

Olympia Planning Commission

August 16, 2021

Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967
Olympia, WA 98507

RE: Olympia Planning Commission Recommendation – Proposed Urban Waterfront Code Amendments

Dear Mayor Selby and City Councilmembers:

On August 2, 2021, the Olympia Planning Commission unanimously voted to recommend denial of the proposed code amendments to permit Recreational Vehicle (RV) Parks in the Urban Waterfront Zoning District. This recommendation was made after considering written and oral comments from the public, in addition to several briefings and presentations from both Community Planning and Development staff and Port of Olympia staff and consultants. The Planning Commission found the proposed code amendments:

- Restrict and/or discourage waterfront accessibility
- Appear to benefit a single property owner
- Are inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the Olympia Comprehensive Plan
- Are inconsistent with the vision of the Downtown Strategy
- Are inconsistent with the goals and objectives of the Shoreline Master Program

The Port of Olympia identified a 3-acre parcel immediately adjacent to the shoreline and between the south end of Swantown Marina and Swantown Boatworks for a future RV Park. Under the existing UW zoning district code, an RV Park is not permitted. The Port requested a change in the code to allow an RV park. The subject parcel is currently accessed from the Billy Frank Jr. waterfront trail and a sidewalk along Marine Dr. NE. The nearest public parking lots are located off-site at the Farmer's Market and further north at the old Cascade Pole site. Currently, the waterfront trail is unimproved in this location. The constricting presence of an RV Park in this area would limit visual and physical access from the sidewalks, as well as discourage use of the waterfront trail. The Comprehensive Plan and the Downtown Strategy both stress the value of honoring the waterfront as a public amenity. An RV Park in this location would diminish this honor.

The proposed changes would modify the permitted uses in the Urban Waterfront Zoning District by allowing RV Parks to locate in proximity to public marinas and require a minimum of 1 acre for such a use. The only public marina that currently qualifies for this use is the

Swantown Marina. With no other property owner able to meet these qualifications, the code amendments only benefit the Port of Olympia instead of a wider public interest.

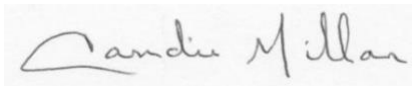
The Olympia Comprehensive Plan is the guiding document when considering future land use. The Plan expresses values of walkability, open-space, vibrancy, environmental stewardship, and recognition of the importance of land near water. An RV Park in the Urban Waterfront District would not preserve these values. In deliberation, the Planning Commission discussed ideas for future uses that are more compatible with the Comprehensive Plan including a park, community gardens, open space, small craft launch site, and small retail/restaurant or mixed use.

The Port of Olympia is proximal and integral to Downtown Olympia. As reflected in the vision of the Downtown Strategy, it is important that downtown and the Port by inference, be a “vibrant, attractive regional destination.” The shoreline is a natural attribute with great potential for enhancement. It is an amenity, if adjacent uses are well designed, that could be a desirable asset to downtown and community residents as well as out of town visitors. It is the Planning Commission’s interpretation that an RV Park does not lend itself to public interaction necessary for a socially vibrant and attractive space.

The recently approved update to the Shoreline Master Program identifies compatible uses within the shoreline setbacks that are of low-intensity, non-motorized and water-based. The Planning Commission recognizes that an RV Park is enhanced by the proximity to the shoreline but is in no way dependent on it. A recreational vehicle relies less on the natural environment where it is parked than on the infrastructure required to service it, such as a level hard surface, electricity, and water and sewer hookups. This type of use cannot be considered low-intensity and non-motorized. As situated, an RV Park advantages are more urban-oriented with proximity to downtown and other Port amenities than water-oriented.

Based on these findings, the Olympia Planning Commission is forwarding a recommendation of denial to permit Recreational Vehicle (RV) Parks in the Urban Waterfront Zoning District. We appreciate the opportunity to provide this recommendation and look forward to further opportunities to serve this Committee, the City Council, and the City of Olympia.

Sincerely,



Candis Millar, Chair
Olympia Planning Commission



Aaron Sauerhoff, Vice Chair
Olympia Planning Commission