



MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Selby and Members of the Olympia City Council

FROM: Christina Lock, Chair, Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee (BPAC)

DATE: December 6, 2016

SUBJECT: BPAC Comment on Draft Downtown Strategy Recommendations

The Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee is pleased to offer our perspective as you approach the adoption of the Olympia Downtown Strategy. We are struck by the overlap between features of the evolving plan and our interest in promoting active transportation. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the Strategy at this point in the process.

First, we commend the process of creating the Strategy. It has been exciting to see all the great planning on the part of City staff as well as community members. We are inspired to see the result of this inclusive process. The Strategy reinforces several of the ideas we presented in our comments on the Capital Facilities Plan. Specifically, we hope the Council will:

- Continue to commit dependable, ongoing funding for bicycle and pedestrian programs.
- Prioritize gaps in the existing bicycle infrastructure. We need to assure that cyclists of all abilities can get to and around downtown.
- Connect to the regional bicycle and pedestrian network. With its shopping, scenic, historic, and cultural attractions, downtown Olympia is probably the largest potential destination for both commuter and recreational cyclists from outside the downtown core.

We are gratified to see the planning documents and public input have drawn such a strong connection between economic activity and a vibrant, safe, and welcoming downtown. "Walkability" is clearly an essential strategy for a robust business community, and downtown business owners already know that people don't spend money from their cars. When we talk about "getting more people on the streets" we really mean "getting more people on the sidewalks." Those who drive downtown must eventually leave their cars to get into businesses and attractions. Since drivers and pedestrians exchange roles, everyone benefits from downtown Olympia being a more walkable place.

We note that a hotel/convention center is mentioned in the draft Strategy materials as one way to bring in more regional visitors. Patrons of convention centers tend to walk in the local area for exercise, sightseeing, and shopping, and are likely to support the kinds of businesses that contribute to the liveliness of downtown. Again, walkability drives economic activity.

An outstanding feature of the Downtown Strategy is increased density, both in the number of people living downtown and the number of destinations people go to, such as shops, cultural activities, and public amenities like the waterfront, etc. The implications are clear:

- More people living downtown. One reason people may move downtown is to reduce their dependence on automobiles and be able to work, shop, eat, and entertain themselves and their guests nearby without having to drive. This could translate into a concentration of more walkers and cyclists as the downtown

resident population grows. Anecdotally, a recent informal count of bicycles in the common bike storage area at a new market-rate downtown apartment building showed about one and a half bikes per occupied unit. We wonder if this indicates that new downtown residents might be more likely to ride a bicycle than we might assume. Current bicycle parking requirements could be inadequate to fulfill bike parking demand for a growing population that chooses to live within the downtown core.

- More destinations downtown. More destinations in a small area means the destinations are closer together, thus more likely within walking or biking distance. We expect to see, and should plan for, more and better infrastructure for safe pedestrian and cycling use, such as improved crossings, bike corridors, and pedestrian protection from rain and road splashes.

We support slowing car traffic through downtown to help make it a sanctuary for people walking. Bulb-outs, especially on 4th Avenue, will help slow traffic and make downtown more walkable. We also would support diverting higher traffic volumes around downtown as opposed to through downtown. High auto traffic volumes through the core work against the goal of making downtown a more walkable place. To stay in alignment with the goals of the Strategy, we see the downtown core as being best suited to pedestrian, cycle and transit traffic and less suited towards auto through-traffic.

We like the festival street idea, and we support the proposal for shared streets on the north peninsula.

We also support working with the State on a parking strategy and a marketing strategy to encourage state workers to come downtown.

Another key feature of the Strategy is to take better advantage of our geographic assets, notably the waterfront "ribbon" around downtown. Clearly, this asset is most appealing for active transportation users. As the waterfront path develops, we would like to be sure the needs of both cyclists and pedestrians are met. With adequate cycling infrastructure connecting the path to surrounding neighborhoods, the waterfront ribbon trail could provide a longer but safer option for cyclists traveling to and through downtown.

Finally, the BPAC sees buses as complementary to walking and biking. Every bus trip begins and ends with someone either walking or biking. The BPAC supports buses moving through and to downtown, because they expand options for people biking and walking.

We hope this "bicycle and pedestrian" perspective sheds a different and informative light on the Olympia Downtown Strategy. In our view, the Strategy offers a welcome and exciting future, one that we hope will include increasing numbers of residents and visitors using active transportation to enjoy our city.

Sincerely,



CHRISTINA LOCK

Chair

Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee

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cc: Michelle Swanson, AICP, Senior Program Specialist, Public Works Transportation
BPAC Members