

## **Background and inspiration information on the Artesian Alley project:**

The inspirations for the Artesian Alley are numerous. Artesian wells in downtown Olympia have always been a “back burner” topic of conversation among the committee members. There is a strong, unique historical component to the artesian wells downtown that goes beyond the Olympia Beer and its famous “It’s the Water” slogan. For instance, the original town well was fed by an artesian well. Downtown businesses that have a well inside used their wells for drinking water, cooking, etc. The wells have a great potential of being a positive draw to the downtown area. While there are no hard numbers on the number of tourists who are aware of our wells, I and a couple of the other committee members have come across people from out of town (and even out of the country) looking for the wells or taking pictures of the well – even when it was just simply a pipe out of the ground.

At the time the Design Committee was created around 2008, the artesian well in what is now known as the Artesian Commons was still just a pipe in the Diamond Parking lot and the Friends of the Artesians, the group that made sure it was considered potable by the Health Department had declared that they were disbanding. One of our committee members, Wade Stine, became active in what would later become H2Olympia, the citizen group that took over the mission to preserve the well and have the well water be free and accessible to all. Even when the Artesian Commons was still in the early, conceptual stages, the committee has discussed how the other wells could become community assets – and not necessarily as potable wells.

Another inspiration for our project is Vancouver, Washington’s “Turtle Place” sculpture. The Vancouver Downtown Association, in partnership with the C-Tran (the local transit service) and the City of Vancouver, converted a former C-Tran transit station to a public plaza dedicated to the idea of sustainability. Olympia Downtown Association Design Chair Erica Cooper, Executive Director Connie Lorenz, and other ODA members attended a Main Street Conference soon after the dedication, and noted that the main fountain uses recycled rainwater – which can cause a problem during the summer if there is no rain for a long period of time. What struck the Design Committee was that Olympia has a constant, renewable source of water in many places downtown that is not reliant on the weather or a pump that must be provided power to run!

A video of the fountain at the “grand opening” of Turtle Place can be found here. As you can see – a fire hose was needed to get the fountain started.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2kX8SgtOUI>

## **“Artesian Alley” – why this alley and why now**

The alley came to our notice as a potential alley for us to work on through our own alley project for multiple reasons. It is an alley with high pedestrian traffic, mainly due to it being located between City Hall and city employee parking. The well itself was frequently mentioned in our discussions about Artesian Commons and its close proximity to it. This alley has also had high graffiti issues in the past. With the recent completion of the mural, we hope to see a decrease in

graffiti management problems. Even though it is heavily used, it is uneven and frequently has standing water. We knew we would not be able to take on the resurfacing of the alley itself; therefore, we always knew this would be a “multi-phase” project that would require us to work with Public Works’ schedule of resurfacing and repair of the alleyways. It did not make sense to us to put in a “3-D” piece of art or archway before resurfacing as it could potentially be in the way or damaging to both the sculpture itself or to Public Works’ schedule.

We feel that working on the sculpture project now, in the same year that resurfacing occurs and the Artesian Commons opens only creates a positive synergy for that area of downtown that can only benefit us all in the long run.