



## City Council

### Approval of Downtown Welcome Center Proposal

**Agenda Date:** 2/10/2015  
**Agenda Item Number:** 3.D  
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**Type:** decision **Version:** 1 **Status:** Consent Calendar

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#### Title

Approval of Downtown Welcome Center Proposal

#### Recommended Action

##### Committee Recommendation:

Authorize staff to contract with Capital Recovery Center for the establishment and management of a Downtown Welcome Center one year pilot project, contingent upon signed memorandums of understanding with partnering organizations.

##### City Manager Recommendation:

Move to authorize staff to contract with Capital Recovery Center for the establishment and management of a Downtown Welcome Center one year pilot project, contingent upon signed memorandums of understanding with partnering organizations.

#### Report

##### Issue:

City Council allocated \$20,000 from the 2015 parking fund to establish a Downtown Welcome Center (DWC) for visitors and tourists. A proposal has been brought forward involving several downtown stakeholders.

##### Staff Contact:

Brian Wilson, Downtown Liaison, Community Planning & Development, 360.570.3798

##### Presenter(s):

No Presentation - Consent Item

##### Background and Analysis:

During 2015 budget discussions, Mayor Pro Tem Jones proposed and City Council allocated \$20,000 for a Storefront Partnership to be paid from the Parking Fund. The specific proposal states:

*Storefront Partnership - \$20,000; Partner with PBIA, VCB, Ambassadors, and ODA to create a "welcoming center" in the core of downtown. The storefront would provide information for visitors and newcomers, would provide an open presence for people looking for local resources or attractions, would support office activities for any of the four organizations, plus*

*Police Volunteers, special events staff, and others.*

Staff met with representatives from the Parking & Business Improvement Area (PBIA), Visitor & Convention Bureau (VCB), Downtown Ambassador Program (DAP), and Olympia Downtown Association (ODA) to discuss how all of the organizations can work together to establish a “Downtown Welcome Center” and fulfill the vision provided by Council.

At the January 28, 2015 General Government meeting City and DAP staff presented a model for the Downtown Welcome Center that reflected Mayor Pro Tem Jones’ vision outlined above. Staff made clear that the space will not serve as a social service drop-in center, intake center, or public restroom.

### **Steering Committee**

The General Government committee recommended that a steering committee be formed to meet regularly and review performance measurements while providing feedback to Capital Recovery Center staff. They will also be involved in a business planning process involving the Economic Development Council (EDC) of Thurston County. The steering committee will consist of representatives from City Council, PBIA, VCB, ODA, and City Staff. The General Government committee recommended that Councilmember Jeannine Roe represent the Council on the steering committee.

### **Role of Organizations**

- City of Olympia
  - Participate in the steering committee at a Council and staff level
  - Provide staff support for data analysis and creation of a three-year business plan
- Downtown Ambassador Program
  - Participate in the steering committee
  - Monitor day-to-day operation of the Downtown Welcome Center
  - Assist in volunteer recruitment
  - Assure that performance statistics are collected on a daily basis
  - Work with City staff to produce data reports for the steering committee to review
- Visitor & Convention Bureau
  - Train volunteers to staff the Downtown Welcome Center
  - Assist with volunteer recruitment

- Provide direction on appropriate performance measurements
- Parking & Business Improvement Area Board
  - Participate in the steering committee
  - Assist in the design concept
  - Assist with volunteer recruitment through internal communication with ratepayers
- Olympia Downtown Association
  - Participate in the steering committee
  - Assist in promoting the Downtown Welcome Center by incorporating the space in event planning when appropriate (i.e. Girls Night Out)
  - Provide promotional materials for upcoming events to distribute to visitors

## **Location**

The location chosen for the pilot project of the Downtown Welcome Center is 301 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue East. This location was chosen for several reasons:

- In 2011, Project for Public Spaces conducted multiple “place audits” with over 200 Olympia residents ranging from elementary school students to senior citizens in an effort to identify locations in need of revitalization. The 300 block of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue East was one of three consensus locations the public identified was in need of revitalization efforts.
- 301 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue East is located in a highly visible location on a heavily used main arterial. Recent transportation studies show that, on average, over 10,000 vehicles pass through the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue & Franklin intersection a day. In addition, a survey from January 21, 2015 showed that over 2,400 pedestrians travelled through this intersection between the hours of 7:00 AM and 6:00 PM. The pedestrian numbers represented 40% more pedestrian traffic than 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue & Capitol Way.
- Downtown Ambassador Clean Team statistics show that the 200-400 blocks of 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue East generate higher amounts of graffiti, trash, and vandalism than other blocks in the downtown core. The Downtown Welcome Center has space to house Clean Team supplies which would allow them to be located centrally and focus more time in abating messes. They are currently housed in two locations (1000 Cherry St. & Quality Storage on Washington St.).
- 301 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue has been a difficult location for business longevity. The space has no hood vent, thus not allowing for a restaurant to use ovens or fryers. The square footage is also minimal for retail, yet optimal for a small, controlled welcome center environment.
- The parcel features two large display windows which allow for rotating displays featuring

downtown performances and events, artwork, and historical information.

**Proposed Timeline**

The General Government committee expressed an interest in opening the Downtown Welcome Center by Spring Artswalk but insisted that the space not open before the design work and staffing schedule is 100% complete.

Once opened, the steering committee will begin work with the EDC on creating a three-year business plan. The business plan will be presented to City Council in late Fall along with the year-to-date performance measurements.

**Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):**

The Downtown Welcome Center would create a partnership program between several downtown stakeholder groups. The space will be a welcome, clean, and safe place for visitors, tourists, and residents to acquire information about downtown Olympia.

**Options:**

1. Approve Downtown Welcome Center concept and authorize staff to contract with Capital Recovery Center contingent upon signed memorandums of understanding with partnering organizations.
2. Refer back to General Government committee for more clarification on proposal.

**Financial Impact:**

Council allocated \$20,000 from 2015 parking budget fund.