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City Council

Briefing on Downtown Alleys

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Title

Briefing on Downtown Alleys

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

The Heritage Commission and Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committees held a joint meeting in March 2013 to discuss alley improvements, including the historic alley naming project. There was strong support from both committees to pursue improvements to alleys downtown.

City Manager's Recommendation:

Briefing only.

Report

Issue:

Discuss opportunities to transform alleys from a blighted condition to an amenity for Olympia's Downtown.

Staff Contact:

Rich Hoey, P.E., Public Works Director, 360.753.8495

Presenter(s):

Rich Hoey

Ron Thomas, Thomas Architecture Studio

Background and Analysis:

Improving alleys in Downtown Olympia is a key component of the City's Downtown Project Phase II - focused on making downtown "safe and welcoming for all." The goal of the alley project is to transform downtown alleys from a blighted condition - where drug use, public urination/defecation and other criminal activity is the norm - into safe, vibrant and welcoming public spaces. Many positive examples of alley transformations can be found in other communities.

Following discussions with staff, Ron Thomas of Thomas Architecture Studio generously offered pro-bono design services to explore opportunities to transform downtown alleys from the current blighted condition into an urban amenity for Olympia.

Two east-west alleys connecting Capitol Way to Washington Street (between Legion Way and 4th Avenue) were selected as pilot projects. These alleys have also been included in the City's "alley naming project", renaming downtown alleys after the historic "Mosquito Fleet" steamships. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the Mosquito Fleet steamships ferried mail, goods and passengers to ports all around the Puget Sound and were a vital transportation link for Olympia.

After assessing the many challenges and opportunities with the target alleys, Thomas Architecture Studio developed conceptual designs and renderings of alley improvements, including:

- Decorative resurfacing of the alleys with pavers (including porous pavers to infiltrate stormwater where feasible)
- Suspended acorn light fixtures and other decorative lighting
- Alley naming signage and murals that highlight the historic Mosquito Fleet
- "Bulb outs" with vegetation and street furniture on Capitol Way and Washington Street that extend the alley improvements out onto the adjacent sidewalks
- Green walls in the alleys to add vegetation
- Banners across the alley that highlight community events

Staff and Ron Thomas will present the conceptual design and renderings as part of the City Council presentation.

In addition, staff will also highlight an upcoming program on August 28th at the Olympia Timberland Library - "The History of Olympia's Mosquito Fleet." The program, hosted by local historians, will begin in the library's meeting room at 6:00 p.m. followed by a walking tour of downtown alleys to be named for the Mosquito Fleet.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

To date, staff and Thomas Architecture Studio have presented the conceptual design of alley improvements to the Heritage Commission, Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Olympia Downtown Association Design Committee, and to several downtown business and property owners at a Downtown Academy. The response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Options:

This presentation is a briefing only. Staff has identified the following options for consideration by the City Council as part of future Capital Facilities Plan deliberations:

1. Express intent to complete the project. Pursue design and construction funding through

grants and community partnerships.

2. Allocate funding for design of alley improvements to get the project “shovel ready.” Pursue construction funding through grants and community partnerships.
3. Accelerate implementation of the project. Proceed with the project using redirected City funds.
4. Re-scope the project.
5. Do not proceed with the project.

Financial Impact:

Total cost, including design, construction and contingency is estimated at approximately \$400,000 - \$450,000 per alley, including adjacent sidewalk improvements. The project is not currently included in the Capital Facilities Plan. Staff is currently assessing potential grant and community partnership opportunities as part of a funding strategy.