

# THE PORTERVILLE RECORDER

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## Roundabout hearing continued

January 11, 2018

By: Myles Barker

Many Lindsay residents disapprove of proposal

The Lindsay City Council agreed Tuesday to close the public comment period regarding the Hermosa Street Intersection Improvement Project, but to continue the public hearing to its next meeting on Jan. 23.

The project, which proposes to construct a roundabout that is 110 feet in diameter at the intersection of Hermosa Street and Westwood Avenue, has been ongoing since 2006 when the city's school district and local parents filed complaints saying the intersection is too dangerous for residents to cross.

City Manager Bill Zigler said he and city staff have been continually trying to figure out how to deal with the situation affordably.

When Self-Help Enterprises [SHE] — a low income housing program in Visalia — brought forth a project to do affordable housing on the southeast corner of the intersection, Zigler said he addressed with them the concerns about getting residents, especially students who attend Jefferson Elementary School nearby, safely across the intersection. He said SHE agreed to work with the city in obtaining funds that would pay for a structure that would enhance pedestrian safety, calm the traffic and help the city with reducing vehicle emissions.

Shortly thereafter Zigler said SHE received a grant worth nearly a million dollars to build a structure that would go in the intersection to aid the city in meeting its goals.

As far as what to build at the intersection, Zigler said a roundabout is the only structure the city is aware of that will help it achieve all of its goals.

"We have looked at stop signs, we've looked at traffic lights and they don't check off all the things that need to be," Zigler said.

Unlike with traffic lights and stop signs, Assistant City Planner Brian Spaunhurst said a roundabout, among other things, provides improvements to traffic and pedestrian safety by physical design.

"The roundabout physically requires a car to yield to pedestrians as they approach the intersection," Spaunhurst said, adding that everything involved in the design of a roundabout aims towards the city's goal of ensuring pedestrian and traffic safety. "The same thing goes with reducing vehicle speed because as you are approaching the intersection, the lane narrows and it causes you to focus more on what's going on in your surroundings."

Spaunhurst added that the roundabout also lowers vehicle emissions, which he said will aid the city in achieving Executive Order S-3-05 — an Executive Order of the State of California signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger in June 2005 that set greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets for the State of California.

Tom Collishaw, the CEO of SHE, said a roundabout does seem like the best solution that checks all of the boxes.

"The city has approached this in a measured fashion and it seems like it makes sense," Collishaw said.

Lindsay resident Patricia Contreras said it makes sense.

"Until last week I had not made up my mind about any of this, but once I sat back and saw the plans, it was the only thing that made sense," she said. "In a perfect world I think we'd all like to not have Jefferson School there at all, but in the meantime, until something is addressed with that, we need to do something."

However, the idea of a roundabout at the intersection didn't make much sense to Lindsay resident Zue Scott.

Scott said the roundabout is especially an issue for elderly residents, most of whom she said don't know how to use a roundabout.

"They [elderly] fear roundabouts and it is just going to cause panic for them," Scott said.

Scott said the location of the proposed roundabout is also an issue.

"You guys are talking about putting a roundabout right in front of Save Mart where they [elderly] all go," Scott said, adding that about 95 percent of seniors in the City of Lindsay buy their groceries at the Save Mart. "I know that for the fact that my boyfriend works there and he sees that there are nothing but seniors there and you guys are going to make it harder on them."

Given the fact that city staff received a petition with more than 800 signatures of city residents who don't want the roundabout, Scott said the city surely wouldn't be doing anyone a favor by approving it.

"If the residents that are currently living here do not agree with it, how is it helping anyone," Scott said.

Lindsay resident Trudy Wischermann argued that a roundabout simply does not work well in reducing four or five lanes of traffic to a single lane.

"In my explosion of roundabout research the last couple of days, I have not found one roundabout that squeezes down four or five lanes of traffic into two, and I think that is where the real traffic circulation and congestion problems are going to occur," Wischermann said, adding, "That is what we have trouble with in the current roundabout."

Councilmember Esteban Velasquez believes many residents are against the roundabout proposal partly because they don't know how it works, an issue he feels can be solved with education.

"It is about education and helping [residents] understand how to use them," Velasquez said.

Councilmember Brian Watson agreed.

"We are in a very unique situation, there is no doubt about it, and so we've got to decide what can we do to help our citizens better understand how to navigate these roundabouts," Watson said.

Mayor Pro Tem Danny Salinas said he recently put signs up near his house on how to use roundabouts and said it has been helping.

"The amount of people that are doing it [using roundabouts] correctly now is amazing," Salinas said.

Mayor Pam Kimball said whatever happens, the council will choose to do what it believes is in the best interest of the community.

"This council cares deeply about our community and about student safety and pedestrian safety for all of our residents and we are going to make careful decisions," Kimball said.