

## Isthmus Planning Process – February 23, 2014

### Why focus on the Isthmus?

Olympia’s downtown is the urban center for the entire region; residents and business owners would all benefit from a more active, vibrant downtown. However, the isthmus area, at a key entry point to the downtown, is widely recognized as “blighted,” with several condemned or obsolete buildings occupying key properties. Soil contamination, soils subject to liquefaction and rising seas only contribute to the blight. Re-development is stuck despite the area’s unparalleled views and access. The City has an interest in improving the isthmus. It has invested in open space and property there, and would like to work more directly with private property owners and the community to develop an action plan so that the isthmus can flourish.

### What is community renewal, and how might it help the isthmus?

The Community Renewal Area law was created by the state specifically to give communities the tools that they need in order to help areas such as the Isthmus move forward. Washington law (RCW 35.81) allows cities to establish a Community Renewal Area through the designation of a certain geographic area that contains blight and the creation of a Community Renewal Plan for addressing blight in that area. Many Washington cities have used CRA to develop and implement redevelopment plans, including Vancouver, Shoreline, Everett, Bremerton, and Anacortes.

### What area are you talking about?



**What is the Objective of this process?**

Create several development scenarios illustrating redevelopment options for the Isthmus, in cooperation with the Citizens Advisory Committee and property owners, through a collaborative design process. These scenarios may be used to help illustrate possible paths forward for the redevelopment of the Isthmus and could be used in future a future Community Renewal Area plan following additional public outreach and involvement.

**What does the Comp Plan say about the area?**

The existing and proposed Comprehensive Plan both designate the Isthmus as UW-H or Urban Waterfront Housing and UW or Urban Water Front and contemplate and encourage mixed use residential development on the Isthmus. The UW-H land use designation allows for one floor area ratio (FAR) of commercial development on these properties with any square footage beyond that required to be used for residential purposes. The UW zone allows for a mix of residential, commercial and office uses with no limitations on the commercial component of the project.

The Vision Statement from the Land Use Chapter of the proposed Comprehensive Plan includes:

People walk throughout downtown, shop at its small businesses, enjoy its artistic offerings and gather at its many fine restaurants and meeting places. The historic Capitol Way boulevard linking the waterfront and downtown to the Capitol Campus invites and attracts residents to enjoy the City's civic space. Plazas, expanded sidewalks, and art in public places have stimulated private investment in residential development, which, in turn, has greatly increased downtown's retail and commercial vitality.

Downtown will continue to be an attractive place to live, work and play. Future office, retail and residential development will bolster downtown's role as a regional center and home of state government, commerce, and industry.

The new Comp Plan envisions the Isthmus as a combination of mixed use residential and urban waterfront.

Some goals specific to the downtown from the proposed Comp Plan:

PL1.7 Enable frequent transit service, support housing, utilize existing infrastructure, provide public improvements and concentrate new major shopping, entertainment and office uses downtown, in the medical services area of Lilly Road, near the Capital Mall, and in the urban corridors.

PL12.3 Seek opportunities to create or enhance town squares framed by commercial or civic buildings, pocket parks, plazas and other small public or private spaces in downtown or other high-density areas.

PL14.2 High-density Neighborhoods concentrate housing into a number of designated sites: downtown Olympia; Pacific/Martin/Lilly Triangle; and West Capital Mall. Commercial uses directly serve high-density neighborhoods and allow people to meet their daily needs without traveling outside their neighborhood. High-density neighborhoods are primarily walk-dependent. At least one-quarter of the forecasted growth shall be in downtown Olympia.

PL17.3 Through aggressive marketing and height bonuses, encourage intensive downtown residential and commercial development (at least 15 units and 25 employees per acre) sufficient to support frequent transit service.

Zoning for the area (UW–H and UW) limits building heights to a maximum of 35 feet.

The Shoreline Master Program affects those properties within 200 feet of the shoreline and will limit heights on the shoreline of the Isthmus to 35 feet.

A CRA Plan must be consistent with these policies and regulations.

#### **How will this work fit into a Downtown Master Plan?**

Council has approved a Planning Project Work Plan for 2014, 2015 and 2016. This plan establishes an order for the major planning projects that the City Council has on its agenda for the next three years. The downtown master plan is included in that work plan for 2015 and 2016. The work done on the Community Renewal Area and the Isthmus Urban Design process will be used to inform that effort and may provide a model for how to engage the community in urban design questions.

#### **What are some of the key Urban Design and Redevelopment Objectives?**

1. Create a vibrant mixed use area combining housing, retail, office and park space that is a destination for the community.
2. Consider the needs of existing businesses so they can grow and prosper.
3. Consider the role of the City's newly acquired park property.
4. Create an extraordinary pedestrian environment, which could include public art, public gathering spaces, outdoor dining, street vendors, performance space, retail and restaurants.
5. Consider the role that a new library, arts center or other public facility might play as an anchor for redevelopment.
6. Enhance connectivity to and through the isthmus for all transportation modes.
7. Consider parking needed to support redevelopment.
8. Consider how to eliminate blight and stimulate reinvestment.
9. Consider the role of development along Water Street, and the relationship between this area, the adjoining fountain park, capital campus and the downtown core to the east.
10. Create a graceful transition along 5<sup>th</sup> Ave from the open space of Heritage Park to the Isthmus properties to the north.
11. Consider the impacts of redevelopment on views of the State Capitol Building, Budd Inlet and the Olympic Mountains from the Law Enforcement Memorial, 4<sup>th</sup> Ave bridge, Port Plaza and other key vantage points in and around downtown.
12. Create resiliency from sea level rise.
13. Consider the future of Percival Landing.
14. Consider the viability of redevelopment proposals from an economic perspective.

### **What existing plans and conditions should be considered?**

- Comprehensive Plan – Existing and Proposed
- Market Conditions and data
- Sources of public funding and resources
- Shoreline Master Plan
- Percival Landing redevelopment
- Existing development regulations and zoning

### **What is the design process?**

We want to create a plan that represents the community's vision for the area. Remember when the earthquake took out the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue bridge in 2001? It was an extraordinary problem that created an extraordinary opportunity. Through a highly collaborative process, the community developed a shared vision for the re-design of bridge. That vision was translated into plans and ultimately into the beautiful structure that we know today as the Yashiro Friendship Bridge.

Bring your best ideas and your vision for the redevelopment of the isthmus to the table in a spirit of openness and sharing. We'd like you to help us imagine the possibilities, co-create the future, and share ideas. Let's continue the spirit of the Yoshiro Friendship Bridge and develop a plan for the isthmus that will result in something inspired by this community's vision for its future.

### **Step 1: Design workshop Pre-work (January/February)**

#### **A. Property owner meeting**

This first meeting will convene Isthmus property owners to discuss the purpose and timing of the workshop, to understand their desires, and to encourage their productive engagement in the workshop. We will also discuss with them their expectations or concerns about Isthmus area redevelopment in general, and on their properties specifically.

#### **B. CAC meeting: principles and process**

To set the workshop conversation off with the right tone, we recommend a pre-meeting with the CAC, facilitated by Fregonese Associates to accomplish the following:

- Identify a set of principles for the Isthmus that all can agree to. These principles are likely to be basic and high-level statements "the Isthmus must be improved".
- Identify any areas of disagreement or strongly held opinions that will need to be reconciled through the process.
- Identify and get buy-in on a set of re-use options that can help to test areas of agreement

Fregonese will use instant polling software to allow the CAC to remain anonymous, if they choose, in their opinions about the area's future.

The outcomes of this meeting will significantly shape the agenda and focus of the Design Workshop (described in Step 2). With an understanding of likely areas of agreement and disagreement, we can design a workshop and associated visualizations that will best meet the needs of the group.

### **C. Ad Hoc Committee Meeting**

We will check in with the Ad Hoc Committee following these two meetings to report findings from the property owner meeting and CAC meeting, and to review a preliminary agenda and process in advance of the design workshop.

## **Step 2: Design workshop and follow up**

### **A. CAC Design Workshop**

The Consultant and the City will host a workshop with CAC members (including key property owners) to address issues raised in previous CAC meetings. The workshop will focus on the Isthmus, and be organized as a half-day workshop, facilitated by Leila Aman or John Fregonese from Fregonese Associates. ECO will work with Fregonese Associates and City staff to design the details of the workshop, but in general, it will follow this format:

We recommend scheduling the workshop for late-February or early March to give ample time to recruit participants and develop workshop materials.

- ECO will present the work completed to date, including the market analysis for downtown Olympia. This is important context for understanding the challenges to redevelopment, but also the imperative for action for downtown.
- The purpose of the workshop will be to work toward agreement on potential uses, public improvements, and design characteristics for the Isthmus properties.
- Fregonese Associates effectively uses instant polling technology to anonymously “take the temperature” of participants, and would use this technology for this workshop to move participants toward consensus by providing value statements about area redevelopment and determining the degree of agreement with those statements.

Ideally, after the workshop, Fregonese Associates will design one or two (depending on the degree of agreement) conceptual diagrams.

### **B. Ad Hoc Committee Meeting**

We will meet with the Ad Hoc Committee following the CAC meeting to debrief and determine an approach the third meeting.

## **Step 3: CAC meeting**

The results will be presented at the third and final CAC meeting, along with ideas on how to implement them, to get feedback on how to incorporate the results into a CRA Plan, thoughts about next steps for additional community engagement and to describe and get feedback on lessons learned through the process.

**What are the next steps?**

Following the Urban Design Workshop the Community and Economic Revitalization Committee and City Council will determine next steps in this process. These steps will include broader public outreach and participation.