

May 8, 2013

Olympia City Council
Olympia, WA

Dear Mayor Buxbaum and City Council Members:

The Olympia Planning Commission worked diligently over the last three-and-a-half years to develop its recommendations for the latest update of the City's Comprehensive Plan. During this time we attempted to provide citizens multiple and varied opportunities to comment and be heard. Many of the policies put forward by staff and the Commission resulted directly from community input.

I feel honored to have been part of this process and hope that the revised vision, values, goals, and policies we are proposing will provide a solid foundation for your continued work on the plan. I am confident the work of the Council, Commission, and staff will result in a plan that citizens can be proud of and will help Olympia become a better place to live for all of us.

While we were able to cover a lot of ground, the Commission did not have time to address every issue of importance and some issues that were addressed we would like to have addressed more thoroughly.

In this letter, I would like to point out the following key issues that I believe need further work by the Council or the Commission:

1. Of great importance is development of vibrant mixed-use communities that accommodate anticipated population increases while maintaining the historic, livable neighborhoods that contribute so much to the character of the city. The Commission's concept is to focus much of the city's growth in urban nodes, including downtown, the area between Martin and Pacific on the east side, and the area around Capital Mall on the west side. The Commission did excellent work on this proposal prior to approving our recommendations in March. The five commissioners remaining in April continued work on the proposal and are submitting more refined language as an addendum to the original proposal. I hope the Council will accept the adopted recommendations and the future land use map included with the addendum. With the Council's approval, the Commission could further refine the proposal as part of our work program.

2. The Commission did not have time to delve into downtown planning issues. Based on community input, downtown development is important to many people and I think we should begin work on this planning sooner rather than later. I hope that Council will allow the Commission to begin developing a process for a community-wide downtown planning process. This process could serve as a model for subarea planning, which is among the significant changes in the comprehensive plan update.

Based on the proposed public participation policies and goals in the draft plan as well as other input we have heard, I believe the downtown planning effort should involve a broad segment of the community. The Council could create an ad hoc committee consisting of residents, business owners, state and county officials, developers, business owners, neighborhood representatives, advisory committee members, community experts in disciplines such as environment, planning, and transportation, and representatives of other key stakeholder groups. An urban planning/urban design firm could be contracted to provide leadership and guidance to the group. The Council could either serve as the steering committee, or create one, to guide the ad hoc group as their work evolves. It is essential that the community has maximum input into the downtown plan and that there is buy-in from a broad range of community groups, business and development interests, neighborhoods, and the general population as the downtown plan takes shape. This downtown planning effort could also model the planning effort for the other two nodes the Planning Commission identified.

The Commission recommended that the Downtown Plan not be a component of the Comprehensive Plan. I support that concept. But the Comprehensive Plan should provide guidance for the plan's development. It would be appropriate for the Planning Commission to work on this guidance as a work plan item for submittal to the Council. To a large extent, the plan provides principles to guide the work of potential downtown planning committees, but additional clarity made be needed in areas such as height limits, integration with the Shoreline Management Plan, use of form-based codes, parking policies, preservation of historical features, creation of downtown districts, traffic calming, walkability and biking, and examination of the current one-way couplet through downtown.

3. The City should continue to look at our urban growth boundaries and how our less urban communities toward the periphery of the city and in the urban growth areas are developing. We should examine how to make all communities more walkable and transit-friendly. This work may appropriately be done in cooperation with the county and our neighboring cities. As a part of this effort, we could look also at the cost of

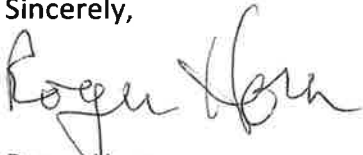
providing infrastructure to these areas and how to provide alternatives to septic systems.

4. Another issue that would benefit from further analysis and emphasis is pedestrian safety. I believe that this is a critical comprehensive plan issue. We should be working toward a zero pedestrian fatality goal as part of our 20-year plan. The Commission proposal includes a policy in the Transportation chapter (PT1.3) that would reduce speed limits on local access streets from 25 to 20 miles per hour. While the proposed plan supports safer crossings, it may be appropriate to emphasize adding well-spaced crossings on all arterials, particularly those with large block size, and increasing enforcement of the yield-to-pedestrian laws. Lastly, the City could add policies supporting public education geared toward students, drivers, and walkers on respecting pedestrians, the importance and value of walking, and the motorist's and pedestrian's role in achieving the zero pedestrian fatality goal.

There are several other issues that need further work, but I will leave it to my Planning Commission colleagues to bring these forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to work on the Comprehensive Plan and to present my views in this letter. I look forward to our continuing work with the Council on the Comprehensive Plan, development regulations, action plan, subarea plans, and other related efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Roger Horn".

Roger Horn
Member, Olympia Planning Commission

