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WALNUT, GLENRIDGE MINI-PARKS POPPING UP IN AUGUST

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Delayed a bit, the parklets are due to go up on Walnut and Glenridge mid-August.

COURTESY BIKE AND WALK MONTCLAIR

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After a few design snags and a late start, the parklets planned for Walnut Street and Glenridge Avenue could be welcoming guests by mid-August.

Presented by Bike and Walk Montclair, the mini pop-up parks that fit into any street parking space were approved by the council in June. Each parklet will take up two parking spaces and extend out from the sidewalk at the same level, will be ADA-accessible and used as a quiet respite for pedestrians and for art, music and literary events. They will be up through October, said John Sullivan of Bike and Walk Montclair, who has been spearheading Montclair's mini-park movement.

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.

"We got the green light for the parklets late in the season," BID Director Israel Cronk said about the delay in getting them up.

Last week, plans for the Walnut parklet were brought to the space for the town engineer, fire marshal, building department and police to visualize. It was suggested

roof heights be raised. After tweaking the plans, the group will again either accept or make more revisions. Sullivan thinks they will be accepted and a group of volunteers will begin assembly Aug. 10.

The Glenridge Avenue parklet is expected to be installed the same weekend, said Cronk.

Parklets began three years ago in Montclair, first with a set-aside artificial turf space for a day. Then, a wooden boardwalk-like platform was installed for a few weeks on Glenridge Avenue. The one being by planned Bike and Walk for this summer and fall is being designed by Montclair resident Alex Nunez of Colectivo Workshop.

“It’s much more elaborate and artistic. It will have a roof and walls,” said Sullivan.

Although the parklets will be welcoming stops for anyone passing by, events already planned for the spaces include mini pop-up art galleries, acoustic music concerts, lectures, a moving library and horticultural events. Groups that have already booked an evening in what Sullivan describes as an outdoor living room at the Walnut Street parklet include the local knitting group and book clubs. The Walnut Street space will also include a chalk board and sandbox.

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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.

“It’s really a wonderful, local grassroots movement,” he said.

The Walnut Street parklet will be assembled by a group of volunteers.

Cronk said the one on Glenridge will be less elaborate, as the design created by Montclair-based designer Shaun Killman, was met with some challenges due to the pitch of the road. The plan calls for three open wooden platforms.

While the tiny parks can run as high as \$25,000, the one on Walnut will be under \$5,000 due to the volunteer efforts of both designers and builders. The Bike and Walk parklet was funded through donations and a major sponsorship from Corso 98. Nunez also donated his time. The BID received a sponsorship from Schumacher Insurance Agency. Parklets are built according to strict guidelines from Together North Jersey. They must be ADA-accessible with a two-foot buffer between the parklet and the traffic lanes. In addition, Sullivan said, parklets can only be installed on streets with a 25 mph speed limit.

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

Parklets are not without some controversy as some do not like the idea of taking up precious parking spots for months at a time which results in loss of parking revenue for the town and some aggravations for motoring visitors in search of parking.

But Sullivan said parklets encourage visitors to walk the business districts.

“You go to a cafe and then jump into your car. But, there’s life along these streets,” Sullivan said.

Cyndi Steiner, the executive director of the New Jersey Bike Walk Coalition, said businesses near a parklet project in Philadelphia experienced 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.

Cronk said they are planning ribbon cuttings for the spaces and may hold a mini bike-and-walk-a-thon for opening day. The opening date is still to be determined at this time.

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