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Land Use & Environment Committee

Downtown Project Status Report and Continuing Discussion of Approaches to Downtown Pedestrian Interference

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Title

Downtown Project Status Report and Continuing Discussion of Approaches to Downtown Pedestrian Interference

Issue:

One of Council's top priorities is to create a safe and welcoming downtown for everyone. Concerns have been raised about certain behaviors in downtown and how to address them.

Staff Contact:

Keith Stahley, Community Planning and Development Director, 360.753.8227

Presenter(s):

Keith Stahley, Community Planning and Development Director

Ruth Snyder Downtown Liaison - Status report on the Downtown Project

Ronnie Roberts, Police Chief

City Manager's Recommendation:

Receive status report on Downtown Project and consider next steps and options for addressing pedestrian interference.

Background and Analysis:

Complaints about pedestrian interference continue to be received on a regular basis. These complaints are primarily directed towards activities that are not addressed by our current Pedestrian Interference Ordinance. To date, Council discussions about downtown behaviors have acknowledged that there are many stakeholders who have an interest as well as a role helping create a safe and welcoming downtown.

Framework for discussions about the Pedestrian Interference Ordinance:

- What is or is not effective with the existing ordinance?
- Will changes to the ordinance address the concerns?
- How do we balance concerns of merchants and visitors with the needs or interests of persons who use gather on downtown sidewalks?

The current Ordinance:

1. Applies between the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m. From 10:00 p.m. to 7:00 a.m., sitting and

lying on the sidewalk within the Pedestrian Walking Lane is not prohibited.

2. Applies to an area of the sidewalk defined as “Pedestrian Walking Lane.” This area is defined as an area extending 6 feet out from the front of any building, and in this area the obstruction of pedestrian traffic is prohibited. In the remainder of the sidewalk there are generally no prohibitions to sitting or lying.
3. Applies to the entirety of downtown from the lake and the east side of the Budd inlet north to the Port east to East Bay and Plum and south to Union Ave. The majority of pedestrian interference complaints originate from the core of downtown and most particularly along 4th Avenue.
4. Enforcement and judicial response must be coordinated and supported to make enforcement effective.

As noted in the April 18, 2011, Land Use and Environment Committee meeting minutes, the Olympia Police Department has found that enforcement of the Pedestrian Interference Ordinance has been challenging. After 10:00 p.m. and before 7:00 a.m. there is nothing that the police can do to keep the sidewalks open other than asking people to step aside. Generally there is also nothing that the police can do when people are seated on the sidewalk more than six feet from the front of a building.

Neighborhood/Community Interests:

Downtown is a unique part of our community in that it is often viewed as everybody's neighborhood. The people who live there claim it as their own while those who visit, work, shop or tour also have interests in the success and health of downtown.

Options:

1. Initiate a community conversation about downtown behavior with interested parties.
2. Move forward with amendments to the Pedestrian Interference Ordinance to prohibit sitting and lying on targeted downtown sidewalks.
3. Enforce existing ordinance, establish the Downtown Ambassador, make physical changes to the curbside including parklets, planters and benches and enhance police presence through targeted use of Police Explorers and other resources.
4. Proceed with a combination of the above.
5. Take no action.

Financial Impact: \$3,000 for community conversation support.