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City Council

Neighborhood Program Briefing

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Title

Neighborhood Program Briefing

Issue:

How to better engage residents in the planning process and in City programs

City Manager's Recommendation:

Discuss information; provide guidance. [The Coalition of Neighborhood Associations' Steering Committee has reviewed and recommends the Memorandum of Understanding.]

Staff Contact:

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Presenters:

Keith Stahley, Director, Community Planning and Development

Jennifer Kenny, Associate Planning

Bob Jones and Phil Schulte, Coalition of Neighborhood Associations

Background and Analysis:

Neighborhood Recognition Program -

Olympia's Neighborhood Recognition (RNA) Program was started in 1989 as a way to foster ongoing communication between City Government and neighborhood associations. Neighborhoods voluntarily choose to participate in the Olympia program and all neighborhoods located within the City of Olympia and its Urban Growth Area are eligible to apply. There are 40 active recognized neighborhood associations at this time. These vary in size since borders are self-defined and many are also Home Owners Associations. Services to RNAs included grant opportunities, notification of development projects, educational classes, use of City copier for newsletters, maps and other materials for neighborhood projects, and programs to enhance public spaces in neighborhoods. The neighborhood liaison also assists RNAs with various issues that arise.

Coalition of Neighborhood Associations -

The program's scope has expanded over time, and most recently with the formation of the Coalition of Neighborhood Associations. The Coalition is not a formal City entity but it does convene meetings in support of recognized neighborhood associations. One of the main issues of concern to both the City and Coalition is that many areas of city are not represented by a recognized neighborhood association.

A New Approach -

The Coalition of Neighborhood Associations is interested in a larger role in many aspects of City programs and processes, including development decisions and in sub-area planning, among other areas. This new direction is reflected in both the proposed update to the Comprehensive Plan and a proposed Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) undertaken by the Coalition of Neighborhood Associations. Staff and Coalition members would like to discuss with Council how the neighborhoods program may better meet the needs of residents while encouraging greater participation and public involvement to make the whole community better. Entering into an MOU is one approach.

A model in which collaboration between the Coalition and staff has been quite successful is in the area of Code Enforcement. After more than a year of meetings, a new Ordinance is being proposed that addresses concerns raised by the Coalition. The ordinance creates a definition of “repeat offender.” The ordinance then allows a property owner, tenant, contractor or property manager to have a higher fine when they have more than two violations, including violations of different types, such as violations of the property maintenance code, zoning, and of the critical area ordinance.

Memorandum of Understanding -

For the past several months the City Manager, other Executive Team members and staff have met with leadership from the Coalition of Neighborhoods to draft a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and review the proposed sub-area plans described in the April draft of the Comprehensive Plan.

The MOU formalizes the Coalition’s role in neighborhood planning, land use decisions, capital facilities and creates opportunities for neighborhoods to help improve the efficiency of service delivery, among other proposals.

Key agreements of the MOU include:

- CNA involvement in City decisions related to land use planning and resource allocations
- Ad Hoc Committee for the review of City and neighborhood services
- Neighborhood Development Forums
- Coalition input on the design of neighborhood plans
- An annual report by the City Manager and Coalition detailing the successes, challenges, opportunities and future work plan items

The proposed MOU is still in draft form and will need final review by the City Attorney.

Neighborhood/Community Interests:

The Coalition of Neighborhoods represents recognized neighborhood associations on a voluntary basis and has worked with its membership for several months to craft an MOU. This is the approach they feel best suits their interests. Staff supports this approach and feels that the services rendered to the city would more than offset the additional work to support the CNA’s efforts. Through the development of an annual work plan, the impact on City resources could be managed.

Options:

1. Direct staff to finalize the memorandum of agreement for City Manager approval, subject to review and approval by the City Attorney and move forward with implementation.
2. Provide guidance on modifications to the draft MOU.
3. Do not move forward with implementation.

Financial Impact:

This would depend on whether new programs are created or expanded and staff capacity.