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PARKLETS TO CROP UP AGAIN THIS YEAR

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Parklets will go on Bloomfield and Glenridge.

By Erin Roll

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Sometimes people just need a space to be, says John Sullivan, vice president of Bike and Walk Montclair. A “parklet” – a mini-park that can fit in any on-street parking space – can offer that space.

Two years ago, Glenridge Avenue was home to one. Now, parklets will be coming back this summer through early fall.

Montclair’s township council has given its blessing to set up two parklets along Glenridge Avenue and Walnut Street via a resolution that passed unanimously at the May 22 council meeting.

The parklets will crop up in July and be removed on Oct. 31.

Sullivan is one of the biggest proponents of the parklet project. Parklets were first mentioned in Montclair’s master plan about three years ago as a possible public space amenity, and Bike and Walk Montclair decided to pursue the tiny parks.

The parklets are part of a larger effort to make downtown areas more centered around people rather than vehicles as the park will be taking up

parking places. "This is a really wonderful, local grassroots movement," he said.

The next steps involve working out the details of how the parklets will be funded, including the possibility of grant money.

In 2016, the township set up a demonstration parklet outside MishMish on Glenridge Avenue.

This year, the Glenridge Avenue parklet will be located between Bloomfield Avenue and Forest Street. The Walnut Street parklet will be located between Forest Street and North Willow Street. However, Sullivan said that the exact locations of the parklets within those two streets is still being nailed down, and will likely depend on which businesses and non-profits want to sponsor a parklet.

Bike and Walk Montclair will be responsible for the parklet on Walnut Street, while the Montclair Center Business Improvement District will be responsible for the one on Glenridge Avenue.

The goal is to get the community involved in the parklet and to take some sort of ownership of it. It may be set up as a blank canvas of sorts, but the community can add artwork, flowers and other features. "We want it to be

an unfinished canvas,” he said. At the first parklet, a local florist brought in flowers and sent someone to water them every day.

By the time the parklet was taken down for the season, some of the people who had initially opposed it due to the loss of parking were sad to see it go, Sullivan recalled. A common concern is the loss of parking.

“What are your favorite vacation memories? A lot of those memories involve sitting in public squares or piazzas. It’s never around a parking spot or where you park,” he said.

Because Montclair has so many sidewalk cafes, people often mistake the parklets for an extension of the restaurant’s eating space. So there will be signage and other information telling people that they are free to sit there.

Parklets are built according to strict guidelines from Together North Jersey. They must be ADA-accessible with a buffer between the parklet and the traffic lanes. In addition, Sullivan said, parklets can only be installed streets with a 25 mph speed limit.

Parklets end up being a traffic-calming device, as drivers instinctively slow down.

“We’re excited that Montclair again is doing something as forward-thinking as community place-making,” said Cyndi Steiner, the executive director of the New Jersey Bike Walk Coalition. “People see these and they want them, people see them and want to sit in them.”

At the meeting, Steiner cited data from Philadelphia’s own parklet project. She said that businesses near the parklets had seen a 20 percent increase in revenue.

If a car sits in a parking spot over the course of a day, that’s at most four people using the spot, Steiner said. Conversely, she said, a parklet is more likely to be used by many people during the day.

She hopes to see a parklet in the Upper Montclair business district in the future.

For more information about the parklets, or to learn how to get involved, email info@bikewalkmontclair.org.

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