



STAFF REPORT – CITY COUNCIL MEETING

May 01, 2024

TO: Honorable Mayor and City Council Members

FROM: David Loya, Director of Community Development

PREPARER: David Loya, Director of Community Development

DATE: April 24, 2024

TITLE: **Discuss Options for Securing Alcoves in Commercial Districts.**

RECOMMENDATION:

It is recommended that the Council consider the Planning Commission's discussion on securing commercial alcoves and provide direction to staff and the Commission.

INTRODUCTION:

At its April 9, 2024, meeting, the Planning Commission considered several options for securing commercial alcoves. The Commission recently approved a scissor gate installation on the Plaza. Several Commissioners expressed reservations about the approval. The Commission expressed an understanding of the balance between preventing the negative impacts associated with vagrancy, litter, and overnight camping on the Plaza with the aesthetics and design character on the Plaza. Many businesses have turned to scissor gates, either in their shop windows or in the entryways to their stores. The Commission's deliberations ended with a request for policy direction from the Council. This item is to discuss options for objective standards for security in commercial districts.

BACKGROUND:

The City does not explicitly prohibit scissor gates in policy or in code. Land Use Code (Code) Section 9.30.030 Fences, Walls, and Screening discusses the standards allowed for gates. In most cases, scissor gates would not meet the development standards for height in setbacks. However, some zoning districts, such as the Commercial Central, have no setback. The standards can be viewed at:

<https://www.codepublishing.com/CA/Arcata/#!/LUC/ArcataLUC0930/ArcataLUC0930.html#9.30.030>

None of the fence standards currently prevent the establishment of scissor gates. However, scissor gates have been discouraged and not approved when part of a Design Review application.

DISCUSSION:

The policy question is not straight forward. The Commission discussed how this issue involves a systemic social and economic problem that the business community is forced to confront on a case-

by-case basis. There are at least three businesses on the plaza that have approached Planning staff about installing scissor gates to protect their alcoves. Many businesses oppose the gates. Commissioners discussed the negative aesthetic impacts on the historic district and on the City in general. Councilmembers may wish to watch the Commission's April 9 meeting on the topic.

In addition to scissor gates or roll-up doors, Commissioner Strickland raised the concept of using design features, such as boulders, misting the alcoves, music, or lighting, to make the alcoves less attractive. While these design strategies would not likely be as effective as a fence, they may be partially effective addressing alcove camping without the negative aesthetic effects. Other non-physical solutions included more policing and security cameras.

While the ultimate solutions are beyond the scope of the City's authority and capacity, many businesses are frustrated and looking for solutions that address their immediate concerns. The policy question is, "what means will the City allow private landowners to use to address the problem?" Depending on Council direction, staff will either research alternatives other jurisdictions have used, draft an ordinance with design and/or operational standards for security fencing and gates, or do nothing and allow individual property owners to address the issue in the way they find works best for their situation.