

Draft City Council Response to Sub-Area A Project Initiation Letter

Dear Mr. Dexel,

The Olympia City Council received the February 23, 2015 letter submitted by the leaders of Sub-Area A to formally start their neighborhood-level strategic planning process. We want to thank our neighborhood leaders in the northeast for all of your energy and efforts to move sub-area planning forward in our city.

As you know, the 2014 Comprehensive Plan calls for sub-area planning through collaboration between the community and City to help shape how our neighborhoods grow and develop. The Comprehensive Plan indicates that sub-area planning can be initiated by the City or the neighborhoods themselves. Through your letter, we recognize your intent to begin the formal process of sub-area planning and look forward to following your progress as you work towards submitting a final plan to the Council for acceptance.

Your letter highlights important points and asks a number of questions which we will address here.

Communication/Outreach during the Sub-Area Planning Process

We appreciate learning of the community outreach that you've already conducted as well as your plans to expand the work you've completed so far. In addition to working with your membership, broad public engagement that reaches out to and is inclusive of all residents and businesses in the sub-area will be critical to its success in representing the voice of the community, whether they are members of the five neighborhood associations or not. We hope to see a plan which includes details on how community members – residents and businesses – were engaged in the development of the plan's priorities and strategies, including the numbers of participants involved.

What the Council Sees as the Purpose and Benefit of Sub-Area Planning

As outlined in the adopted Comprehensive Plan, sub-area planning is intended as a collaboration between the City and community members to identify local planning priorities and strategies for addressing them.

Sub-area planning should create a structure that serves as a forum for neighborhoods, City advisory committees, staff, and other partners to come together to help neighborhoods set their own priorities which are integrated into the City's and other partners' processes for budgeting and planning. In particular, Sub-Area A's pilot process will establish a different way for the City and neighborhoods to work together, serving as a template for how other neighborhoods can develop positive relationships with the City and other area partners as we work together to help shape the look and feel of Olympia's neighborhoods.

How the City's Planning and Budget Processes will be Different with Sub-Area Planning

Through active collaboration between City staff, the sub-area, and other partners, sub-area planning should provide strategies for integrating community priorities early and throughout City planning and budgeting processes where appropriate. This approach will help identify opportunities and constraints in addressing community priorities throughout the City's ongoing planning and budget allocation processes.

We envision a process where collaboration starts at staff level to coordinate and integrate efforts during the development of the plan. The Sub-Area Planning Liaison will work to bring together other staff, partners, and advisory committees as the community identifies its priorities. Being aware of neighborhood priorities early means that, whenever possible, those which include City involvement can be included in the formation of City planning and budgeting processes, such as the CFP, and potential partners can be brought in to help. In the years ahead, City staff can then continue to consider the identified priorities in the plan when looking at projects in the area. This approach should create positive, ongoing relationships between the City and its neighborhoods.

What the Council Expects to See Addressed in a Sub-Area Plan

The finished plan should outline how it implements the Comprehensive Plan at the sub-area level. At its core, the plan will identify the community's priorities and strategies for addressing them. The identified strategies should include details on who will be responsible for taking steps to achieve priority goals, including City departments, neighborhood associations, and other community partners. We anticipate that some of the community's strategies may be on-going programs rather than individual projects, such as historic preservation.

In addition, some of the features we anticipate seeing in the sub-area plan include:

- A list of the sub-area's assets;

- Descriptions of areas that present challenges or opportunities;
- Reference to existing City and other partner plans that involve the sub-area;
- Short-term and long-term goals and actions following placemaking principles;
- Description of how you involved neighbors and gathered their input; and
- Ways the City can involve neighborhoods early in its established processes.

Role the Council and City Staff Will Play in Sub-Area Planning

Existing City budget resources include 0.25 FTE for a sub-area planning liaison role to assist and support the development of the plan and its public outreach activities in 2015. The liaison will work to bring in staff from throughout City departments to provide expertise and information in developing strategies. She will also keep City Council and the Land Use and Environment Committee informed of the progress of sub-area planning through regular status updates.

Citizen advisory boards may also be brought into the process depending on the priorities identified by the community, whether it be to receive informational briefings or to provide advice. In particular, the Olympia Planning Commission will review the draft plan for consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

Upon final submission of the sub-area plan, the City Council will review the plan for acceptance. Assuming the plan is accepted, City Council would direct staff to work on implementation strategies where the City is a partner and the work can be accomplished within existing resources. The City Council may also choose to direct staff to include individual strategies where the City is identified as a partner into its planning and budget processes.

Resources the City Can Commit to the Sub-Area Planning Process and Implementation

As described previously, committed resources for the project include the annual 0.25 FTE position for 2015 and other staff time as determined by community priority interests. Resources for the implementation of the community's plan currently fall under existing planning and budgeting processes, such as the Comprehensive Plan's Action Plan. Outreach and mailing assistance is available to the sub-area within existing resources.

Depending on the progress of Sub-Area A's planning process and recognizing that that this is a pilot, the Council may consider extending staff support into 2016.

Key Measures the City Plans to Use to Evaluate Effectiveness of Sub-Area Planning

In our view, the assessment of the effectiveness of the sub-area plan should be done by all partners in the collaboration. What methods of evaluation would be most effective will depend on the partner. From the City Council's perspective, the sub-area plan will help implement the 2014 Comprehensive Plan. As a result, the Comprehensive Plan's policies can help formulate questions to ask to determine how effective the sub-area plan is. In addition, we will seek input from the northeast neighborhoods on the City's Action Plan, particularly on the community indicators that consider whether the community is progressing toward its Comprehensive Plan goals. We will also turn to the people of Sub-Area A for suggestions on what other questions to ask to understand if the plan's goals are being accomplished, such as, "are neighborhoods being involved earlier in City processes?"

We are also interested in determining what the tangible benefits are that are accomplished through sub-area planning. We could explore the possibility of the neighborhood participating in data gathering to demonstrate what those benefits are.

How Council and City Staff Want to be Kept Informed

The City Council would like to receive quarterly updates on your progress at regular Land Use and Environment Committee meetings. Staff will be involved in the process throughout the plan's development. An additional meeting between Sub-Area A's leadership and the cross-departmental team may also be considered.

Thanks again to community leaders from the Bigelow, Bigelow Highlands, East Bay Drive, Northeast, and Upper Eastside Neighborhood Associations for formally initiating this new planning approach. We look forward to collaborating with you.

Sincerely,

Stephen H. Buxbaum
Mayor