



# McDowell Elementary School SRTS Walk Audit

Thursday, November 30<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**In attendance:** Christina Panza (SRTS Director), Sarah Hadler (SRTS Program Manager), Ruth Miller (McDowell Principal), Bjorn Gripenburg (Active Transportation Planner, City of Petaluma), Ken Eichstadt (Engineer, City of Petaluma), Sergeant Walt Spiller (Petaluma Police Department), Deb Fox (Cool Petaluma), Emily Oh (McDowell Parent), Brian Oh (McDowell Parent), Aida Aguilar (McDowell Custodian).

**Route:** Met at school entrance on McGregor Avenue. Walked east on McGregor Ave to Park Lane, north on Park Lane to Maria Drive, west on Maria Drive to S. McDowell Blvd and south on S. McDowell Blvd back to McGregor Avenue.

**Pick up/Drop off:** Morning drop off and afternoon pick up for the elementary school takes place on McGregor Avenue on the south side of the school. This is also where students enter the campus. Travelers enter/exit McGregor Ave from both S. McDowell Blvd to the east and Park Avenue to the west.

The front entrance & parking lot on S. McDowell Blvd is utilized by staff, the adult school, preschools, the Boys and Girls Club, and by parents/other visitors outside of normal pick up/drop off time. Drivers enter that parking lot from south driveway on S. McDowell Blvd and exit from the north driveway on S. McDowell Blvd. A third entrance to that parking lot, on McGregor Ave, is blocked to vehicular traffic.

## School Information:

McDowell Elementary School is not just an elementary school, it is a “Community Hub” that in recent years has significantly grown, and will continue to expand. On site is the elementary school, an adult school, two preschools, and a Boys and Girls Club. In addition, a middle school may be constructed on the property within the next few years.

***“McDowell is a destination that people travel TO, not THROUGH.”***

Address	421 McDowell Avenue, Petaluma, 94954
Morning Bell(s)	8:20am
Afternoon Bell(s)	M, T, Th-F: 1:50 (TK/K), 2:40 (1-3), 3:00 (4-6) W: 12:10 (TK/K), 1:05 (1-6)
Grade levels	Tk-6
Enrollment	262
School type	neighborhood plus community hub
Student’s proximity to school	262 geocoded students 212 live within 2 miles of school (81%) 130 live within 1 mile of school (50%) 76 live within ½ mile of school (29%) 38 live within ¼ mile of school (15%)

Participating School in Sonoma County SRTS program?	Yes
Student Travel Mode info (Sept 2023 student arrival/departure tally data)	10% walk 3% bike 0% other (scoot/skate) 5% carpool 0% school bus 0 % public transit 81% single family vehicle  <i>*totals do not equal 100% due to rounding</i>
Safe Routes to School Non-Infrastructure Programming (2023-24)	2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade Pedestrian safety lessons 4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Bicycle Basics Lessons, Bike Rodeo 5 <sup>th</sup> Grade Mapping & Communication lessons Monthly Walk/Roll to School Events with walking school bus meet-up spot at Safeway parking lot on Maria Dr.

## **CONCERNS &/or POTENTIAL SOLUTIONS:**

*Please note that all recommendations on the following pages are meant to capture potential solutions to issues or ideas raised during the walk audit. Each of these recommendations are subject to additional design, analysis, outreach, funding, prioritization, and approval by the City of Petaluma and/or Petaluma City Schools prior to implementation.*

### **McGregor Ave between S. McDowell Blvd and Park Ln:**

#### **Concerns:**

- Parents park and/or drop off along McGregor between S. McDowell and Park, on both the north and south side. Vehicles parked on the north side of McGregor present challenges for a safe and orderly drop off. Traffic is heavy, and drivers often have to weave around parked cars in order to proceed.
- Numerous parents/students cross McGregor mid-block due to the location of the school entrance and distance from the intersection at S. McDowell/McGregor or McGregor/Park. In addition, a daycare center is located directly across the street from the school entrance on McGregor.
- There is no designated school bus loading/unloading zone. School bus is present in the mornings between 8:15-8:25 (did not note afternoon pick up)
- Ruth and Emily expressed that drivers heading to work or elsewhere from the apartments/neighborhood to the east often “fly down McGregor to get to S. McDowell.” The speed limit on McGregor is 25mph, but even that feels fast on that stretch of the road.
- There is an ADA parking space on the north side of McGregor east of the side entrance to the school, which, when vehicles are parked in it, impedes the flow of traffic.
- At the October 2023 SRTS Task Force meeting, Ruth and McDowell Elementary parents expressed concerns that the city bus travels “too fast” down McGregor. As a result, City transit have informed drivers to slow down on McGregor and go 15mph on this stretch of road. However, Ruth and Emily expressed that the buses still are not driving slowly enough.

## **Ideas and/or Potential Solutions:**

- City to consider restricting parking on the north side of McGregor between Park and S. McDowell, during morning drop off and afternoon pick up time.
- City to consider construction of a mid-block crossing on McGregor (north/south) directly in front of the side entrance to the school. This would also require construction of curb ramps.
- City to consider construction of a school-bus loading/unloading zone on the north side of McGregor, west of the side entrance to the school.
- City to consider speed cushions or other traffic calming measures on McGregor.
- City will reduce of speed limit on McGregor to 20 MPH in accordance with AB 43.
- School/District to obtain “Slow the Fast Down” signs and display on McGregor.
- City to consider installation of yellow center line mid-crosswalk “yield” signs for neighborhood crosswalks around the school (McGregor, Park, Maria)
- School district to consider either removing the ADA parking spot on McGregor or converting it to a parallel parking space. Removal is preferred, if feasible, as a parked vehicle in that spot could still impede traffic.
- City/Transit to look into alternative circulation options for buses that currently travel down McGregor. Determine if feasible to change the route to avoid McGregor completely. In meantime, Transit Supervisor(s) to continue to remind drivers of necessity of slowing down while traveling on McGregor.

## **McGregor & Park Avenue**

### **Concerns:**

- Concerns were expressed that re: the safety of students crossing at this intersection and across Park Lane in general from the apartment complex, given heavy traffic, speeding, and inattentive drivers.
- Concerns were expressed that at dawn/dusk/night, the lighting is insufficient.

### **Ideas & Potential Solutions:**

- City to consider improvements to shorten the crossing distances at each leg of this intersection, such as bulb outs. This could be a good location for a temporary demonstration project.
- City to consider “daylighting the intersection” to improve sightlines. This entails removing parking spots closest to the intersection to improve visibility.
- City to consider improving lighting
- City to consider a mid-block crossing from the apartments on Park Lane, to McDowell Park.
- District/city to consider looking into potential sources of funding to pursue a crossing guard program. Ruth would love to have a crossing guard at Park & McGregor, McDowell and McGregor, and, if a mid-block crossing is constructed, at that crossing. Neither the school district nor city currently provided funding for crossing guards. A source of funding, such as a transportation tax, parcel tax, vehicle registration fee, etc. would need to be identified and pursued. Sgt. Spiller indicated that the Petaluma Police Department can provide training for crossing guards.

## **Maria Drive between Park and McDowell**

### **Concerns:**

- There is a yellow striped crosswalk on Maria (north south), east of Park, and yellow striped crosswalk on Park (east-west). However, there is no striping or curb ramp on Maria west of Park, which is a concern.
- Houseless people park on Maria with campers and other vehicles, because they can remain parked there for 72 hours and are able to utilize the bathrooms at Safeway. Concerns were expressed re: the safety of students/parents walking along that corridor.
- Many Kenilworth Junior High School and Casa Grande High School students utilize the bus stop at Maria at the Safeway shopping center, and some McDowell Elementary students utilize it with their parents. Therefore, many students are traveling on Maria in the mornings/afternoons, an additional reason to improve safety at/near that bus stop and along that corridor.

### **Potential Solutions (& Planned Project):**

- City is planning to construct a mid-block crossing and RRFB on Maria on the east side of the easternmost driveway of Safeway. Ruth expressed support for this project.
- City to consider installation of a crosswalk and curb ramp on Maria west of Park.
- City to consider increasing restrictions on parking to give “teeth” to enforcement of vehicles parked for excessive time periods.
- City to consider construction of a cycle-track on the south side of Maria between McDowell and the creek trail. A cycle track would enable safer bicycling for students and adults, and would additionally be a traffic calming measure.
- Removal of parking on Maria could be mitigated with the following potential solutions:
  - District/City to consider converting unused gravel area, off Maria, next to baseball diamonds, into parking spaces (area is half city/half district owned)
  - District/School to consider a shared use agreement to enable baseball/weekend event participants to park in school staff parking lot or on school blacktop.

### **Consideration for future improvements:**

- PCS is considering construction of a middle school building with five classrooms on the McDowell campus, in what is currently the northwest field. This would entail removal of the western (district-owned) baseball field (the eastern baseball field in the park would remain, as it is city-property), and construction of a drop-off/pick up area, with entry/exit from Maria Drive.

## **McDowell between Maria Drive and McGregor:**

### **Concerns:**

- Many students/families live west of S. McDowell Blvd and therefore must cross an extremely busy thoroughfare to get to school. Even with controlled intersections, it feels extremely unsafe to cross S. McDowell Blvd.
- Speeding and distracted driving on S. McDowell Blvd is a great concern. Therefore, not only does it feel unsafe to cross the road, but even with the current class II bike lanes, bicycling on S. McDowell Blvd also feels unsafe for all but the most confident bicyclists.
- Drivers traveling south on S. McDowell Blvd who wish to enter the parking lot on S. McDowell, in front of the school, often make U-Turns at the S. McDowell/McGregor intersection. This is legal but still presents safety concerns.
- Drivers traveling north on S. McDowell who wish to enter the parking lot on S. McDowell generally must slow down to enter the parking lot. There have been incidents where vehicles have been rear ended by drivers traveling too fast down S. McDowell at this location.
- Drivers traveling north on S. McDowell also make u-turns at the south end of the median, just north of the school entrance. This is also legal but also presents safety concerns.

### **Ideas, Potential Solutions (& planned project):**

- City will be installing flashing speed feedback signs on S. McDowell, northbound at the approach to McGregor, and southbound on the approach to Maria.
- City to consider a “road diet” on the section of S. McDowell between E. Washington and McGregor Ave., which would entail reducing the travel lanes to one in each direction, and improving bike lanes. S. McDowell falls below the traffic threshold for a road diet, and reducing the width and number of travel lanes would be a significant traffic calming measure.
- City to consider installation of roundabouts at the intersection of Maria & S. McDowell and the intersection of McGregor and S. McDowell. Roundabouts would both reduce potential for conflicts and would slow traffic.

### **Other:**

- Sgt. Spiller observed that ADA spaces in parking lot in front of school are not properly marked and need to be refreshed by the district.
- Bike parking is located inside the school gates, on McGregor. There are old style steel racks (with one point of contact), with space for ~12 bicycles. The City can provide vendors and rack types that meet best practices.



**Appendix: Walk Audit Pictures**



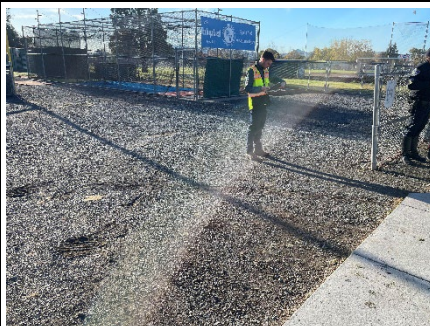
morning traffic line on McGregor near the school



ADA parking space north side of MacGregor east of side entrance to school



crossing at McGregor and Park



unused gravel area off Maria



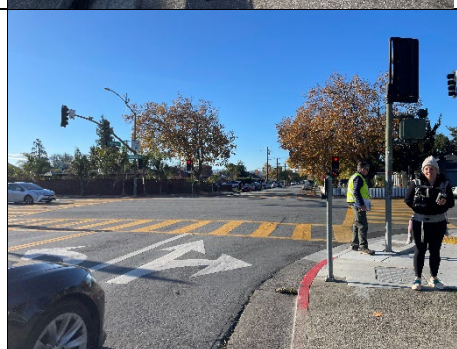
crosswalk at Maria and Park



Maria between Park & McDowell



intersection of Maria and McDowell



intersection of McGregor & McDowell