

Olympia Planning Commission

October 3, 2022

Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967 Olympia
WA 98507-1967

Dear Councilmembers:

SUBJECT: Preliminary 2023-2028 CFP Recommendations

Thank you for the opportunity to review the 2023-2028 Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) for consistency with Olympia's Comprehensive Plan. The Olympia Planning Commission appointed a Finance Subcommittee to perform the review. Firstly, we would like to recognize the City of Olympia staff for consistently striving to improve the content, layout, and accuracy of the CFP. It is through their hard work that we are able to make an informed review of the CFP.

We find that the CFP is generally in alignment with the Comprehensive Plan, however we have concerns with a lack of spending and progress around safe infrastructure for walking, biking, and transit – particularly sidewalks – in the transportation section. Because of this the Olympia Planning Commission cannot recommend adoption of the 2023-2028 Preliminary CFP without revision to the transportation section. Below we have detailed our concerns for the City Council to consider as well as included some suggestions on continued improvements to the presentation of the CFP itself.

Consistency with the Comprehensive Plan

There are many good projects in the CFP that support Olympia's Comprehensive Plan. While we focus here on our concerns with the transportation section, we would like to note our excitement around two examples. The first is are the investments in creating more accessible playgrounds in our parks, supporting the vision of inclusivity in Olympia. The second, is the use of capital facilities funds to purchase firefighting equipment and provide a more sustainable funding source for these high cost and long life span pieces of equipment that support the safety of our community.

Transportation

We do not find that the planned investments in transportation include sufficient prioritization for infrastructure that supports walking, biking, and transit (i.e. active transportation). These investments are critical for realizing the future vision in Olympia's Comprehensive Plan for “a

walkable, accessible, vibrant city” with “**complete streets that move people, not just cars.**” With goals that relate to transportation and the environment (particularly the climate) to:

*“Reduce the pollution and energy consumption of transportation by promoting the use of electric vehicles and **expanding accessible and inviting alternatives that reduce vehicle miles traveled, including transit, walking and cycling** (see also GT25).” (PN8.5)*

And make:

*“**All streets are safe and inviting for pedestrians and bicyclists.** Streets are designed to be human scale, but also can **accommodate motor vehicles, and encourage safe driving.**” (GT1)*

The vision these excerpts highlight requires investments that reflect the urgency demanded by the danger people face walking next to a busy street without a sidewalk, avoiding more climate change boosting emissions, and the joy and community that can be realized through better connection to the places people live. However, the majority of the investments continue to go to automobile street repair (Street Repair and Reconstruction, 25% 2023-2028 or 12% in 2023) and major projects that are primarily automobile street reconstruction (Major Street Reconstruction, 56% 2023-2028 or 70% in 2023) which combine for about 80% of spending in 2023 or the next six years 2023-2028. These investment choices leave the safety, bicycle, and sidewalk projects underfunded and highly dependent on grants, resulting in slow progress on a long list of critical projects.

In particular, the sidewalks program lags behind what is promised in the Transportation Master Plan (and before that the 2003 Sidewalks Program). Investment in the construction and maintenance of sidewalks was also where the Planning Commission received the majority of public testimony. In the 2023 – 2028 CFP the construction of sidewalks is only funded by the Voted Utilities Tax (VUT) which was increased to provide dedicated funding to sidewalks. However, rather than this tax being in addition to the general funding there was previously, the general funding has been invested elsewhere – primarily in support of car travel. Indeed, the targeted sidewalk money has in some cases been combined into Major Street Reconstruction projects instead of used to complete the prioritized set of projects it was originally intended for in both the 2003 Sidewalks and Transportation Master Plan (see: Fones Road CFP 2022-2027 where \$3,000,000 from the VUT was appropriated in 2022). At the current funding rates, new sidewalks required to connect the community to transit, schools, and daily needs won't be close to finished in the timespan of this CFP. These sidewalks serve the direct purpose of providing the community walkable spaces and support the City of Olympia's climate goals through making it possible to make more trips safely outside of a car and being able to better access the region's transit.

While new sidewalk projects will be completed very slowly at the current funding level, there is little to no funding for maintaining the sidewalks we already have. From public comment, and the experience of members of the Olympia Planning Commission, it appears that making sidewalk maintenance the responsibility of the neighboring property owner is failing the

community. Broken sidewalks throughout our neighborhoods impair people's movement – whether by foot or mobility aid (e.g. wheelchair). This cannot help but reduce people's mobility and ability to live full lives in Olympia. We suggest that in addition to funding more new sidewalks in the Capital Facilities Plan, that the condition of our sidewalks should be evaluated and treated more like our roads – as the critical transportation infrastructure that they are.

For consideration by the city council and City of Olympia staff:

- Increase the funding for the sidewalks program by restoring funding to the sidewalk program from the general fund in line with the funding before the VUT increase (making the Voted Utility Tax additive to the program as intended). The sidewalks program needs funding commensurate with completion under the current 20 year forecast in line with City of Olympia carbon emissions goals and reduced vehicle miles traveled goals.
- Review and provide guidance on the interpretation of where the Voted Utility Tax for sidewalks can be spent as it has been broadened to all sidewalks as well as being included in Major Road Reconstruction projects.
- Support a program of sidewalk condition evaluation and maintenance similar to that used for roads.
- Review options for better supporting the ongoing maintenance of existing sidewalks.
- Consider broadening Olympia's Transportation Benefit District (TBD) charter to help fund the goals of active transportation and walkability. The current TBD was created in 2008 and was then focused on specific projects and automobile lane repair in 2009.
- Update the bicycle level of service to consider safe bicycle infrastructure (per the updated Engineering Design and Development Standards where enhanced bike lanes will be needed for arterials and major collectors).
- Consider the guidance of the priority of system maintenance over transformation in the CFP (see page: YY). In the current budget it is clear that we cannot rebalance our transportation system to be safer, more climate friendly, and increase the total capacity to move people via walking, biking, and transit while also spending so much on maintaining the totality of the costly automobile infrastructure we have inherited.

Recommendations for Future Capital Facility Plans

To improve the transparency of the CFP, it would be beneficial to include more contextual information on past spending, along with project specific progress and spending. With this information, readers of the CFP would be better able to judge the full cost of projects and how current spending and planned spending relates to past spending. For example, in last year's CFP \$3,000,000 of the Voted Utility Tax was allocated to the Fones Road project but it isn't possible to track that money in this year's CFP.

The commission suggests the following additions:

- As noted in a previous CFP Recommendation from the commission, a map of where projects are planned would be informative and engaging.

- A stronger connection between the planned spending and its impacts on the operations budget and debt service. We would like to commend General Capital Facilities Projects for their efforts in this area.
- Consistency in which dollars revenues and costs are shown.
- Include the impact of inflation on projects.

Miscellaneous

In public comment, it was brought to the attention of the Planning Commission that an unintended consequence of the proposed Regional Fire Authority (RFA), would be a realized reduction of almost \$1,000,000 in dedicated Parks funding. We urge the city council to maintain Parks funding through other means or overall savings should the RFA be instituted.

We again commend the City of Olympia staff for the detailed CFP and their continued efforts in making it accessible to the public as well as their hard work in balancing many competing priorities maintaining and constructing the critical infrastructure the community depends on.

Best,

Gregory R. Quetin
Chair, Finance Subcommittee