



Council Agenda Report

From: Katie Banister, Associate Planner

Subject: Approval of the Final Decorative Details for the Niblick Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Plan

CEQA Determination: In compliance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), a Mitigated Negative Declaration (SCH 2024120426) for the Niblick Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Plan (Project) was approved by the City Council on March 18, 2025 by Resolution 25-030. All mitigation measures set forth in the Mitigated Negative Declaration and Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan shall remain in effect. For the approval of the final decorative details of the Project, Staff recommends the City Council find this action does not require further environmental review under State CEQA Guidelines Section 15162.

Date: September 16, 2025

Facts

1. On July 9, 2020, the City Council adopted Resolution 20-116 approving a plan for Niblick Road, which would maintain the existing number and width of vehicle travel lanes, while repurposing the westbound bicycle lane and sidewalk into a 10-foot-wide elevated bicycle and pedestrian path.
2. In December 2022, the City applied for a Cycle 6 Active Transportation Program (ATP) Grant. The California Transportation Commission (CTC) awarded the City a \$13.9 million grant. The grant requires the City to contribute \$3.4 million for a project total of \$17.3 million.
3. On December 5, 2024, the City held a public open house to share preliminary concept plans for the Niblick Road Corridor and gather further input from the community.
4. On February 11, 2025, the mitigated negative declaration (MND) prepared for the project and preliminary design concepts were presented to the Planning Commission. The Commission voted to adopt Resolution PC 25-001, recommending the City Council adopt the MND for the project. The Planning Commission also provided comments and recommendations for desired changes to the preliminary design concepts.
5. On March 18, 2025, the City Council voted to adopt Resolution 25-030, approving the MND. The Council also voted to form an ad hoc committee of Planning Commissioners appointed by the City Manager to work on final decorative details for the Niblick Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Plan.
6. Planning Commissioners Christensen, Covarrubias, and Koegler were appointed to the Niblick Road Ad Hoc Committee. The committee met 3 times (April 10, 2025, May 20, 2025, and July 17, 2025) to provide guidance for the final decorative elements.
7. The ad hoc committee's recommended decorative elements were presented to the public at an Open House on August 13, 2025.

Community Outreach

City staff conducted at least eight outreach events and meetings during the initial planning and design of the project beginning in 2019. The design elements for the project were first presented to the public at an open house on December 5, 2024. The plans were subsequently presented at the February 11, 2025 Planning Commission meeting and March 18, 2025 City Council meeting.

The final design elements presented in this staff report were created through three ad hoc committee meetings, each open to the public with an agenda published at least three days before the meeting. City staff held an open house to present the final design elements to the public on August 13, 2025.

Options

1. Take no action (which could result in loss of grant funding if project benchmarks are not achieved);
2. Approve the final design elements for the Niblick Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Project;
3. Provide alternative direction to staff.

Analysis and Conclusions

Ad Hoc Committee Recommendation

The final design elements included as Attachment 1 are the result of the work of the Niblick Road Ad Hoc Committee. The design elements include the committee's recommendations for:

- Safety fence design and materials;
- Light fixtures;
- Banners (on light fixtures);
- Wall treatments;
- Crosswalk materials;
- Bus stop shelters;
- Landscaping;
- Special features to celebrate Paso Robles High School; and
- General appearance for upgrades to open space areas interfacing with the project including an entry to the Salinas River Walk, a City-owned property west of Quarterhorse Lane, and a stormwater basin east of Appaloosa Drive.

Niblick Road at Spring Street



In general, the revised design elements are more traditional in style. They include red brick, a combination of black and rusted metal (similar to Corten) materials for the fence and light fixtures, a rectilinear/geometric fence design, decorative bell-shaped light fixtures, limited use of rock gabion walls, and modest but distinctive bus shelters. The proposed details are more similar to the existing decorative features at the Niblick Road and Spring Street intersection, which are also traditional in style with red brick, concrete, and black metal materials.

The project no longer includes entry signage on Spring Street, which can be considered as a separate project should the Council desire to make changes to this City Gateway.

Public comments received at the August 13, 2025 open house for the project were more positive than the reaction to the design elements presented in late 2024 and early 2025.

Niblick Road at Creston Road



Public Art

During the Ad Hoc Committee process for the Niblick Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Project, community members voiced strong interest in incorporating public art as a meaningful component of the corridor. While the current design proposal is focused on essential infrastructure improvements, including lighting, fencing, landscaping, sidewalks, and bicycle/pedestrian facilities, it does not currently include public art elements. However, staff has identified that several locations along the corridor may offer suitable opportunities for public art installations in the future.

Recognizing the importance of integrating arts and culture into public spaces, the City Council's 2024–26 Goals include the reestablishment of an Arts in Public Places program. In support of this goal, the City is also actively exploring the formation of an Arts and Culture Committee that would be tasked with promoting, encouraging, and overseeing the expansion of public art throughout Paso Robles.

To help guide future decisions, staff recommends that the City Council review the forthcoming *Arts in Public Places* program recommendations, which are scheduled to be presented later this year. These recommendations will provide a framework for identifying appropriate locations, processes, and funding

mechanisms for public art, including the potential integration of public art into the Niblick Road corridor and similar City-led infrastructure projects. Staff is recommending the City Council defer public art installations for this project until the Arts in Public Places Program is reviewed.

Fiscal Impact

The California Transportation Commission (CTC) awarded the City a \$13.9 million Active Transportation Program grant, that requires the City to match \$3.4 million, for a project construction total of \$17.3 million. The City's match is budgeted to come from general fund reserves (not supplemental sales tax measures J-20/I-24). If the City does not proceed with the project, it will forfeit the grant money awarded. This is a planned project, and no further City Council action is necessary.

Budgeting for maintenance of the Niblick Corridor improvements is a key step in the viability of the project. Maintenance costs will be estimated when plans and specifications reach 90% completion, and specific improvements such as plant type and number are finalized. Those costs will be factored into the total project cost when presented to Council for construction contract approval.

CEQA

The City prepared an MND (SCH 2024120426) for the Project, which was circulated between December 12, 2024 and January 10, 2025. On February 11, 2025, the Planning Commission conducted a duly noticed public hearing and considered the entire administrative record (as of that date), including staff reports, the MND, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Program ("MMRP"), and oral and written testimony from interested persons, all of whom were given an opportunity to be heard. On March 18, 2025, the City Council adopted Resolution 25-030, adopting the MND and MMRP for the Project based on its findings that there is no substantial evidence supporting a fair argument that the Project will have a significant effect on the environment with the incorporation of mitigation measures.

The finalization of the Project's design elements do not present substantial changes to the Project that will require major revisions of the MND due to the involvement of new significant effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects. As stated above, the finalization of the Project's design elements include minor revisions such as the finalization of safety fence design and materials, light fixtures with banners, wall treatments, crosswalk materials, bus stop shelters, landscaping, features to celebrate Paso Robles High School and general appearance upgrades to open space areas. The finalization of these features is within the scope of considerations analyzed in the MND. As such, none of these features present a substantial change that introduces new significant environmental impact that have not been previously analyzed in the MND. Moreover, there have been no changes that have occurred with respect to the circumstances under which the Project is undertaken which will require major revisions of the MND due to the involvement of new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects. There is also no new information of substantial importance relevant to the Project of its environmental impacts that have been analyzed in the MND.

Therefore, no Subsequent MND or EIR is required under State CEQA Guidelines section 15162, because there are no substantial changes proposed in the project, there have been no substantial changes that have occurred with respect to the circumstances under which the project will be undertaken, the project will not result in new significant environmental effects or a substantial increase in the severity of previously identified significant effects, and there is no new information of substantial importance that would allow for a Subsequent MND or EIR under State CEQA Guidelines section 15162. Therefore, no further environmental review is required. Staff recommends that upon approval of the final design

elements of the project, a notice of determination be filed and posted with the County Clerk and State Clearinghouse within five days of approval.

Recommendation (Option 2)

Approve Resolution 25-XXX approving the final decorative elements for the Niblick Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Project; and task the future “Arts and Culture Committee” with identifying a process, locations and funding for public art as part of the project.

Attachments

1. Resolution 25-XXX – Niblick Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Decorative Elements
 - a. Exhibit A - Final Decorative Elements for the Niblick Road Bicycle and Pedestrian Improvement Project

