

Olympia Planning Commission

October 3, 2017

Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967
Olympia, WA 98507

Dear Mayor Selby and City Councilmembers:

The Olympia Planning Commission (OPC) is pleased to report on its annual review of the *City of Olympia's 2018-2023 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan (Draft CFP)*.

We wish to thank the members of the OPC's Finance Subcommittee for their work on this review. The Subcommittee was comprised of Commissioners Mike Auderer, Rad Cunningham, Paula Ehlers, and Carole Richmond. We also wish to thank the members of the public who testified and provided written comment, as well as the program staff who generously provided of their time to answer questions.

We commend capital facilities program staff for producing a document that is thorough, clear, and concise. We find that the proposed capital projects are consistent with, and further the policies and goals of, the Comprehensive Plan.

PARKS, ARTS AND RECREATION

The 2018 Parks, Arts, and Recreation section of the Draft CFP is based on the Capital Investment Strategy adopted in the 2016 Parks, Arts, and Recreation Plan. In carrying out the strategy, we are pleased to note that multiple types of park uses are addressed in the Draft CFP to some degree, including a pool feasibility study, off-road bicycle park, Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) upgrades, a dog park concept plan and site consideration, athletic fields, as well as a cultural resource study. The variety of projects seems well-suited to meeting the needs of a wide range of Olympia residents.

Parkland Acquisition

In 2017, the City exercised an Option to purchase the Bentrige parcel, which is the final remaining piece of LBA Woods. The Parks Department plans to set aside more than \$14 million for parkland acquisition over the next 6 years, to be funded through the sale of \$10 million in Bond Anticipation Notes, as well as revenues from the voted and non-voted utility taxes. The Draft CFP notes, however, that the "open space inventory will need to be substantially increased" to not fall below the target Level of Service over the next 20 years.

Thanks to the voter-approved Metropolitan Parks District and tax levy, funding has been increased to maintain the facilities that we have. A steady revenue source over the years will ensure that the \$4 million maintenance backlog continues to fall.

Percival Landing

The Parks Department continues to make progress on Percival Landing maintenance and reconstruction. Voter approval of the Metropolitan Parks District tax levy in 2016 is speeding up completion of the many projects involved in replacing Olympia's public waterfront facility on Percival Landing. For example, it is allowing the Department to build reserve funds for both maintenance and current Phase 2 work, which includes:

- New sheet pile bulkhead replacement (\$3 million)
- Repairs conducted over the next 3 to 5 years (\$700,000), and
- "D" and "E" float replacements (\$4 million).

The City is pursuing grants and other funding sources to augment City funding for these projects, and has received a Legislative appropriation of \$921,500 to fund a portion of the bulkhead replacement.

Recommendations:

Percival Landing maintenance and reconstruction includes complex, challenging and expensive projects and the work can only proceed as funding becomes available. The Parks Department appears to be doing an excellent job of scheduling design, engineering, and repairs, while actively fund-raising to complete the work.

If there is one omission in this otherwise well-balanced section of the Draft CFP, it might be any reference to downtown urban or "pocket" parks, which have been discussed informally as a possible new category of parkland. While the Downtown Strategy relies on "privately owned public spaces," such as the plaza fronting the Hands On Children's Museum, it is unclear whether the additional 5,000 people expected to live downtown in the next 20 years will have adequate green space and outdoor recreational opportunities to meet required Level of Service and/or Comprehensive Plan goals and policies. Climate change is also expected to increase the ambient temperature of paved urban areas, which could be offset by planting more shade trees downtown.

We thank the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee for its letter to the Commission and concur that future annual CFP updates should expedite ADA retrofits to the extent possible, as no one should be denied access to our existing parks and recreation facilities.

TRANSPORTATION

The City's Public Works Department has committed to developing a 20-year *Transportation Master Plan*,

beginning in 2017. When completed over the next 2-3 years, this Plan will update data and models, enabling more accuracy in traffic and multi-modal transportation projections, as well as identify and prioritize long-term transportation projects and the funding amounts and sources needed for their implementation. This Plan will provide needed guidance for development of the 6-year CFP transportation project list and refine the City's ability to achieve concurrency of projects with population growth.

As in previous years, major challenges include building and replacing sidewalks, encouraging cycling by providing safe bicycle access, and maintaining our existing road system. Funding for these projects comes from several sources, including the Voted and Non-Voted Utility Taxes, a portion of the gas tax, the Capitol Improvement Fund, and the Transportation Benefit District. New road construction is financed through impact fees and grants, which generally provide secure funding for road projects intended to serve new growth.

Sidewalks and Pathways

The purpose of this program is to construct new sidewalks based upon the 2004 Sidewalk Program. The program focuses on building sidewalks on at least one side of arterials, major collectors, and neighborhood collectors. Priorities include building sidewalks leading to and from schools and transit stops. The Transportation Master Plan, which is under development, will update the 2004 Sidewalk Program and evaluate the Neighborhood Pathways program.

Other than sidewalks built by developers and builders within and adjacent to subdivisions or infill lots, as required by City ordinance, sidewalk construction is the responsibility of the City. As we noted in our letter last year, there are many miles of roads frequented by pedestrians that currently do not have sidewalks because of the high cost of sidewalk construction; for example, sidewalks must now be built using pervious concrete and must often accommodate stormwater collection and drainage.

We are pleased that public input provided through the Sub-Area planning process has led to the addition of a sidewalk project in the Draft CFP. The 26th Avenue sidewalk project, from Bethel Street to Gull Harbor Road, is a high priority for the Olympia Northeast Neighborhood Association. We encourage the City to consider and include in future CFPs capital projects identified in future Sub-Area plans, as these will already have gone through local review and vetting, and respond to an identified neighborhood priority.

We are aware that the City is currently evaluating its "fee-in-lieu of sidewalk" option for builders and developers. This option would allow builders and developers to pay the City for the cost of building a sidewalk, rather than build the sidewalk themselves. Builders point to a concern about liability when only a portion of sidewalk is built, creating potential obstacles for pedestrians. The benefit to the City would be that it could use those fees to fund the highest priority projects in the City, rather than be limited to the area immediately fronting a builder's project. There are a number of issues to resolve before this option could be adopted by the City, but it could benefit both parties. We encourage further analysis of this issue.

Recommendations

Sidewalks help meet the Comprehensive Plan goals of promoting health and safety and reducing dependence on automobiles. While the voted utility tax increased available funding for sidewalk construction throughout Olympia, funding still falls short of need. We recommend that the City explore options for increasing revenue to address the gap between the need for new sidewalks and available funding. One option would be to increase parking fees. The Planning Commission recommends considering expanding revenue from parking meters and parking lots by increasing fees and/or hours to help fund additional sidewalk improvements.

As requested by the Olympia Downtown Association, we would also like to recommend that the City prioritize sidewalk reconstruction downtown. We agree with the ODA that all hazardous sidewalks should be repaired and rendered safe for walking. We urge the Council to fund all needed sidewalk repairs and replacement downtown as soon as possible, starting in the Historic District, which attracts many visitors.

Cycling

Cycling projects have been included in the Draft CFP for the first time. The purpose of this program is to complete elements of the bicycle network. The bicycle network consists of bike corridors on low volume, low-stress streets improved for bicycle travel, while other improvements consist of addressing gaps and spot improvements in the bike lane network. Generally, new bike lanes are added in the Street Repair and Reconstruction program as part of Complete Street Reconstruction. A total of \$100,000 per year for the next 6 years is budgeted from the CIP fund for these improvements.

Recommendation

Of particular concern to members of the cycling community is the lack of protected bike lanes, which would include a physical barrier between cars and bicycles. Unfortunately, many streets in Olympia are not wide enough to accommodate all uses separately. We recommend that when a decision is made to include bicycle lanes, that the City prioritize protected lanes whenever possible. These are what will make a real difference in the willingness of people to ride their bikes downtown and elsewhere.

Street Repair and Reconstruction

The City uses a pavement condition rating system to evaluate the condition of our street surfaces. Depending upon the level of deterioration, a project may require minor preservation work, such as chip sealing, a simple resurfacing, or full reconstruction. A major emphasis of the program is to preserve the condition of a street before it deteriorates to a point that full reconstruction is needed.

Currently, the City has a deferred maintenance backlog of about \$48 million. Addressing this backlog

would bring the streets that are in poor condition up to a fair and good condition.

Complete street reconstruction addresses the streets with pavement in the worst condition. These reconstruction projects add bicycle and pedestrian facilities at the time the street is reconstructed. Mottman Road from Mottman Court to the west of SPSCC will undergo complete reconstruction, but work will not start until 2019. In 2018, five streets downtown will be resurfaced for a total of \$2.8 million.

Transportation Projects with Impact Fees

Transportation projects funded with impact fees are projects that are needed to serve anticipated new growth consistent with the 2040 Regional Transportation Plan, the Olympia Comprehensive Plan, and requirements of the Growth Management Act.

The Commission recognizes that some projects have been included in the Capital Facilities Plan for several consecutive years, without being completed as planned. This can occur for various reasons, such as when growth and the collection of impact fees have not occurred at the rate originally anticipated, or when anticipated grant funding has not yet been secured. The City continues to collect more data and to refine its transportation models to increase accuracy. Current development trends indicate that planned development will occur as projected.

Recommendations

We encourage continued efforts to fund and construct projects before road conditions fall below adopted transportation level of service standards – in this case, how long cars have to wait before passing through intersections – to provide adequate transportation facilities that meet the needs of both existing residents and new growth, and to be able to use impact fees for needed transportation projects. Some of these projects can be significant, such as the Fones Road widening project, which will require a mix of funding sources, including impact fees and grants, in order to be realized.

If the entire project cannot be built within the six years as projected in the plan because of shortfalls in expected funding, the city should consider breaking the project into smaller projects in order to ensure concurrency and/or that road conditions do not fall below required transportation level of service standards. The City should also consider funding arrangements that could allow future users of a project to pay for a fair share of a completed project, somewhat like late-comer agreements.

PUBLIC UTILITIES

Drinking Water, Wastewater, Storm and Surface Water, and Solid Waste Programs are critical programs for any city. Because these programs in Olympia are funded largely through General Facility Charges and user fees (utility rates), the adequacy of funding for needed projects is generally available. This has been

particularly true for the City since the recession ended and Olympia began to experience significant growth and development. The City's public utilities meet or exceed all required level of service standards and enjoys exceptional water quality, as well as adequate groundwater supplies to meet demand through at least 2050.

SUMMARY

The Olympia Planning Commission and its Finance Subcommittee appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and recommendations regarding the 2018-2023 Capital Facilities Plan. We hope the Council finds them helpful in their budget deliberations. We will gladly answer any questions that might arise from this letter.

We also would like to express our appreciation for the work of all those who helped develop the Draft CFP. Many thanks to Joyce Phillips for her diligent and always cheerful support and guidance of our Finance Subcommittee. We would also like to thank the Utility Advisory Committee, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee for their review and letters.

Sincerely,



Brian Mark, CHAIR
Olympia Planning Commission



Carole Richmond, CHAIR
OPC Finance Subcommittee