



# Greening Capitol Way Project

Environmental Protection Agency—Office of Sustainable Communities

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The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has selected Olympia to receive place-based design assistance in 2014 through their ‘Greening America’s Capitals’ Program. The EPA states that the goal of the program is to “...help state capital cities create a clear, implementable vision of distinctive, environmentally friendly neighborhoods that incorporate innovative smart growth strategies and green infrastructure systems.”

### Capitol Way Streetscape Redesign

The selected project is ‘Greening Capitol Way;’ a redesign of the Capitol Way streetscape, extending from the Capitol Campus to the Farmer’s Market. The focus is on retrofitting the streetscape to meet the following goals:

- Establish a stronger sense of place, or identity, and connection between the campus and downtown—perhaps through place-making, signage, repeated design elements, and vegetation
- Address existing issues with untreated stormwater runoff through the integration of green infrastructure streetscape elements, such as bioretention.
- Produce visual tools to help recruit new economic development opportunities.
- Improve the flow and function of alternative modes of transportation.
- Highlight connections to other on-going downtown improvements or amenities, such as the alleyways, historic landmarks, and Percival Landing.

### Why Propose Capitol Way?

The EPA sought projects that are visual, achieve multiple goals, connect people and places, and integrated green infrastructure to help address critical environmental challenges. They encouraged cities to invest in existing spaces and focus on how to catalyze new projects or contribute greatly to an ongoing effort. Past projects have highlighted reducing barriers, both physical and psychological, making connections between people and places, and improving the environment.

#### Making Connections

Focusing on Capitol Way is a natural extension of the improvements the City has already been implementing in the downtown, reaffirming Council’s commitment to improving the area’s economy, environmental impact, and community health. This project will develop a stronger physical and psychological connection between the Capitol Campus and downtown, encouraging more of Olympia’s daytime population to frequent downtown.

#### Existing Infrastructure

The existing streetscape infrastructure needs to be upgraded and integrated to address stormwater, street tree, pedestrian amenities, safety, and urban design issues. Streetscape safety, functionality, and design are a high priority for local businesses and City staff, who have been struggling with stormwater runoff, aging pipes, sidewalks, and trees. A design for Capital Way could also serve as a template for other urban streetscape upgrades in the future.

## ***Project Design Team***

EPA has contracted with a design team comprised of three separate firms: Community Design + Architecture (Oakland, CA), MAKERS Architecture and Urban Design (Seattle, WA), and Urban Rain (Portland, OR). Together the three firms have extensive expertise in community design, landscape architecture, green infrastructure, and public engagement.

Three members of the design team visited Olympia on July 2. The team walked Capitol Way between the campus and Farmer's Market multiple times, took photos, and observed how the street is used at various times throughout the day. They also spent a significant amount of time with City staff, partner agency staff, and community representatives to learn about some of the major challenges and opportunities on Capitol Way.



The visiting design team meets on Capitol Way with City staff to learn about transportation and urban forestry issues.

## ***Next Steps: 3-Day Design Charrette***

Once an initial set of design concepts have been developed, the design team will return to Olympia again in late September to host a 3-day design charrette. The charrette is a major focus of the project. It will provide an opportunity for City staff, key stakeholders, and community members to review initial design concepts and take part in an in-depth discussion of how to address the many design and environmental challenges that exist on Capitol Way.

Feedback from community involvement in the charrette process will be compiled into a final report that the City and its partners can use to pursue grant or other sources of funding to make the design vision for Capitol Way become reality.

***To learn more or to receive regular updates about this project, please contact:***

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