic only” message would be reinforced by creating a “visual deterrent” by slightly narrowing 1st street west bound at Larch (to between 1/2 to 2/3's of normal) as is often seen in urban areas trying to introduce “traffic calming”.

Larch and 2nd

This intersection would allow only a right turn option to the east.

This could be done with signage located in the west and north extensions of the intersection that says:

- Local traffic only
- No parking
- No turnaround

Hemlock and 2nd

This is another high pedestrian/vehicle opportunity.

Pedestrians on Hemlock having become accustomed to walking with no vehicles around will suddenly come upon the 2nd Street thru traffic.

We think that it is important to keep the stop signs on 2nd in place as well as stationing 2 traffic aides to manage both vehicle and pedestrian traffic.

What remains to be sorted out?

The Chamber recently did a survey that asked folks if they favored closing portions of Hemlock.

I think it was roughly 50/50 for and against.

At the time this question was asked there had been no public discussion of the concept or a plan to review so a 50/50 result at that point is not alarming.

If Council is in favor of continuing the investigating the concept of closing portions of Hemlock, the next step would be to get with residents and business owners to discuss their ideas as well as concerns. I know that a major issue for the businesses is accommodating deliveries in and deliveries that they need to make.

The only way to sort these things out is to provide the opportunity for a dialog.

The Ask

The intent of the discussion on May 27th is to determine if Council wants to move forward with the development of the Hemlock closure concept.

If you want to go to the next level it would be appropriate to direct staff to initiate a dialog with residents and business owners to determine what accommodations might need to be made so that the closure produces a positive outcome for all involved.

Thanks, and please let me know if you have any questions.

Stay well.