

To: The Olympia City Council
 From: The Olympia Heritage Commission
 Date: November 30, 2016
RE: Downtown Strategy Draft Recommendations on Heritage

The Olympia Heritage Commission, in its role as caretaker of Olympia's historic built environment, provides the following comments in response to the Downtown Strategy Recommended Action List, dated October 29, 2016.

The Heritage Commission has actively participated in the Downtown Strategy attending the many public meetings as well as meeting directly with the consultants on issues relating to historic preservation. Throughout the process participants – retail business, public, planners all - have given voice to the importance of preserving the sense of place that is uniquely Olympia. Downtown Olympia is an historic district and its built environment is a major contributor to this sense of place. The challenge for all of us is to preserve what is unique and special while building to meet future needs. A balance can be struck that provides both for development that provides a graceful transition from historic to new construction, and new development of quality and character that in time will come to define the sense of place that is uniquely Olympia.

To that end, we believe the City of Olympia will be best served by adopting the Secretary of Interior Standards for Rehabilitation as the guide for design in downtown and in areas adjacent to the historic district. The Standards are nationally developed and recognized guidelines that have stood the test of time in preserving the historic character of the built environment and can best guide decision making that preserves Olympia's unique historic character. The Standards do not preclude new development but provide guidance to ensure that new construction is compatible with what currently exists, providing a graceful transition from historic to new construction.

The adoption of these standards is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and the Action Plan goals of ensuring predictable permitting processes for business/development with opportunities for strategic incentives and should be given consideration as the city proceeds with updating city design standards to achieve the Action Plan strategies:

- *Encourage investment while preserving Downtown's unique and historic qualities;*
- *Preserve and promote the unique historic and cultural features.*

In addition we offer these comments to Specific Proposed Actions in the Downtown Strategy Recommended Action List:

Land Use 1: *Develop and adopt a land use, circulation, design, and environmental enhancement plan to the isthmus:*

The Isthmus is adjacent to the historic district and needs to be developed in a manner compatible with the historic downtown without historical imitation. The view across the Isthmus is preserved in the 2014 Comprehensive Plan (PL3.3 Protect historic vistas from the Capitol Campus to Budd Inlet and the Olympic Mountains and from Budd Inlet to the Capitol Group.)

Land Use 5: *Examine potential expansion of historic district boundary and/or designation of additional historic structures*

This action will preserve the historic, human scale character of downtown enjoyed by Olympia residents and tourists. It is consistent as outlined above with the Action Plan strategies related to preserving the unique historic features.

Land Use 6: *Identify buildings and tools appropriate for adaptive reuse, and promote this package of tools.*

After the completion of the current architecture inventory, we propose a detailed architectural analysis be done in order to guide development for adaptive reuse that is compatible with the historic character of downtown.

Finally, we ask the city to make changes to the design review process that promotes preservation of historic buildings and development adjacent to the historic district. Specifically, we recommend adding a fifth member of the Heritage Commission to the Joint Design Review Board. Currently, historic preservation is not equally represented in the actions taken by the Joint Design Review Board when historic buildings and the historic district

are under review. We recognize this will require the Heritage Commission to step up and provide more representation. We are committed to meeting the challenge.

In closing we commend the extensive work of Makers, the OP&D department, the Stakeholders, and the public participation in workshops and surveys. The City's vision for a vibrant downtown is one we share.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of the downtown.

Respectfully,

Holly Davies, Chair
Olympia Heritage Commission

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