TO: JAMES L. APP, CITY MANAGER

FROM: BOB LATA, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: PRIVATE GATED RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENTS AND OTHER BARRIERS TO PUBLIC VEHICULAR TRAFFIC FLOW

DATE: AUGUST 17, 2004

Needs: For the City Council to consider whether or not to establish a policy regarding private gated residential developments and other barriers to vehicular traffic.

Facts:

1. In recent years there have been a number of residential development projects proposed with gates restricting public access. The list includes the following projects:

   - Kapareil Lane cul-de-sac east of Golden Hill Road;
   - One of the phases in tract north of Von's shopping center;
   - The 90 unit multi-family development west of Cuesta College;
   - A recent residential subdivision west of Vine and 36th Streets
   - The Waterford Court private street approved 7/1/03

2. In addition to development projects, gates, chains and other barriers have been policy issues under other circumstances. For example:

   - A gate was illegally installed across Walnut Drive by local property owners who were concerned about traffic flows through their neighborhood; the City acted to remove the gate;

   - At property owner requests, the City Council has approved both temporary and longer-term installation of bollards across street rights of way (e.g. temporary bollards across Larkfield which have since been removed; longer-term bollards across Via Promesa which are still in place);

   - There are other locations where the City has installed or approved barriers that are designed to preclude public access but would allow emergency vehicles to pass (e.g. chain across the James Street substandard right-of-way; chain at end of Blackburn Street; gates at east end of Wild Mustard Lane in the Oak Meadows development; access gates along Highway 46 East).

3. Physically restricting public access has implications for Emergency Services. In addition, "gating" parts of the City creates barriers to public access, redirects traffic (which may concentrate traffic where it was not intended) and could create negative public perceptions about exclusivity and separateness that may not be consistent with Council policy.

4. The City's General Plan contains a series of policies that relate to traffic calming; a summary is attached. These policies recognize that there are circumstances where it may be appropriate to design features that will slow the speed of traffic and at the same time insure continuous flow. A basic component of these policies is to avoid unintended displacement of traffic, particularly into residential neighborhoods.

5. The purpose of this staff report is to provide City Council with an opportunity to provide direction regarding whether or not the City should permit private gated residential developments.

Analysis and Conclusion:

The City has basically two different circulation systems, each based on different principles and responding to different circumstances:

- Traffic circulation for the historic west side of the City is based primarily on a "grid" system, which was possible to be established because of limited topographic constraints. Although there are collector streets (by designation or function) like Spring Street, 24th Street, 13th Street and Riverside Avenue, the overall grid pattern provides considerable flexibility in terms of vehicular movement. Over the past 100 years of development, few streets have been closed off and the grid pattern remains essentially intact. In neo-traditional planning terms, the west side provides a relatively ideal traffic circulation pattern.

- The east side of the City developed traffic circulation patterns focusing on a hierarchy of arterial, collector and local streets. In addition to being consistent with the trends of post WWII American development trends, topographic constraints have impacted the ability to apply the same grid street pattern as the west side of the City.

With the hierarchy of streets, topographic constraints, and existing subdivision design patterns on the east side of the City, drivers have fewer options than they would on the west side of the City. As a result, any closures of planned streets (e.g. use of bollards) may have a disproportionate adverse impact in

terms of displacing traffic from one street to other streets. This problem is particularly acute with the hierarchy of streets on the east side of the City.

Bollards: Installation of bollards for long-term traffic control would create an impediment to emergency services access and also causes vehicular traffic to be redirected in an unplanned manner. The effect is to displace traffic and concentrate impacts where they were not intended, providing a form of traffic calming for one neighborhood and creating an unfair burden on another.

Street systems, particularly in the hierarchy pattern of the east side of the City, rely on disbursing traffic over the available network. To arbitrarily remove a link in the network by placing bollards in a City street weakens the overall effectiveness of the street system.

Residential subdivisions have street systems designed by traffic engineers and paid for by the developer of the subdivision. To install bollards across a dedicated public street thwarts the purpose of the streets and circumvents what the developer has paid for.

Bollards across a public street are, in fact, illegal barriers that need to be removed. They are inconsistent with a designed system of traffic circulation, and have a particularly adverse impact on the east side of the City where a hierarchy of streets provides drivers with fewer travel options.

Secured Secondary Access: Installation of gates and chains where public traffic is not intended (e.g. James Street, the end of Blackburn Street, the end of Wild Mustard Lane) are entirely appropriate traffic control devices and, in fact, often provide a secondary point of access for emergency response vehicles. These can provide a controlled means to access an area during an emergency without providing general vehicular access over a road or through a neighborhood not suited for traffic.

Gated Communities: The broader question of whether gated communities are appropriate from a social perspective is a policy issue that is being addressed in many communities throughout the United States. Gated communities provide real and/or perceived increases in security and are apparently intended as a marketing tool for residential developments. Based on the number of recent projects that have been proposed with private streets and gated access, and considering the widespread use of gates in other (especially larger metropolitan) communities, it seems likely that there will be continued requests for providing gated access.

To date, the City has considered and approved gated residential developments on a case by case basis. There has been no overall policy established.

One context to consider whether or not gates should be permitted on private streets is whether or not they would contribute to the Council's adopted General Plan goal of "preserve the small town character that the City has historically enjoyed". This would seem to be a very judgmental standard and one that can best be addressed as the City has been doing so: reviewing each project on a case by case basis.

Gated communities also raise issues with regards to emergency response, and how a gated area may relate to the overall traffic circulation pattern within the community. Gates will unavoidably slow access for emergency response vehicles, although automated systems can be installed to minimize delays. It is, however, essential that gated areas do not create a blockage that conflicts with the effectiveness of overall street systems.

Traffic Calming: The General Plan provides a policy basis for adopting a traffic calming program. It is important to note, however, that installation of bollards, gates, or other impediments to traffic flow are not consistent with traffic calming (particularly if they displace traffic into other geographic areas). Traffic calming focuses on slowing traffic but helping to insure a continuous flow. The design of a street system relies on all of its component parts, and installation of unplanned impediments to traffic flow often have unintended consequences. Although traffic calming may include partial or full street closures under certain circumstances, these are design solutions that need to be analyzed and implemented by professional traffic engineers.

Summary: Depending upon the specific circulation pattern, gates (or other barriers to traffic flow) could have significant impacts on overall City traffic circulation; each situation does, however, need its own analysis. It is important to look at the overall traffic circulation system and consider the potentially adverse implications.

The recently updated General Plan contains a series of traffic calming policies that are designed to discourage unnecessary traffic intrusions into residential neighborhoods (including but not limited to policies that support new design solutions and creation of truck routes). Each circumstance does, however, warrant separate analysis by traffic engineering professionals.

Emergency Services can make arrangements to provide access to gated communities in the same manner as other secured properties (e.g. use of Knox boxes or other physical techniques). It should be noted, however, that any

impediment to easy access would incrementally reduce the speed with which Emergency Services can respond. The level of "significance" would seem to be judgmental and may not alone be grounds to deny requests for gates.

Removal of existing illegal temporary barriers to traffic circulation (i.e.: bollards) is an issue that warrants attention. The illegal bollards are inconsistent with good traffic engineering principles and circumvent the purpose and intent of City street design, particularly for areas served by a hierarchy system of streets.

Policy Reference: As noted above there is no established policy for gates, bollards, or for non-public emergency vehicle access to private property. If the Council wishes to establish a policy, the General Plan would be an appropriate place to locate that policy. The bollards on Via Promesa were established pursuant to City Council Resolution 99-30. Vehicle Code Section 2146; 21101.6; Uniform Fire Code as adopted by Municipal Code Section 17.04.010(G); Section 902.1 required that fire apparatus routes be maintained.

Fiscal Impact: None

Options:

a. That the City Council direct:

- Staff to insure that no additional illegal gates or barriers to traffic are installed; and
- Staff to investigate what types of automated systems are available and could be required of new developments in order to facilitate access by Police and Emergency Services; and
- Staff to confer with the City Attorney to confirm the process for removal of any illegal barriers in City streets; and
- The Planning Commission to continue considering gated residential developments on a case by case basis, considering the impacts on the City's General Plan / traffic circulation system, emergency response times, and implications for traffic calming.

b. Amend, modify, or reject the foregoing options.

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