



MEMORANDUM

TO: Joyce Phillips, Senior Planner

FROM: Mark Russell, Deputy Public Works Director
Sophie Stimson, Transportation Planning Supervisor

DATE: January 13, 2021

SUBJECT: Comments on Proposed Comprehensive Plan Amendment to remove the Log Cabin Road Extension and other proposed street connections within LBA Woods Park

The City of Olympia Public Works Department does not support the proposed Comprehensive Plan amendment to remove the Log Cabin Road Extension and other street connections within LBA Woods from the Comprehensive Plan.

In addition to being in the Comprehensive Plan, the Log Cabin Extension is also in the 2045 Regional Transportation Plan. It is significant both for Olympia and the region's transportation system. A change of this magnitude should be evaluated for all its impacts, local and regional.

Because a detailed evaluation is needed, we recommend reviewing the Log Cabin Extension and other street connections within LBA Woods in the context of a broader Comprehensive Plan update. The Comprehensive Plan update process provides the time for this type of evaluation and the forum for community and policy maker discussion. An update to the Comprehensive Plan is scheduled to occur between 2022 and 2025, with adoption planned in 2025.

Policy background to street connections:

New streets are needed to complete the transportation network for several reasons, including dispersing traffic. By dispersing traffic across a connected street network, streets can stay small. Connected streets also mean more direct routes, which allows for faster emergency response times, shorter detour routes during construction, and more efficient commercial deliveries.

A well-connected street grid also makes it easier for people to walk and bike, and it makes transit routing easier and more direct. Smaller streets with fewer vehicles are safer and more inviting for people walking or biking. More direct routes are crucial for pedestrians and bicyclists, who are very sensitive to distance.

The Comprehensive Plan includes specific language and guidance on street connections, and it proposes them in parts of the City where the blocks are large, trips are longer, and traffic is concentrated on a few streets that are spaced far apart.

Background to the Log Cabin Extension:

The Log Cabin Road extension is proposed to connect Boulevard Road to Wiggins Road in the future. This street connection has been identified as a need for both the local and regional transportation system. The project would improve east-west mobility for southeast Olympia and Lacey. It would serve motor vehicles, pedestrians, and bicyclists. The project is likely not needed for 15-20 years.

Relationship to LBA Woods:

In 2016, the City purchased land that was slated for housing to create a park, LBA Woods. At that time, the City re-evaluated the need for the Log Cabin street connection, given the change in land use from housing to park/open space. It was determined that the new road was still needed, but farther in the future, closer to the 20-year horizon. As part of the decision to purchase the land to create a park, the City Council also used transportation capital funds to purchase right-of-way for the Log Cabin extension.

As part of the 2016 evaluation, we examined the traffic impacts of not building the extension of Log Cabin. We found that traffic would increase on other east-west streets to the degree that the City would need to make significant capital investments on them. We looked at widening Morse-Merryman Road and improving Yelm Highway and 18th Avenue to allow for more traffic flow. We found these projects to be much more costly and impactful than building the Log Cabin Road extension. Widening Morse-Merryman would significantly impact existing properties and homes along the street.

In 2016, we also reconsidered the proposed street design for the Log Cabin extension. The original design was a two-lane road with a median and bike lanes, sidewalks and planter strips on both sides. After the redesign, we were able to reduce the overall road width. This allowed us to better integrate the street into the park design and seemed appropriate, given that it was not serving as direct access to homes. The proposed narrower street design through the park is a two-lane street with a paved bike and pedestrian path on the north side, separated from the street by a planted buffer.

Regional implications:

Several projects have already been built with the assumption that the Log Cabin extension would be constructed in the future:

- The City of Lacey has completed its section of this regional corridor, the Mullen Road Extension, between College Street and Ruddell Road. The Log Cabin connection would complete the corridor from Wiggins to Boulevard.
- Thurston County's Yelm Highway project also assumed the east-west connection of Log Cabin Road would be built.
- Olympia's Boulevard/Morse-Merryman roundabout was also built with the assumption that the Log Cabin Road extension would be constructed, and it assumed that Morse-Merryman Road would not be widened.

Before any decision is made to remove the street connection from the Comprehensive Plan, the impacts to the regional network would need to be understood, and a discussion of those impacts with neighboring jurisdictions would need to occur.

Staff recommendation not to support amendment:

Removing the Log Cabin extension will have an impact to mobility for the community in the immediate area, as well as the regional transportation system. An in-depth evaluation is needed to understand the impacts of removing it and other street connections. Because the Log Cabin extension is not needed in the near term, there is no urgency to pursue these changes through an amendment process. The Comprehensive Plan update process, which must occur at least every eight years, is the appropriate time to reevaluate these transportation system needs in a broader context.