

Eucalyptus Avenue Holiday Celebrations Community Outreach Efforts

The Issue and the Plan

After receiving a number of complaints from constituents about the Eucalyptus Avenue holiday light celebration in December 2020, the San Carlos City Council directed staff to conduct outreach to the San Carlos community. Staff began by providing a report to the City Council at its meeting of April 12, 2021. The report included staff recommendations for a webpage on the City website, two community meetings, and a survey on Shape San Carlos. With some changes, Council approved staff's Outreach Plan.

SHAPE San Carlos Survey

Community members who were unable to attend either meeting were given the opportunity to respond to questions via our SHAPE San Carlos online forum tool. The survey had two simple questions: what do the residents think about the events and what concerns do they have. The survey was open for input for one month.

SHAPE Survey Results

Our online survey received a total of 424 visitors and 275 responses. Of those responses, 106 were received from "Registered" participants, those that have confirmed their address within San Carlos.

The following data summary is pulled only from "Registered" responses. Registered responses are preferred as they require registration to ensure the responder can only respond once and is a City resident.

What do you like and appreciate about the holiday events?

- Holiday spirit – 83%
- Good family activity – 82%
- Beautiful to look at – 75%
- Sense of community – 72%

What concerns do you have about the events?

- Crowd size – 67%
- Safety – 54%
- Trash – 54%

Community Meetings

Staff prepared an invitation to participate in this discussion and mailed it to the entire community. The invitation provided information about the webpage, the SHAPE survey, and the upcoming meetings.

The purpose of each meeting was to: 1) provide some history about the event and the impact on the City organization, including the benefits of pulling a City permit and its direct relation to City involvement in providing increased support and safety; 2) allow community members to share their past experiences with the holiday events; 3) listen to and document their experiences and concerns; 4) encourage residents to talk with each other, discuss actions the residents were willing to take, and suggest how the City can support these efforts; and 5) form a partnership with residents to resolve the issue.

The meetings were held on May 26 and June 8, 2021. Both meetings were structured with presentations from Parks & Recreation, Public Works, Sheriff's Office, Fire, and the City Attorney, followed by small breakout group discussions. During the breakout groups, community members were asked to answer and discuss the following questions:

1. What are your experiences with holiday lights events?
2. What do you like and appreciate about the holiday events?
3. What concerns do you have about the events?
4. What actions can be taken to address the concerns you've identified?
5. Under what conditions should neighbors get a permit? How important is this?
6. Outside of getting a permit, what can you and your neighbors do to address concerns?
7. How can the City support these efforts?

Many community members shared positive experiences from the holiday events, appreciating the event's family-friendly nature, and the holiday spirit of those involved. Despite these positives, however, many community members expressed concern that the events had grown beyond the small, local, community events they previously remembered and enjoyed. Top concerns expressed by meeting participants were crowd size, safety (for pedestrians and emergency personnel access), and trash.

The most frequently cited ideas for dealing with these concerns were increased traffic enforcement and law enforcement presence, providing additional trash bins and portable restrooms, and limiting the scale of the holiday celebrations (days/hours of operation for lights and restricting access to San Carlos community members).

Community members were divided on the issue of permits. Some believed the City should not make Eucalyptus residents obtain a permit for putting up lights, while others wanted residents to recognize that the celebrations have become an event and obtain a permit to facilitate City support. The notes taken by staff are provided on the following pages.

Community Meeting Input (both meetings combined)

The following responses were all recorded from community members during our two virtual meetings held on May 26 and June 8, 2021.

For each question, a summary of common themes and frequent answers is provided at the top of the section, followed by the individual comments of community members during the discussion.

What are your experiences with holiday lights events?

Common Themes:

- Many residents have a long history of attending the events; they enjoy the events as a family tradition and see them as opportunities to build community
- Enjoy the holiday lights, but have noticed negative changes in recent years as crowd size has increased significantly
- Appreciation for the effort of Eucalyptus residents and empathy for the near neighbors who have to deal with the negative impacts
- Holiday lights has “gotten out of hand” in recent years due to the popularity and increased crowd size – “we are the victims of our own success”

Community Comments:

- Long history of attending the holiday events
- Wonderful tradition that should be continued
- Halloween event is wonderful
- December lights – enjoyed early days, too many people now, crowds too large
- Halloween draws a different crowd from the December event
- Experience has changed greatly in recent years (vehicle backed up into driveway, vomit, garbage in yard)
- Has become a hindrance, can't get car until late at night
- Walking over from other neighborhoods – crowds seem to be from outside the community in recent years
- Last year crowds were exceptionally large and a “disaster” – no other attractions last year because of COVID, people coming from outside the peninsula (saw Eucalyptus advertised on social media)
- Figuring out how to keep tradition alive for the San Carlos community
- Family tradition
- Empathy for Eucalyptus families having to deal with crowds/consequences
- Can only enjoy lights early in the season when it is less crowded
- Crowds driven by Chronicle, other holiday event lists
- Entitled visitors

- Lived here for many years and have always enjoyed the event. An attraction and some traffic. Last year in particular was very difficult with the increase in size and attendance. There was a lot of traffic and it was overwhelming
- Great event for the community. But has gotten a little out of control over the years. Distressing to hear of stories that residents have with difficulty getting to and from their homes. Crowds and garbage has become a problem. Some behavioral issues with the participants not being neighborly
- Have enjoyed the event over the years. The increase of traffic has impacted the ability for residents to enjoy. Lot of traffic from out of town. Holiday lights and the Halloween event have become increasingly crowded
- Halloween event – have witnessed areas on the street where it is wall to wall crowded with people. Concerned about the safety of the crowd. If there was an emergency it would be difficult to move in or out
- Have enjoyed it and see it as a nice community event. Didn't try to go this past year due to the increase in crowd and inappropriate behavior. Maybe too much advertising for the event
- Wondering if the increase in crowds was due to the pandemic. Maybe it will be less crowded this year, or maybe it will still be just as crowded now that even more people know about it
- Feeling that there was a noticeable uptick in crowd size in 2019. Pandemic may have been a factor, but the increase has been noticeable before the pandemic
- Love this event. Wonderful for families, go every year, know it's congested
- Have really enjoyed the lights, concern is for resident who host and decorate. I like the idea of trash cans. Last year was so awkward
- Enjoy the diversity of the community, share the joy of what we offer. Concerns – can decorate or not. We want to be good stewards but continue to have our freedom to decorate within what the law and City allows (Eucalyptus homeowner)
- Live in San Carlos have enjoyed the holiday lights with our children, two most popular public events in San Carlos. Have not seen one single City representative whether it be police, fire, no presence to help the situation
- Always enjoyed the event, was disappointed one year when did not happen. Could do better with crowd control and debris. Concerned about the burden on the residents of Eucalyptus
- Enjoyed the holiday event, have not gone recently. Wants to see it continue, think it has gotten out of control. It's taken away from small town feel. Last time I went did not see people from the neighborhood
- Appreciate seeing lights and getting together with others
- Love seeing lights each year. "Magical"
- Enjoyed event but not having burden like the people who live on the street
- Traffic worse the past few years
- City take pride in the event but does nothing to help the community
- Would like event to be toned down a bit
- People travel far to come to the event, not a community/local event anymore
- Love that people get in the spirit
- This event is similar in traffic impact to hometown days – and is likewise important to the community

- Don't enjoy going to it anymore because crowds are too big
- Used to enjoy the small community event
- Take kids out of the Eucalyptus neighborhood to go trick or treating because it is too crowded and feels unsafe
- Still love the event and have family and friends enjoy the event
- Wish it could only be resident and family and friends
- Dangerous during Halloween. Kids don't trick or treat in neighborhood anymore
- Appreciated the signs the City put out
- A substantial burden for those living in and in neighborhood around the event. Do not feel that they can leave the house in the evening in December. Several residents have had cars hit twice in a single season
- Over 1,200 trick-or-treaters in 3 hours on Halloween
- Neighborhood residents park several blocks away for the duration of December in order to be able to exit in the event of an emergency

What do you like and appreciate about the events?

Common Themes:

- Enjoying the lights with family and friends
- Great family experience and community tradition, especially for kids
- Makes San Carlos special

Community Comments:

- Enjoyment of lights and freedom to have lights. Enjoy bringing friends to the event.
- Feeling of service offered by Eucalyptus to the community and experience with family. Appreciate that residents of Eucalyptus take on the responsibility and expense of providing this event to the community
- Brings business to Laurel Street
- Enjoyment of the continued good representation of San Carlos. Helps to advertise our city and benefits the city as a whole
- Overall experience at the holiday time. Spending the time with children and grandchildren at the holiday tradition
- Halloween and Christmas help to make family memories
- Enjoyment with children and grandchildren. Talk with neighbors and families to enjoy the community.
- Moved to be a part of it, makes San Carlos special greatly enjoy and like to see folks faces
- Look forward to every year
- Good experience – would hate to see it disappear
- Children love the lights tradition, fun way to have that holiday joy. Very special thing the community has

- Small town charm attracted us to San Carlos, small town connection, lights brought us together
- Part of what makes San Carlos a special place to live, great sense of community around these events
- Nice to see the effort of those on Eucalyptus in decorating
- Good memories for kids

What concerns do you have?

Common Themes:

- Crowd size becoming too large
- Traffic concerns
 - Driving unsafe for pedestrians and children
 - Emergency personnel cannot access Eucalyptus and surrounding area
 - Residents and community members cannot get to their house
 - No place to park
- Trash and garbage
- Bad behavior

Community Comments:

- Concerns about asking residents not to have Christmas lights
- Concerns with traffic preventing parking near house or driving to house
- Would like the City to protect the community by providing the appropriate support to keep the community members safe, traffic managed, services to accommodate visitors
- Erratic and unsafe driving
- One thing did not like about Halloween event – not much light
- Traffic was a concern, kids loved it. Hopefully we can figure out how to make this work. Wanted to voice our support to continue this tradition
- No parking for deliveries
- Porta-potty and traffic control – could it possibly invite more interest in the event?
- Traffic on Brittan
- Unsafe traffic around children
- Concerned too many restrictions by the City may prohibit residents from continuing
- Fire and police safety concerns with traffic and accessing
- Concern that people with mobility issues continue to be able to enjoy the street
- Concerns about theft
- People knocking on doors to use residents' bathrooms
- Public urination
- Nuisance of traffic
- Trash

- Not up to neighbors to decide this, need help from the City. Does not remember ever seeing police. Responsibility of the City to handle not the neighbors. Seems cut and dry and hard to believe City has no leverage
- Religious services impacted nearby church
- Resources from downtown – economic impact
- Concerned City was going to do something to make sure it was not going to happen
- Cordilleras – intersection between Cordilleras and Eucalyptus can be very dangerous. Tamarack parking and accidents are of concern -- would look to the City to provide traffic support in those areas
- Holly Street can be dangerous as well. Crowd control is especially important, where larger displays are
- Concerns for garbage and unruly people are outweighed by enjoyment of the event
- Eucalyptus and Birch – people loop around so that the corner becomes congested
- Each year the event grows, exceptional crowds concern about the safety if there were to be an emergency. Concern for emergency access. Park cars blocks away to have peace of mind in case of need to leave. Would appreciate discussion of traffic and litter. Prohibition of cars. Garbage canisters
- If the City doesn't provide support negative impacts still occur
- Length of time of Holiday lights and traffic congestion
- Concerns that it is advertised on national news and a draw to visitors for the whole month
- Litter, traffic, folks staying later in the evening
- Traffic, parents can't visit because of all the cars. Can 911 get to my house if I need them?
- Residents don't view it as an "event"
- Crowd spill-over into other neighborhoods
- Concerned of children being hit and people walking in the middle of the street
- Can't go anywhere in the afternoon because traffic is so bad. Cannot find any parking
- Air pollution and trash in yard
- Intersection between Cordilleras no stop sign crossing Eucalyptus
- Traffic congestion is dangers for people walking on foot especially for people out of area
- Very dark at night and can't see kids/people
- Concern is that the City is not supportive. Permits do not apply because it is not an event
- Need to actively manage the traffic
- Holiday lights event has gotten crazy, lots of trash, decorations stolen. Good community event but getting large. Residents want to make it successful and safe. Not excited for vendors coming to sell food and goods
- Concentration of motor and pedestrian traffic at night creates a danger of someone being hit. Many are children. Need to encourage people to carry some form of illumination so they can be seen. Incorporate into City's website
- Extremely difficult for neighbors close by (dirty diapers, people asking to use bathroom)
- Problem that has been growing. Started out street was one way, closed one year. Used to be one block, now two blocks. No City leadership. Up to the City to coordinate the services such as putting out garbage cans, very nice event. City should pick up the insurance for that type of event

- People who come from out of town don't understand what it is like for those at the "epicenter" in town
- Impossible to get into the area for an emergency -- Cordilleras, Arroyo problematic -- Fire equipment not able to reach area
- Possible COVID spread because too crowded
- Streets too congested – car damage
- Visitors acting unsafely – need clear public safety presence
- Residents feel like "prisoners" – unsure if they will be able to get in/out of the neighborhood, soured the experience of living in San Carlos

What actions can be taken to address the concerns you've identified?

Common Themes:

- Traffic control:
 - Make Eucalyptus one-way
 - Provide Police traffic control assistance
- Limiting days/hours of lights
- Shuttle service & parking elsewhere in the community – downtown, Central Middle School
- Adding trash bins and portable restrooms
- Limiting the event to community members and surrounding neighbors
- Add additional police presence

Community Comments:

- Laurel Street businesses could sponsor the event
- Increase in funding for support
- Lights on Thursday – Sunday and not seven days a week
- Busing people might be good, more significant police presence. It is too important to lose, things had just seemed to get out of hand last year. Cooped up from COVID? Do not want to see it go away
- Could something be done as they do in Redwood City – down by REI, Central School and bus them over so there will not be as many people walking around Brittan
- Open up Central and Arroyo lot for parking
- Could Eucalyptus be pedestrian only for this time period?
- Limit the amount of people that can come to the event or use reservations
- Close street to all but residents and disabled placard
- Have visitors park in school lots and walk to Eucalyptus
- Shuttle service
- Maintain a one way street. Making this a walking street only with no cars
- Donation box could be used to offset some expenses – had one in the past, but nothing considerable was donated

- Put more dumpsters and police. Never seen any police presence. No police to control traffic
- Very little police presence and a lot of the issues can be mitigated with more police. We were told last December there would be more police but that was not the case. Witness police speed down the street once or twice and it was more dangerous than helpful
- Charging will cut down on attendance. Residents of SC and RC get in free. Very few options to cut down. Very well advertised
- Each year national competition let's not reinvent the wheel and reach out to them and see what they have done. Shuttle from Burton Park would cut down car traffic and make a better experience. Lights out earlier for the benefit of neighbors
- Shut down at 9:30 each night like the Halloween event
- Reach out to other communities that have similar events to see what they do
- Ask PG&E to give credits for the month of December for the houses on the street
- Mon-Thur try to turn off the lights by 9:00. 10:00 on Fri-Sun. Would be open to considering an agreed upon time to turn the lights off (Eucalyptus resident)
- Permit system for residents to access area
- Use Central Middle School parking lot for visitor parking
- Limiting it to San Carlos and neighboring towns – Belmont and Redwood City might be an option.
- Crossing guard at intersections could help make it safer for everyone
- Better way to educate people coming from out of the area
- More involvement from the City – step up and put funding in and help with traffic control
- Identify someone in community to be go between for City and Eucalyptus wants to do
- Add some lights so people are more visible at night
- Temporary bathrooms
- Permit allows certain City functions to be available
- Lights out around 10 would help with the late night noise
- Neighborhood not inviting people. Need to discourage people to come
- Scale back decorations
- Take down FB page/yelp
- Create traffic plan to address safety and fire
- Buy a ticket to the event
- A permit is needed to engage the City and its resources
- Shut it down completely or make it pedestrian only. Parking at schools and walking only
- Schools parking is limited, but if the downtown garage and shuttle dropped people off, they might patronize downtown businesses

Under what conditions should neighbors get a permit? How important is this?

Common Themes:

- Concern about putting the responsibility of pulling a permit on residents
- Desire for residents to pull a permit to allow City involvement and assistance

Community Comments:

- Permits are a must for these events. Think it is helpful for safety purposes. The City can help prepare and take on some liability. It's a great community event and would hate to see it end. The City can support by assisting with garbage management, maybe better routing of the traffic for safety as well
- Permit should be required for exclusive events, not for when the community is invited in. Especially for a long-standing tradition
- Permit may not be needed for restrooms and garbage collection – but is it a good enough reason to require permit?
- Permit is not appropriate, they are not creating an event
- Concern that a permit is a way for City to gain money or that it's a way to say no
- Scale of event is larger than for a permit
- Shouldn't require the neighborhood to get a permit, they are simply putting up lights – most people in San Carlos enjoy it, why can't there be a police presence?
- Very important that the neighbors get a permit. The City needs to know what residents are doing with an event like this and the City should be approving the event. The City could then take on some liability of the event. Additional control is needed
- Said it was about \$275.00 cheaper in subsequent years but would have to get liability insurance for the duration of the event. Need clarification
- Mixed feelings about the neighbors having to get a permit. Not as close to the area so would defer to people who live closer. But the event feels like it is getting too big
- Neighbors can be supportive and encourage everyone to have good behavior at these events. Maybe people can pitch in for the cost of the permit (outside of Eucalyptus residents). Has become a community wide event so the City should get more involved
- This event should not take place without a permit. Should be a special event permit for the holiday lights event rather than the block party permit
- Not sure a permit is going to solve the issues at hand. It is their right to have lights on
- Not a block party type of event with cars driving through and people coming from out of town
- A special event permit would be good for the Halloween event as well

Outside of getting a permit, what can you and your neighbors do to address concerns?

Common Themes:

- Limit hours
- Take some responsibility for consequences
- Clean or put out garbage cans

Community Comments:

- Fundraiser event with volunteers from local organizations
- Everybody shares the cost & responsibility
- Limit on hours

- Work with local churches and schools to use their parking lots for parking
- Residents on Eucalyptus bear some responsibility – they understand the consequences/effects
- Putting out garbage cans
- Residents can clean the street themselves

How can the City support these efforts?

Common Themes:

- City should take the lead in mitigating negative impacts by providing:
 - Traffic control and parking support
 - Additional traffic signage
 - Additional trash bins and portable bathrooms
 - Police and CSO support and presence

Community Comments:

- Make Eucalyptus one-way. Block off, add detours
- Institute a traffic program, provide restrooms, and provide trash cans. Not fair to displace the burden to the residents of Eucalyptus
- Need for citywide recognition and City support for traffic management. Four block radius blocked off. Would require staffing intersections. Burton could use additional portable restrooms. Congestion is consistent
- Parking at Central and Arroyo. Policing of Eucalyptus and Birch and maybe Arroyo
- City should step up for the neighbors and develop plan to manage traffic and make it a joy
- CSOs could do a great deal of assistance in managing intersections
- Have City provide porta-potties and trash cans to support home owners. Done at their expense
- Traffic study, providing restrooms, and trash, parking areas
- City put out one way traffic signs from the 1st to the 26th
- Signage for parking
- Understand people are upset about trash and lack of bathroom facilities, would that be helped if only cars go through, no pedestrians?
- Opportunity to generate funds for people who live on that street? Their PGE bill, the candy they buy, interest in donating to help them?
- Having a pedestrian only section around the area rather than letting cars drive through. When you close the street, it can create more of a party and hang out situation
- A toll for admission?
- Limit on the time. Like the idea of a shuttle. Like the idea of one-way street, but allow residents to still access their homes.
- Help with garbage and garbage pickup
- Add police presence

Questions and Answers:

Q: How do permits work for the Holiday Lights event since it is not a one-day event?

A: Previously, the City issued Special Event Permits to accommodate safety measures like one-way traffic for prolonged periods of time.

Q: How does the Farmers Market work? Can the Eucalyptus Avenue celebrations be done in the same manner?

A: The San Carlos Farmers Market is currently run by the San Mateo County Chamber of Commerce through a Special Event Permit. This Permit is renewed and issued on an annual basis. It is possible that once a Special Event Permit is issued to a resident of Eucalyptus Avenue, it can be renewed annually.

Q: How much does a permit cost?

A: The cost for a New Event Permit is \$280. For a Repeat Event Permit the cost is reduced to \$168.

Q: Why can't there be extra garbage cans on Eucalyptus Avenue?

A: If the residents of Eucalyptus obtain a Special Event Permit, additional garbage and recycling cans can be requested by the applicant. City staff would then look to the City Council for direction and funding. If additional cans are provided, our Public Works Department would coordinate with Recology San Mateo County to arrange for service and pick-up.

Q: What would the Permit allow/trigger in support from the City?

A: It will depend on what the applicant requests. For Eucalyptus Avenue events, it has triggered one-way traffic control. If there is a desire for more City services, such as sanitation and litter control, it can be requested. City staff will then request that the City Council determine the level of City resources to be committed to the event.

Q: Who creates and manages the one-way traffic control on Eucalyptus?

A: One-way traffic on Eucalyptus is currently managed by our San Carlos Public Works Department in partnership with the San Mateo County Sheriff's Office.

Q: What is the cost to have the event patrolled?

A: The cost of patrolling a month-long event such as the Eucalyptus Avenue holiday lights varies greatly depending on number of deputies and number of days of patrol. Ultimately, this cost will be determined at the direction of the City Council.

Q: What revenue is brought to the City by this event?

A: These events are not revenue-generators for the City. The only direct revenue to the City receives is from the Special Event permit fee (\$280 for a new event and \$168 for a repeat event), which do not cover the City's costs. There are no other fees or payments collected directly by the City. The event may, however, bring in indirect revenue, as guests to Eucalyptus may also frequent restaurants and shops in San Carlos during their visit in the form of sales tax. Because there is no revenue generated, the City Council must approve spending by the City for these events.

Q: What are the obligations from the City when a resident applies for a permit?

A: This will vary depending on what is requested and deemed necessary to protect the health and safety of the community. The City Permit request process is as follows:

1. Parks & Recreation receives the permit request from the applicant.
2. Parks & Recreation staff begins the draft permit with all requirements that must be met by the applicant.
3. Parks & Recreation staff arranges a pre-event meeting with City personnel and the applicant to discuss all of the needs.
4. Parks & Recreation staff updates the permit from input received at pre-event meeting.
5. The final permit issued to the applicant. This final permit provides all of the obligations of the applicant, which would have been discussed and agreed to by the applicant in advance.