




MEMORANDUM

TO: Olympia Planning Commission

FROM: Sophie Stimson, Senior Planner
Public Works Transportation 

DATE: November 26, 2012

SUBJECT: Background and Status of Street Connections at Decatur Street and 16th Avenue

This memo is in response to the Olympia Planning Commission's (OPC) questions related to Decatur Street and 16th Avenue. The following information provides the history of decisions related to, and the status of, these street connections.

Street connectivity is emphasized in the current *Olympia Comprehensive Plan* (Comp Plan). In 2009, City Council accepted the *Olympia Transportation Mobility Strategy* report and connectivity emerged as a major policy area. Street connectivity policy helps to achieve many transportation objectives: access, safety, efficiency, and mode choice.

The July draft of the Comp Plan continues to emphasize the value of street connections and the development of a more connected grid. While reworded, the proposed updated policies are consistent with the current plan.

Status of Decatur Street and 16th Avenue Connections

The status of the proposed street connections at Decatur Street and 16th Avenue is captured in ordinance 6389 adopted by City Council in 2006 and reads as follows:

"Any decision on whether to connect Decatur Street to Caton Way (south of the existing end of Decatur Street) and open 16th Avenue (west of Fern Street) as through vehicular connections will not be made until the Westside Access and Traffic Circulation Study is complete."

This direction resulting from the 2006 ordinance is referenced in the current comp plan, and is referenced in the same manner in the July draft of the updated comp plan.

West Olympia Access Study (formerly "Westside Access and Traffic Circulation Study")

The West Olympia Access Study (WOAS) examines transportation access and circulation needs on the Westside, including highway access and multimodal improvements to the local street system. Phase I of the WOAS, related to access to US 101, was complete in 2010; Phase II

related to the local street system is not yet complete. City Council approved funding for Phase II, with work anticipated to begin in 2013.

Background to the Decatur Street and 16th Avenue Connections

- 1990s 4th/5th Avenue Corridor Planning: In the early 1990's, the City developed a vision for the 4th and 5th Avenue Corridor, as part of the need to replace the 4th Avenue Bridge. At the time of the discussions, the public voiced concern about the additional traffic in the southwest neighborhood that would result from bridge construction.
- 1990s Neighborhood Traffic Management Program: The City established a new program called the Neighborhood Traffic Management Program (NTMP). In response to the future construction of the 4th and 5th Avenue corridor, and in anticipation of new street connections in the Southwest neighborhood, a project was developed to build traffic calming devices on several Southwest neighborhood streets.
- 2000 16th Avenue Street Opening: New private development projects adjacent to 16th Avenue and Fern Street leads to connection of these streets.
- 2001 Earthquake: The Nisqually Earthquake damages and closes the 4th Avenue bridge and Deschutes Parkway. Traffic flow in the area is affected by the closures. The replacement of the 4th Avenue bridge project is accelerated.
- 2001 STP Grant Funds: The City receives Surface Transportation Program (STP) grant funds for the construction of the Decatur Street connection.
- 2001 16th Avenue closes: The connection from 16th Avenue to Fern Street is closed based on the August 28, 2001 City Council resolution M-1486. The resolution states that 16th Avenue/Fern Street will be reopened to motorized traffic concurrent with the opening of Decatur Street (anticipated in 2003) and Deschutes Parkway, conditioned on the review and determination of other connection alternatives in the area.
- December 11, 2001, City Council Study Session and December 18, 2001, Consent Calendar, Connecting Streets in South Westside Neighborhood: City Council holds a study session to debrief on the 16th Avenue experience, and to review opportunities for additional connections to improve traffic flow in the Southwest neighborhood.

Council decides to delay the Decatur Street connection and street improvements, and redirect STP funds to another project. The specifics on this decision include:

- Delay planned design and construction of the Decatur Street connection and street improvements until 2004 or after completion of the Gateway Corridor improvements and Deschutes Parkway reconstruction, whichever is later.

- Redirect the STP funding that is earmarked for the Decatur Street improvements to the 18th Avenue/Elizabeth Street/14th Avenue from Hoffman Road to the Lacey City Limits.
 - Incorporate the Decatur Street connection portion of the project into the Transportation Impact Fee rate schedule in 2002.
 - Proceed with defining the project scope (including incorporating the Fern Street/16th Avenue Connection) for the Decatur Street corridor improvements in the 2002-2003 timeframe. The Decatur Street corridor study will include a review of potential impacts of the new connections to the South Westside Neighborhood.
 - Develop a work plan that responds to the policy level questions posed in the staff report, and bring it to the City Council for consideration.
- March 16, 2004, City Council meeting, *Scoping and Public Involvement for the Decatur and Fern Street/16th Avenue Connections*: The City Council decides to refer the issues of a non-vehicle Decatur Street connection and a Westside study to the Land Use and Environment Committee (LUEC). At this March Council meeting, there was extensive discussion, including information on traffic flow changes, as a result of opening of the streets.

The regional traffic model describes anticipated traffic volume changes if Decatur Street and 16th Avenue were open to motor vehicles:

- Decatur Street would see 2,800 vehicles per day with traffic calming
- Fern Street would see 1,900 vehicles per day with traffic calming
- A total of 4,700 vehicles per day would use these new connections

Nearby intersections would see these changes:

- 9th Avenue and Black Lake Boulevard would be reduced by 1,400 vehicles per day. (Note that when 16th Avenue was open for a period in 2001, 9th Avenue at Black Lake was reduced by 1,600 vehicles per day.)
 - 4th Avenue at the top of the bridge would see traffic volumes reduced by 2,000 vehicles per day.
 - Black Lake and Cooper Point would see traffic volumes reduced by 2,500 vehicles per day.
- November 9, 2004, City Council meeting, *Decatur Street and Fern Street/16th Avenue Street Connections*: The Council supports the LUEC's October 18, 2004 recommendation. Council decides to retain the Decatur Street and 16th Avenue street connection in the Comp Plan and Regional Transportation Plan. Other decisions are to construct a bicycle and pedestrian access at Decatur Street and develop the 16th Avenue street connection to allow for emergency vehicle access. More specifically, the Council decides:

- Retain the Decatur Street and 16th Avenue openings as vehicle traffic connections in the Comp Plan and Regional Transportation Plan pending completion of the Westside Access and Traffic Circulation Study and future Council decision. Add text to reflect that any decision on whether to open Decatur Street and 16th Avenue as vehicular connections will not be made until the Westside Access and Traffic Circulation Study is complete.
 - Revise Decatur Street Capital Facilities Plan project for a bicycle and pedestrian trail access connection only. Revise the 16th Avenue connection to add only emergency vehicle access.
 - Continue work with the Washington State Department of Transportation to develop timeframe for the Westside Access and Traffic Circulation Study.
- December 26, 2005, City Council approval of Ordinance related to Comp Plan Amendments: Council's 2004 decision leads to Council's formal decision captured in ordinance 6389 which adopts several Comp Plan amendments. Final approval of the ordinance is January 24, 2006. The comp plan is amended to include this text:

"Any decision on whether to connect Decatur Street to Caton Way (south of the existing end of Decatur Street) and open 16th Avenue (west of Fern Street) as through vehicular connections will not be made until the Westside Access and Traffic Circulation Study is complete."
 - 2009 Transportation Mobility Strategy: City Council accepts the *Olympia Transportation Mobility Strategy* report and street connectivity is a major policy emphasis. A "Route Directness Index" tool is recommended to measure relative connectivity in areas of the city.
 - May 2010 WOAS Phase I: West Olympia Access Study Phase I complete. The City and WSDOT agree to ramp changes to improve access to US 101.
 - November 2010 Scope for WOAS Phase II: West Olympia Access Study Phase II Scope of Work is reviewed and supported by Council's Finance Committee and LUEC. This scope will address local street issues, including network connectivity. Funding for this work is secured. The decision to delay Phase II is based on: 1) avoiding any confusion that may result from conducting two public involvement processes (Phase II and the Comp Plan Update) at the same time; and, 2) the limited availability of staff during the comp plan update process. Phase II is anticipated to begin in 2013
 - 2010-2012 Comp Plan Update Process: The Comp Plan update process is underway and street connectivity continues to be a policy focus. There is no change proposed to the status of the Decatur Street and 16th Avenue street connections in the July draft; these street connections are mentioned in the same manner as in the current comp plan.

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A packet of the staff reports and minutes from the City Council meetings referenced here can be emailed to OPC members upon request.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me via email at sstimson@ci.olympia.wa.us or by telephone at (360) 753-8497.

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