

TOWN OF PAONIA

CDOT REVITALIZING MAIN STREET INTERIM REPORT

NOVEMBER 3, 2020

SUBMITTED BY ELAINE M. BRETT

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Town of Paonia

CDOT GRANT PROGRAM

RE-IMAGINING GRAND AVENUE

Around the country, cities and towns are looking for new ways to improve the “livability” of their communities. Concerns for safety and promoting healthy lifestyles have led planners to explore alternatives to mobility issues and to rethink accessibility in downtown areas.

The street layout in the Town of Paonia has not changed much in many years. The original street plan for Grand Avenue was designed to accommodate horses and wagons and to be a width that could allow them to turn around. As automobiles became the dominant mode of transportation, the wide road made possible angled parking on both sides of the street. Photographs show that Harvester Building was at one time a gas station. Imagine gas pumps out on the sidewalk!

Times have changed. The size, shape and speed of automobiles have changed. There is more interest in the walkability of the Town and we see more bicycles, e-bikes, skateboards and scooters on Grand Ave. With an aging, yet active, population there are more people walking and riding bikes than ever. Sidewalks and crosswalks must accommodate wheelchairs and walkers. Visitors enjoy the quaintness of a small town that is walkable.

Designs for “Complete Streets” now reflect the need to include pedestrians, cyclists and other roller devices as well as cars. Goals for the streets include safety and accessibility and promoting physical healthy activity for all ages and abilities. Use of landscaping and color create pleasant surroundings that encourage social interaction.

But as we know, change can be difficult. One approach to change in a streetscape is using Creative Placemaking techniques. In addition to drawings and written descriptions, community engagement and pop-up demonstrations give the community the opportunity to explore potential structural changes in a temporary and fun way. Residents can see and feel what they like and don’t like and often contribute good ideas that a designer or planner would not have considered. Putting crazy ideas in front of people generates creativity and allows them to imagine what could be possible. It also comes with the risk of being misunderstood.

An element of the Revitalizing Main Street CDOT Grant was to try a pop-up Complete Street demonstration on Grand Ave. between 1st and 3rd streets. Using some initial project designs from AARP Livable Communities¹ and Team Better Block² and local architectural designs by StudioMW as guidance, the demonstration explored

¹ <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/>

² <https://teambetterblock.com/Home-Stack>

incorporating bike lanes, parking alternatives and parklets. Temporary paint was used to mark the new design. Residents and visitors were able to participate in surveys and other feedback to offer their ideas and upgrades. It is suggested that all information collected be used to inform long term planning for the Town's Master Plan.

BACKGROUND

In June 2020, CDOT issued a call for applications for a "Revitalizing Main Streets Program" which was "offering small-scale grants for low-cost, immediate actions to help safely improve the economy and enhance healthy activities in cities and towns across Colorado. This could include changes like temporarily reducing traffic in a downtown area or providing for more bicycle and pedestrian access along the state highway system to ensure that Coloradans are able to enjoy vibrant communities while maintaining social distancing."³

The Town of Paonia, meeting all of the eligibility requirements, submitted its application in July with the stated purpose, *"As a small town, Paonia's economy has been hit hard by the COVID pandemic. Stimulating local businesses while maintaining safe practices is vital to our sustainability. Planned street closures of our Main Street (Grand Ave.) will improve sales and offer an opportunity for the Town to try out some mobility alternatives for a long-term transformation of the downtown business district toward active transportation. Improved wayfinding will inform and encourage visitors to spend time in the Town."* The application included support from the Paonia Small Business Alliance, the North Fork Valley Creative Coalition and the Paonia Chamber of Commerce.

In August, the Town Administrator was notified that the application was accepted and the Town could receive State funds for the Grant Amount of \$46,342 with a Grantee match of \$4,634.20. The Statement of Work (SOW) accepted by CDOT and the Town, defined five key tasks. (See SOW. Appendix A.)

THE TEAM

A Team consisting of the following members was assembled and began weekly meetings to determine the plan and implementation of the SOW.

³ <https://www.codot.gov/news/2020/june-2020/revitalizing-main-streets-grants>

- Representing the Town: Mayor Mary Bachran, Administrator Corinne Ferguson
- Representing Small Businesses: Amy DeLuca (Cirque) and Sunshine Knight (Paradise Theatre)
- Representing the Paonia Creative District: Heidi Hudek, NRVCC Executive Director
- Representing architectural design: Molly Wheelock of StudioMW
- Volunteer Consultant and Project Manager: Elaine Brett

Members of the Town Staff were invited to the meeting as needed including Public Works Director, Finance Director and Police Chief.

THE PROCESS

The Team immediately took action and implemented Task 1 and Task 2.

TASK 1: Implementation of COVID safety procedures by (1) installing public hygiene stations in response to business requests, (2) offering locally made hand sanitizers and face masks and (3) providing signage promoting social distancing.

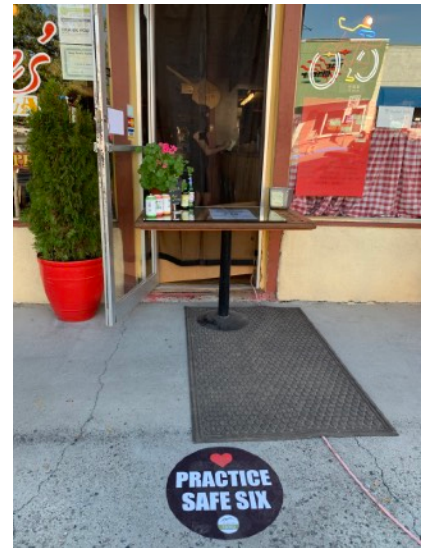
While these were prevalent during streets closures and events,

they also reinforced COVID safety at all times on Grand Ave. (4) provided the Town with barriers and safety cones.



TASK 2:
Announced and implemented several special events and street closures

to promote local businesses. The Art & Ag Saturday, sponsored by the North Fork Valley Creative Coalition drew the most activity with the addition of



the “Mural Militia,” a military truck converted into a mobile art studio, and the Paonia Blues Jam band. By having the street open, people were able to safely keep their distance and still enjoy the activities.

The Paradise Theatre also hosted several concerts and movies in a small park on Grand Ave. limiting audiences to 50 socially distanced attendees with additional patrons that were able to listen in from the street. These events attracted residents and visitors who also patronized local restaurants and shops.

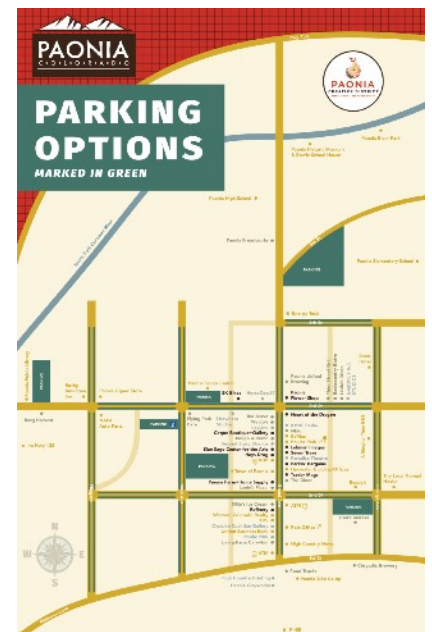


TASK

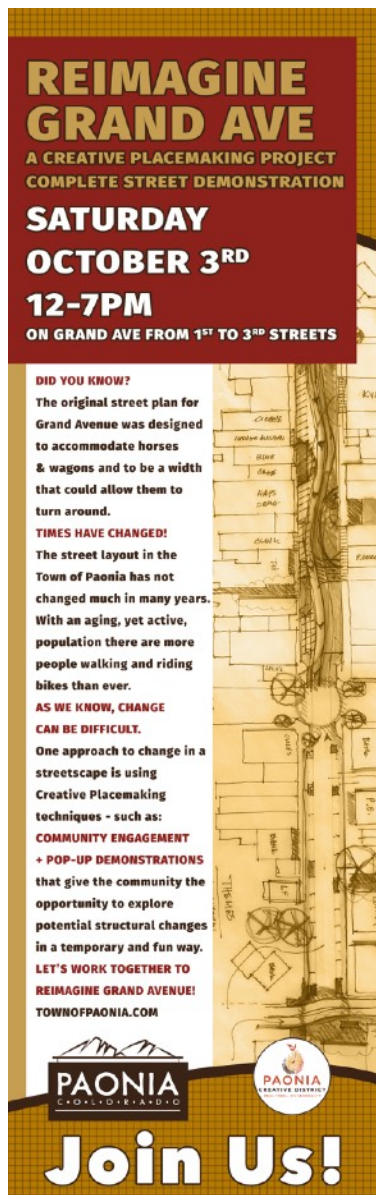
3: Our Reimagine Grand Ave Complete Street demo included pop-up street painting, pocket parks and parking alternatives.

This event clearly got the most attention from the public. While the project was planned to remain in place for two weeks, safety issues and citizen discontent forced an early take-down. Feedback collected through an online survey yielded 732 individual responses (432 from in-town residents). While many expressed the strong desire to “keep things as they are” and to focus on street and sidewalk repairs, we got many thoughtful comments and suggestions that will be used in the Town’s planning efforts. The survey feedback is detailed below.

TASK 4: Communication. We executed a Communication Plan (See Appendix B) that included:



1. A Map/Postcard of the Town of Paonia that was distributed to surrounding wineries, farm stands, restaurants and other attractions with the intent of drawing visitors into the town.
2. Advertising in print media (DCI and High Country Shopper), radio and social media



for Grand Ave events and the Reimagine Grand Ave Project.

3. Large format posters showing the street project and maps with alternative parking options.

In addition, Team members attempted to visit each business on Grand Ave. to inform them about the street closure and the pop-up demonstration. Regretfully, a few may have been missed.

Updates and a list of Frequently Asked Questions were posted on the Town's website.

TASK 5: Survey information and other feedback and input from StudioMW and Peter Marshall Designs will inform the Paonia Master Plan process. In the next few weeks, we will have the finalized designs for the information sign for Poulos Park by Ira Housweart and for benches, planters, etc from Peter Marshall Design. Our goal is to have items fabricated and installed before winter.



SURVEY RESULTS AND OTHER FEEDBACK

Paonia residents and visitors were invited to provide feedback to the pop-demonstration by completing a ten question SurveyMonkey survey online or on paper. (See Appendix C) The survey remained available from October 3rd through October 17th. Surveys received online were limited to one response per IP address to account for duplicate entries. Hardcopy responses were accepted as submitted.

Survey Responses. Survey results were viewed by total surveys and by filtering those that self-identified as being residents of the Town (59%).

	All Surveys	Town of Paonia only
Online	609	368
Hard copy	123	64
# Open text comments (Question 10)	537	327
Total # of surveys	732	432

Age Distribution. Respondents were asked to self-identify by age group with the following results list as percent of the total. Estimates from the State Demography Office (2018 data) are included for comparison.⁴

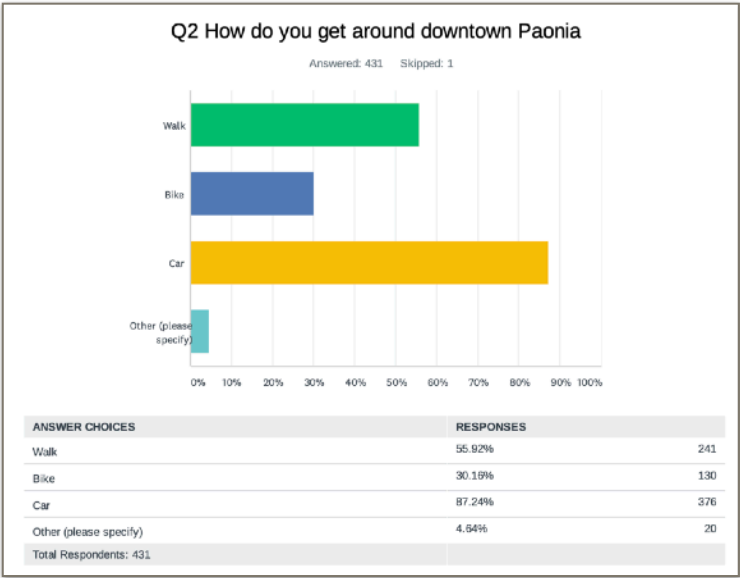
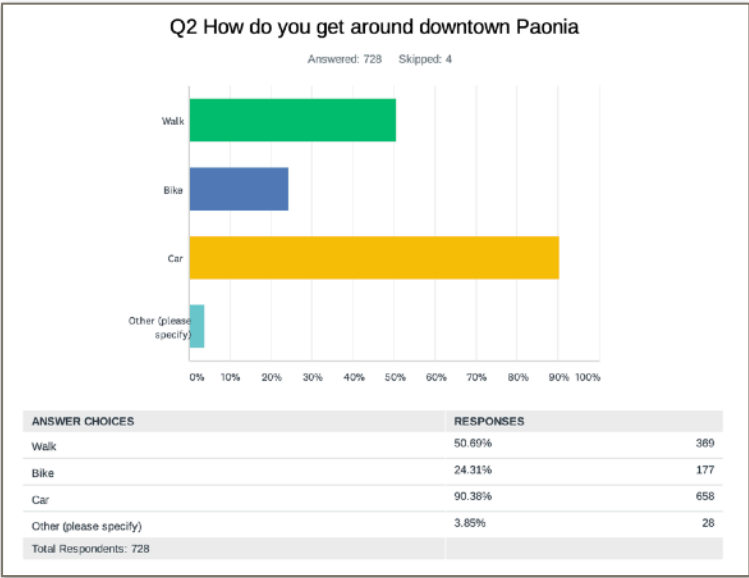
	All Surveys	Town of Paonia only	SDO Estimate(Paonia)
Gen Z (Born after 1996)	4.9	6.4	22.0
Gen Y-Millennial (Born 1977-1995)	26.4	31.0	16.5
Gen X (Born 1965-1976)	21.5	20.6	11.1
Boomer (Born 1946-1964)	32.4	27.0	35.7
The Silent Generation (Born 1945 or before)	3.9	3.8	14.6
No answer	10.8	11.1	

⁴ <https://gis.dola.colorado.gov/apps/ProfileDashboard2/>

Responses to Survey Questions.

While certainly (and no surprise) the use of cars was the dominant mode of transportation, 56% of Town residents responded that they walked and 30.2% indicated they rode a bike. Other modes of transportation reported included motorcycle, scooter, 4-wheeler, skateboard, All Points Transit, truck/trailer, spaceship.

While the ranking of the preferences is the same (car, walk, bike), the percentages differed from the Town’s Master Plan Community Survey in 2019⁵. In this current survey, individuals were allow to chose more than one mode.



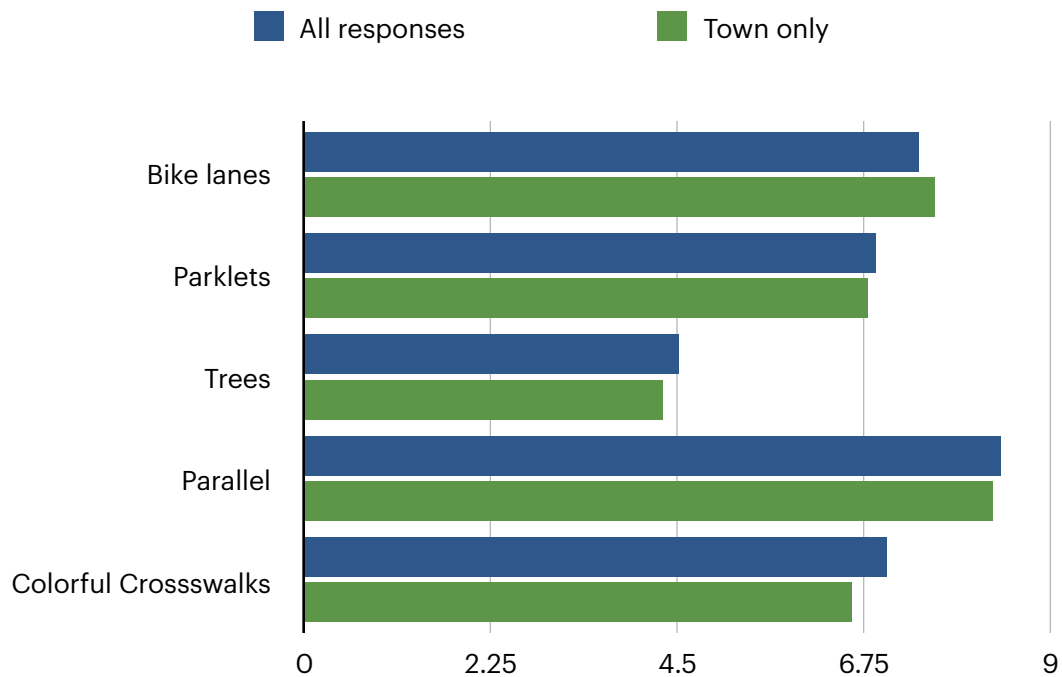
14. What mode of transportation do you use the most?		
	Responses	
Personal Vehicle	76.30%	235
Carpool/Ridshare	0.65%	2
Bicycle/E-bike	8.12%	25
Walk	14.94%	46
Other	0.00%	0

Reactions to the elements of the demonstration were measured in two ways - ranking (weighted averages) and a sliding scale where low marks were favorable and high marks

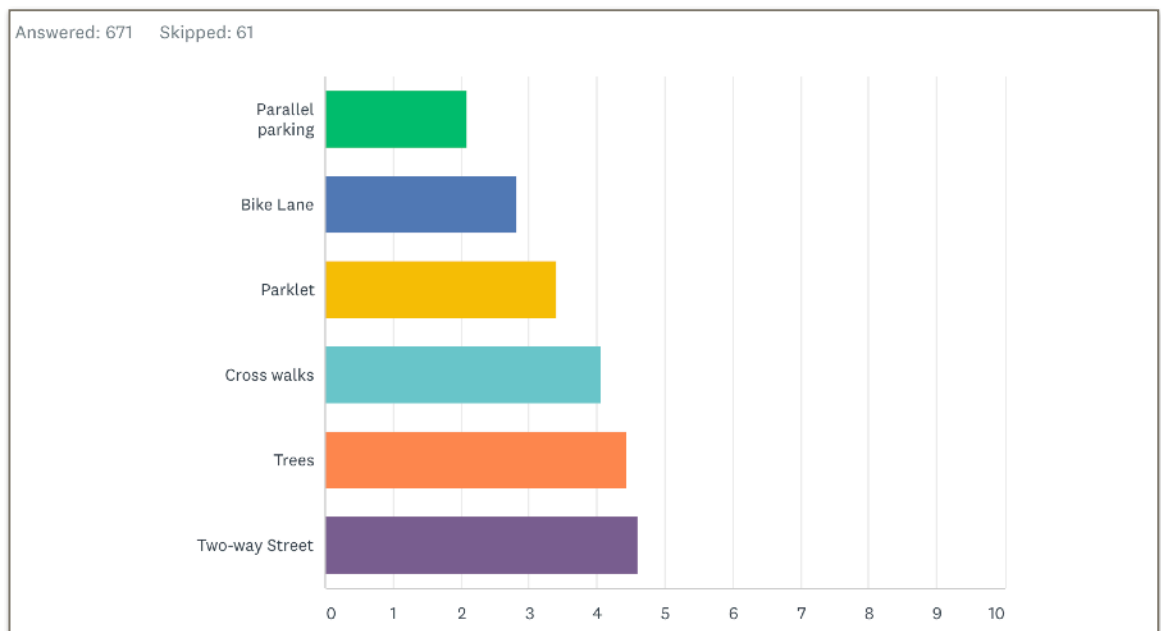
⁵ Master Plan Community Survey Number 2

were unfavorable. Differences between All Responses and Town residents only were negligible. Most favored was the addition of trees to Grand Ave and keeping the two-way street. Least favored was parallel parking and bike lanes. Most favored was adding trees to Grand Ave.

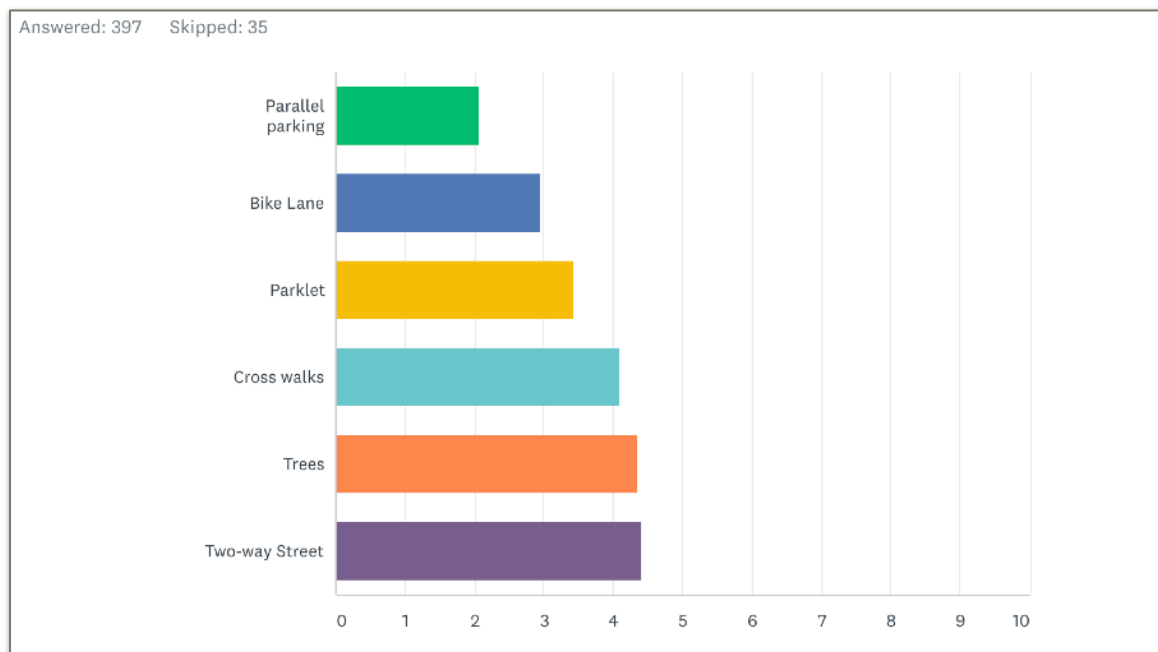
Sliding Score Responses



Ranked Scores All Responses



Ranked Scores Town Only



Open text comments

The comments are probably the most challenging part of the process and also the most useful. Most valued are the comments with suggestions and ideas for improvements in the Town.

Of the 537 comments, 262 were either uninformative, emotionally charged or were not relevant to the project. While they were reviewed and noted, they were not analyzed for substantive content. They can be provided in spreadsheet format upon request. Some examples of comments in this category were

"Go back to Boulder"

"Leave it alone"

"you are stupid"

"fix the potholes and sidewalks instead"

"a waste of time and money"

"Stop turning Paonia into California or boulder."

"Thank you, I love the new ideas"

"Put it back the way it was"

"Thanks for taking a bold step to try to improve the town."

The remaining comments were sorted into the elements of the project And are summarized here. Comments lists may be found in Appendix D.

Parking was the issue that garnered the most attention and reaction with 113 comments. Calling out parking as a local issue is typical in organizational and community studies. There appears to be a strong perception that there is not enough parking on Grand Avenue (110 spaces) and the loss of any spaces would impact businesses and inconvenience residents. Many people did not seem to be aware of parking alternatives such as on-street parking on adjacent streets and off-street parking lots such as behind Town Hall and off Main near 3rd Street.

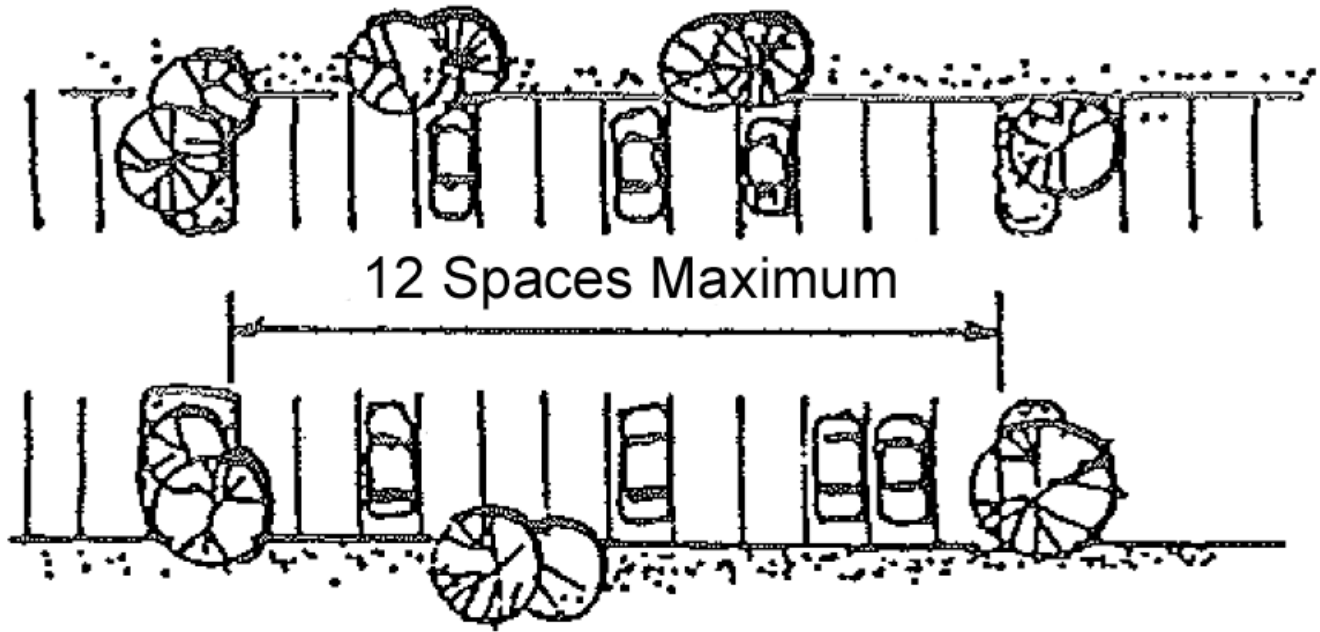
Additionally, the idea of parallel parking created angst for four reasons (1) it would eliminate needed parking spaces on Grand, (2) concern that people do not know how to parallel park and/or think it is dangerous, (3) the need to accommodate delivery vehicles and, (4) Paonia has always had angle parking and that should not change.

There were comments regarding the use of parking spaces on Grand Avenue by owners and employees of the local businesses taking spaces away from customers. This could be an area for improvement.



Compliance issues were raised during this project including regulations for proper turns into angle spaces. Overall width of Grand Avenue to accommodate two sides of angle parking should be explored. Consistency of the current configuration with Town Code may also need to be reviewed. For example, the following is taken from Paonia Town Code Section 16-6-60:

No more than twelve (12) **parking** spaces shall be permitted in a contiguous row without being interrupted by a landscaped area of at least five (5) feet wide and ten (10) feet long. These areas will provide drainage for runoff, with additional areas as needed.



Bike Lanes

Equally as provocative, the purple bike lanes in the demonstration project caught a lot of attention and generated many comments. From one perspective, there are those who



expressed that they just plain don't like bicyclists and believe that all cyclists are a hazard and violate traffic and safety laws. From another perspective, respondents did not see the need or reason for bike lanes in Paonia, expressing that this was not an urban area that required restricted lanes for cyclists and other roller mobility modes. Some just didn't like the purple color. The intent of the pop-up was to demonstrate some possibilities, not permanent solutions.

Of the comments that generated suggestions or recommendations, 30 were strongly in favor of bike lanes and 31 were strongly opposed. The combination of the bike lanes and parallel parking in the demonstration was perceived by some (22 respondents) as a safety hazard citing that

passengers could open their door without recognizing the approach of a cyclist. The demonstration of bike lane alternatives with crossing lanes at 2nd street was not clearly understood.

Sacrificing parking spaces for the sake of bike lanes was an objection (12 responses). Directing bike traffic off of Grand Avenue and in the alleys was suggested (14 respondents). Adherence to traffic laws and bicycle licenses were mentioned 5 times.

Twenty respondents recommended more bike racks and bike parking. Several respondents suggested bike lanes in other parts of town, for example, connecting school routes or on Mathews Lane.

"Please survey the children and families. They are the ones who benefit most from the improvements and have to inherit the decisions. I hear a lot of gruff from older people who- no offense- are not going to be walking or biking and possibly won't be around much longer. The Nature Connection surveyed over 4000 children in Delta County in 2017 and the number one things kids in this community wanted was access to bikes and safe places to do it."

Trees. Overall, the addition of trees was the most favored element. However, there were some comments about the Town's ability to provide maintenance for additional trees. The location of additional trees was also an issue. Using street space would take up parking spaces and possibly create obstructions for cars or bikes.

"Trees will be beautiful. How about just a little park at the end of main street where the food trucks park. Mark the end of main as a turn about. The parallel, especially in front of the post office is a bad idea, especially for the elderly. My mother who is 81, will never be able to do it and she walks with a cane. Thank you for trying to beautify Paonia, it really needs it. I think really enforcing the weed and trash laws would really help. The process is too long and by the time things get done it is at the end of summer."

Careful consideration should be given for the location and type of trees for shade and green space.

Crosswalks. Reaction to colorful crosswalks was mixed. Some thought the colors were a distraction while others thought they were interesting and made crossing safer because

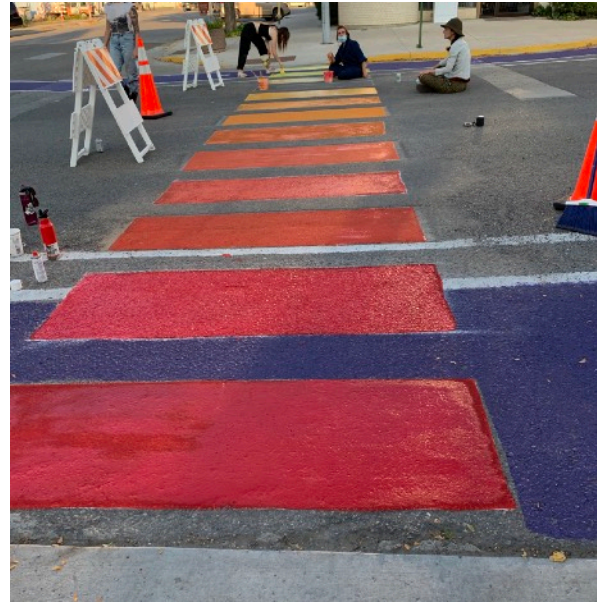
they brought attention to the intersection. Suggestions included painting murals or Paonia Eagles logo.

There were several suggestions to have more crosswalks including some in the middle of the blocks.

Amenities: Parklets, benches, public art, etc.

There were 66 comments with suggestions for other landscape amenities. To summarize the suggestions:

- More benches
- Places to congregate
- Colorful planters & flowers to combat the concrete
- Artwork, flowers
- Outside seating area for restaurants
- Use Paonia public spaces (Poulos Park, Town Hall) to add amenities
- More green!



Caption

“The corridor between the old barber shop and the town hall could be made useful with some benches, small tables, mural, potted plants. Also the area in front of town hall, which was a small garden now is cement, could have a bench, table, potted plants.”

Other street related comments. Truly, there were many comments that expressed the desire to “leave Grand Ave alone,” fix existing problems first and, to maintain the number of parking spaces. However, for those who took the time to reflect on the potential of the downtown, we captured the following ideas which may seem somewhat extreme but may be worthy of some additional community conversations:

“Do everything possible to promote responsible, progressive, growth. Walking-friendly towns tend to promote excellent business opportunities, which is what I want to see more of in this town. We need quality jobs, more tax revenue to repair our city”

- consider a one-way street as a safer alternative
- replace the overhead street lighting
- make downtown into a more pedestrian focused area

- more temporary (or permanent) street closures to promote businesses
- a park area at 1st and Grand where the food trucks park.
- inform everyone about alternative parking areas
- solar panel roadways

ADDITIONAL OBSERVATIONS

Communication. There were a number of comments that the communication of the pop-up demonstration was not enough and that people did not know to anticipate the street painting and displays. There was also a lack of understanding of the intention and the temporary nature of the demonstration.

In spite of the execution of the Communication Plan (Appendix B), residents still felt uninformed. This raises a basic question of the modes of communication within the local community and with visitors and poses the challenge to develop better communications between the Town and its residents. While not within the scope of this report, it is an important consideration for the Town staff and trustees.

Social Media. We acknowledge that there were many comments on Facebook message boards regarding the pop-up demonstration. Because these were unsolicited, unsupervised and random, we have not used the comments in this report. If the Town would like to include archived comments from their website, we would accommodate the request to include such comments in future recommendations.

Public Reaction. The visual representations in pop-up demonstrations are meant to provoke a reaction from the public. A goal is to invite the public to participate, to react and to provide additional suggestions and comments. From this perspective, the project in Paonia was a success. On the day of the installation, about 20 people, including children, joined in to help with the painting. Many more folks stopped to talk with the organizers to ask questions and offer ideas. The project prompted over 700 responses to the online survey and comments on Facebook. While there were a significant number of

opinions against the elements of the demonstration and against any change to Grand Ave., there was certainly an outpouring of emotion that indicated how passionate people are about their town. This is a “sense of place” that does not show up in all towns or cities.

It also should be noted that there were comments that were mean and abusive and brought out a side of Paonia that defies the sense of community and friendly character that is often perceived by visitors and newcomers. This minority “dark side” of the community does not seek to understand or to acknowledge the potential of Paonia, rather it forcefully criticizes and defends the “old ways” of doing things.

A challenge for the town will be to take the energy and interest that was expressed from comments such as “fix the streets” and “honor Paonia’s history and heritage” and make them a part of the Master Plan process that will help direct present and future decisions for the town Trustees and Staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Moving forward with the CDOT grant funding, the Town may want to consider making some small upgrades on Town properties. The addition of benches, bike racks, shade structures or planters could be placed in front of Town Hall, on the side of Town Hall or at Poulos Park could be subtle, quick-hit improvements that may be amenable to residents.

Additional ideas can be incorporated in the Master Plan and be more fully vetted through the planning process. Some things to be considered include:

Consider how to make Paonia more business friendly to attract more local customers and to increase interest from visitors who come to the area for recreation, wine tasting, farm visits, or other reasons. Can there be goals established for working collaboratively with businesses, cultural and entertainment venues and nonprofits to make priorities for consistent messaging, telling the “Paonia story” of the historic past, its interesting present time and the potential for the future.

Can a committee such as Public Works or the Planning Commission review Town Ordinances regarding street and parking configurations, traffic control, use of alleys and business use of on- and off-street parking to gain a clear and shared understanding of what already exists in the Town Code? This will be a reality check and set the baseline for decisions.

While some of the elements demonstrated may not have been acceptable on Grand Avenue, should the Master Plan consider implementation in other parts of the town? For example, would bike lanes to the elementary school or high school make roads safer for children and encourage exercise? Would more attention to refreshing the painting of crosswalks and lane markings throughout town give the impression that Paonia is taking care of its streets, be more recognizable to drivers and be more “complete” in providing safe crossings?

Can someone at the town (Public Works Committee?) or perhaps someone in the media take the time to acknowledge improvements that are actively being made? For example, many respondents who commented about street repairs may not be aware that Public Works has been actively working on street repairs or that street

lights have been replaced to save energy costs and provide a more friendly and safe nighttime appearance in the Town. Others who commented about the condition at Poulos Park may not be aware of improvements that have been made and more are planned for 2021.

Will the Town Administrator and Trustees continue engage the citizens with the “Let’s Talk” meetings to foster conversations and mutual respect? These conversations could go a long way to build a shared understanding and to encourage person-to-person interactions to de-fuse contentious local issues.

DEFINITIONS

“A livable community is one that is safe and secure, has affordable and appropriate housing and transportation options, and offers supportive community features and services.”

AARP Policy Book, Chapter 9: Livable Communities.⁶

“Creative Placemaking, the integration of arts, culture and community engaged-design into comprehensive community development and ... planning, has gained momentum in the last several years.”

The Kresge Foundation.

“Complete Streets are streets for everyone. They are designed and operated to enable safe access for all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists and transit riders of all ages and abilities. Complete Streets make it easy to cross the street, walk to shops, and bicycle to work.”

Smart Growth America

⁶ <https://policybook.aarp.org/policy-book/livable-communities>

APPENDICES

- A. CDOT Statement of Work
- B. Communication Plan
- C. Pop-up Demonstration Survey
- D. Comments
 - 1. Parking
 - 2. Bikes
 - 3. Crosswalks
 - 4. Trees
 - 5. Amenities including Parklets, benches, planters, etc
 - 6. General Comments about the Street
- E. Pop-up Demonstration Street Design