



October 6, 2015

Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967
Olympia, WA 98507

Dear Mayor Buxbaum and City Councilmembers:

The Olympia Planning Commission (OPC) has conducted its review of the City of Olympia's 2016-2021 Preliminary Capital Facilities Plan (Draft CFP) as required by the Growth Management Act. We agree that maintaining our existing resources should be the major emphasis of the plan. Following is a summary of our recommendations for your consideration.

CAPITAL FACILITIES ELEMENT GOALS AND POLICIES

The 2014 Planning Commission CFP letter included a recommendation to revise the 2013 the Capital Facilities Element (CFE) goals and policies that are found on page 119 of this year's Draft CFP. One of our main objectives was to ensure that projects in the Capital Facilities Plan are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan recommended by the Planning Commission and now under review by Council. The revised CFE goals and policies, as proposed by the Planning Commission, are included in this year's draft CFP and will be adopted in conjunction with the adoption of the draft CFP.

Recommendation: The Planning Commission believes that the revised CFE goals and policies, when adopted, should guide the development of the annual CFP updates. As the key document for CFP development and a component of the City's comprehensive plan, we recommend that these goals and policies be highlighted in the introduction section of the final 2016-2021 CFP and all future CFPs.

MAINTENANCE FUNDING

The Planning Commission agrees that protection of our assets should be the first priority of capital funding in the Draft CFP. Additional funding is needed for parks and street maintenance. The City needs to find ways to more fully fund its maintenance responsibilities now or deficiencies will increase in size and cost, and negatively impact quality of service and future budgets.

Recommendation: The Planning Commission recognizes that, given the current financial conditions and the breadth of City needs, meeting our maintenance funding needs is no simple task. However, we believe that the City should place a priority on implementing

revenue measures that address maintenance needs, especially those related to parks and roads.

PARKS

Parks Funding

Parks are a valuable amenity to Olympia residents and demand for parks continues to grow. According to a recent Elway survey, 95% of respondents had visited an Olympia park in the last year. Parks and open space enhance quality of life; provide natural habitat and recreational opportunities for residents.

Community, Neighborhood Parks and Open Space are valuable assets for the City. According to the 2010 Parks, Arts and Recreation Plan (PAR) the City is currently under its target Level of Service Standards for neighborhood and community parks. To keep pace with projected population growth an additional 40 acres of park land and associated development are needed every ten years to meet the City's service standards. The 2016-2021 CFP includes \$1,935,000 for park land acquisition in 2016 and \$1,000,000 per year from 2017 through 2021 for park land acquisition.

In the 2015 PAR Plan Survey respondents identified maintenance of existing facilities and improving and upgrading existing City parks as top priorities. Through its Condition Assessment and Major Maintenance Program (CAMMP), the Parks Department has identified a \$4 million deficiency backlog in major parks maintenance projects and requested \$500,000 in 2016 and \$2,500,000 for 2017 through 2021 to address the backlog.

Percival Landing is a popular destination spot and major capital asset of the City. Given the extensive capital cost for repairs and reconstruction, the facility merits its own program. We support establishing Percival Landing major maintenance and reconstruction as a separately funded program.

The Parks & Recreation Department is finalizing a business plan as a component of its next update of its long-range Parks, Arts, and Recreation Plan due in early 2016. The business plan will provide a comprehensive analysis of park needs, existing and potential revenue sources, and funding scenarios.

Recommendation: Current funding levels are insufficient to sustain the City's Service Level Standard of Neighborhood Parks, Community Parks and Open Space land acquisition. It is important for the City to find ways to increase revenues rather than reducing Park standards and allocating revenue with the Parks Plan and allocate such revenue in accordance with the Parks Plan. Impact fees should continue to be used for land acquisition (they are prohibited from being used for maintenance). The Parks Business Plan is critical tool for future parks capital facility planning efforts.

The City should consider devoting some portion of any new funding source it implements to parks maintenance. As stated earlier in the letter, we believe maintenance of existing infrastructure should be a top priority for the City.

TRANSPORTATION

Multimodal Investment

The multi-modal approach to meeting transportation needs, as strongly supported by the Comprehensive Plan, provides the logic for the use of transportation impact fees. Increased and improved bicycle lanes, including protected bike lanes where indicated, increased and improved sidewalks, and transit improvements such as dedicated lanes and turnouts, can contribute significantly to a reduction in car traffic generation from new development and reduce the need for investments in car-related facilities. On a per-trip basis, bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities can often be more cost-effective than investments to accommodate more cars.

Recommendation: The City should proceed as expeditiously as possible with a proposed traffic engineering study to define an appropriate level of investment in bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities funded by transportation impact fees. Concurrently, the City should perform or have performed legal analysis to assure such investments are done in a manner consistent with the Growth Management Act.

Bicycle Facilities Program

We commend the work of the City on the identification of potential bikeways on low-traffic streets in the neighborhoods of the City and look forward to signage, maps, and outreach to encourage use of the first of these routes in the next year.

Because of higher traffic on all routes going into and through the downtown, \$170,000 which was provided in the past 2 CFP's is being used for identification and implementation of bicycle routes to and through the downtown.

We are aware that the cost of a "through town" route exceeds available funds and that instead; the City proposes a "to town" route that terminates near Sylvester Park. We recognize this as a positive first step.

Recommendation: Given the limited funding available, we urge that a "to town" route and a possible "through town" route be first tested with appropriate striping and impermanent structures, e.g. temporary bollards, to determine public response prior to investment of the major portions of the allocated funds.

Our recommendation of continued consideration of a "through town" route reflects our concern that without a route to destinations beyond Sylvester Park, e.g. the Farmers'

Market and Capitol Lake, and without an increase in protected bike lanes in the downtown, the current investment will not be optimized.

Sidewalks, Pathways, and Other Pedestrian Programs

The Parks and Pathways–Sidewalk Program (p. 56) and the Sidewalk Construction Program (p. 59) both address the City’s sidewalk needs. The Draft CFP provides \$6.5 million and \$153,000, respectively, for these two programs. Since 2003, only 9.2% of the sidewalk miles included in the 2003 Program Sidewalk Plan have been completed. At the current rate, the sidewalk “needs” will not be met for many decades. We need to adjust our expectations, increase funding, or find ways to make our investment go farther.

The Parks and Pathways – Neighborhood Pathways Program is funded at \$125,000 for 2016 and the following five years (p. 54). Neighborhood involvement in this program in 2014 and 2015 has been very encouraging and the completed projects are widely supported in the community.

Recommendation: The OPC recommends that the City consider revising the technical requirements and construction standards for sidewalks to make our dollars go farther.

Based on evidence that “walkability” depends to a significant extent on walkable destinations, investment in sidewalks should be closely tied to existing and future neighborhood centers. We suggest that exploration of an additional route through downtown be included as a component of the Downtown Strategy.

The City should reassess the 2003 sidewalk priority list by accepting input from neighborhood associations and other citizen groups on local sidewalk priorities. This input would be based in part on the planned neighborhood planning process.

The OPC supports continued funding of the Neighborhood Pathways Program out of Parks and Pathways utility tax funds.

Hazard Elimination Pedestrian Crossing Improvements

We strongly support the pedestrian safety projects in the Hazard Elimination (p.53), Pedestrian Crossing Improvements (p. 57), and ADA Requirements (p. 61) programs. These programs should be very high priorities of the City for at least three reasons: the value of human life, the need to encourage walking, and the potential cost to the City from liability claims.

Recommendation: In conjunction with the Hazard Elimination Pedestrian Crossing Improvements, we recommend that the City explore a “Vision Zero” program with the stated objective of reducing injuries and deaths of pedestrians, bicyclists, and car drivers to

zero. This will also encourage pedestrian and bicycle travel by creating a more bicycle and pedestrian environment.

While improved physical facilities such as protected bike lanes, wider sidewalks, and improved crossings are important, they are not sufficient. To achieve a desired elimination of injury and death from collisions between cars, pedestrians, and bicyclists, we recommend a much-enhanced level of education and enforcement of traffic and pedestrian safety by the City.

Street Repair and Reconstruction

The assumed out-year funding of \$2.6 million falls far short of the \$5 million annual funding needed to keep street condition ratings from declining over the next 20 years. Staff estimates that, in current dollars, meeting the backlog of rehabilitation in 2013 would require \$48 million dollars. Seven million dollars per year (an additional \$4 million) is needed to eliminate the backlog in 20 years. The currently proposed funding of \$2.6 million per year remains well below the \$4+ million annual investment required to keep the street condition rating from further decline.

Recommendation: In response to the deteriorating rating for existing streets and the increasing backlog of streets in need of rehabilitation, the City should consider a public process to describe in clear and concise terms the existing street conditions and trends and the current street rating target. It should then invite public comment on a desired street rating target and the possible means to fund the desired level of street repair and reconstruction.

The 2015 State Legislature passed legislation allowing local governments to increase the vehicle license fee to \$40 and after two years by another \$10 without a public vote. We recommend that the Council implement a process to determine public support for increasing the Transportation Benefit District vehicle license fee from the current \$20 per vehicle to \$40, and, if there is sufficient public support, vote to increase the TBD fee.

TRANSPORTATION WITH IMPACT FEES

Use of Transportation Impact Fees in the Downtown

We recognize that transportation impact fees must be spent on facilities related to amelioration of traffic congestion resulting from the residential and commercial facilities generating increased traffic. Recent analysis reveals that 20% of trips generated by new residential development in Olympia terminate or pass through the downtown.

Recommendation: Therefore, we recommend that the downtown be included in consideration of appropriate traffic mitigation investments funded by transportation

impact fees. These improvements can include improved bicycle, pedestrian, and transit facilities that can reduce the number of car trips to or through the downtown.

GENERAL CAPITAL FACILITIES

Urban Forestry

The adopted 2014 Comprehensive Plan contains numerous references to the value of trees in our community as stated in GN3-“ A healthy and diverse urban forest is protected, expanded, and valued for its contribution to the environment and community”. As well as the following:

PN3.1 Manage the urban forest to professional standards, and establish program goals and practices based on the best scientific information available.

PN3.2 Measure the tree canopy and set a citywide target for increasing it through tree preservation and planting.

An important tool that may be used in implementing the above referenced goals and practices, would be an Urban Forestry Master Plan. It would be a significant resource tool for protecting and supporting the City’s long-range urban forestry goals as well as understanding the existing and future tree needs of the community.

Recommendation: It was recommended, in the Olympia Planning Commission’s CFP review letter for 2014, that an Urban Forestry Master Plan be developed. We urge the City to continue the efforts to build a strong and vibrant asset in developing an Urban Forestry Master Plan to accomplish the Comprehensive Plan goals and policies within the six-year timeframe.

OLYMPIA SCHOOL DISTRICT

Under provisions of the Growth Management Act, the City collects school impact fees, which are then transferred to the Olympia School District (District). Because of the role of the City in collecting school impact fees, the City routinely reviews the Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) of the Olympia School District.

The CFP of the District and the calculation of impact fees contained therein is the exclusive responsibility of the District. Any concerns or challenges to the fee, the manner in which it is calculated, or the transparency of the calculation are matters for the District and not the City to resolve. However, the Commission continues to express concern regarding the fluctuation of school impact fees and interest in creating a more consistent impact fee structure.

Fluctuation of School Impact Fees

The wide annual variation in impact fees over recent years and the significant difference between the fees for single family residences and multi-family residences requires a detailed explanation and elimination in future capital facility plans of the District. For example, the single-family home impact fee was \$2,735 in 2010, \$659 in 2011, \$2,969 in 2012, and \$5,179 in 2013. The multi-family home impact fee was \$1,152 in 2011, \$235 in 2012, \$0 in 2013 and \$1,749 in 2014. (p. 41)

These very large swings undercut public confidence in the impact fee process and appear unfair to homeowners and developers who pay the higher amounts. A methodology employing a multi-year average of both new home and apartment construction and of new school facilities construction resulting from this new home and apartment construction in the planning period needs to be considered to reduce the seemingly random fee schedule.

OPC has expressed concerns related to fluctuating impact fees to the OSD and is awaiting a response addressing those concerns. The OPC will provide an additional letter to Council on the OSD.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM 2014 LETTER

We ask that this letter be viewed as a supplement to the CFP recommendation letter the Planning Commission submitted to Council in October 2014. To avoid repetition, we have not brought forward our language on several recommendations in that letter. However, we encourage you to revisit the following issues in the 2014 letter, which we continue to support:

- Developing a comprehensive funding plan for Percival Landing.
- Converting to a two-year budget for capital and operating expenditures.
- Implementing volume-based rates for residential wastewater use.

CONCLUSION

The Olympia Planning Commission and its Finance Subcommittee appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and recommendations regarding the 2016-2021 Capital Facilities Plan. We hope the Council finds them helpful in their budget deliberations. We will gladly answer any questions that might arise from this letter.

We also would like to express our appreciation for the work of all those who helped develop the Draft CFP and OSD CFP, and for those who patiently answered our many questions, including Jane Kirkemo, Mark Russell, Randy Wesselman, Sophie Stimson, David Hanna, David Okerlund, and Andy Haub of City staff and Jennifer Priddy of OSD. Many

thanks to Todd Stamm, Leonard Bauer, and Nancy Lenzi of Community Planning and Development for their support of our Finance Subcommittee. We would also like to thank the Utility Advisory Committee, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, and members of the public who provided comments and letters.

Sincerely,



Carole Richmond, CHAIR
Olympia Planning Commission



Jessica Bateman, CHAIR
OPC Finance Subcommittee