

Community Comment
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The streets of Arcata

It is neither cheap or easy to keep streets in good repair or up with the demands. Arcata was not blessed with the best of construction practices on most of our major streets when they were first built. This compounds the problem. Our first streets were not even built with the car in mind, or the bicycle. They were scaled to the needs of the day. We walked and we rode horses. We did drive buggies and wagons and we allowed cattle and other livestock to use these express ways. In the seventies and eighties I saw streets with no foundation but carrying buses and large trucks. A little gravel and asphalt doesn't last long under these conditions. If you've ever wondered why a mile of roadway cost so much, you just have to look at the design that goes in to them. An extensive foundation is built before that smooth top layer is laid. They are arched so that water will run off and not cause dangerous puddles. The curbs and gutters act as water diverters and allow water to drain to storm drains. If the asphalt and the gutter seam is kept clean and free from weeds, water is kept from getting under the surface and causing erosion. Once the city banned the use of chemicals to keep these weeds under control, something I support by the way, we don't seem to have a good alternative. I control the weeds next to my property manually but I have a hard time keeping up with the weeds. And I admit to getting slower every year. Water causes a ton of problems and cost us all a ton of money.

Recently, my cross street which is I street, has been designated a Bike boulavard. This amounted to calling it as such with new street signage and some long overdue stop signs. I've suggested a four way stop at 11th and I since the seventies. Public works always told me the numbers didn't support the stop signs on 11th. We not only have them at 11th now, but also at 16th and I. We also gained a new something. It looks like a tiny round-a-bout but has no planting area in the middle. I'm told it is street art and to drive normally through it. But people swerve because it looks like you should. That puts cars into the pedestrian area and causes close calls, We have two more of these round things on I street. One at I and 12th and the other in front of my house at 14th street. I was told these were called traffic calming devices. Each of the four streets that feed into them carry yield signs. So nobody knows who should yield. And I can tell you by years of watching this thing, nobody does.

But now we are also a bike way. Just this Wednesday, I watched three bikes go zooming through the new stop signs and almost get hit in the traffic calming area. I can't tell you how many close calls we see daily at lunch hour and before and after school at Arcata High. The buses and fire trucks always have trouble making the turns at these rounds unless they are going straight.

So now we have this bike way as well as the bike lanes on H and G streets. We also have a whole bunch of small planning areas extending into the streets in various locations.

They are supposed to slow traffic, I guess. The ones I've seen also eliminate a parking place.

Of all the great things that Arcata has done and will do, we all need to keep in mind that ~~we, like the country, need to keep up with the maintenance and repair of our~~ infrastructure. If we do the basics well, we can then innovate for the future. Building anything on a poor foundation is a waste of money and resources.

This has been Sam Pennisi for community comment