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City Council

Comprehensive Plan Update Deliberation Process

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Title

Comprehensive Plan Update Deliberation Process

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Topic discussed by Land Use and Environment Committee on March 28, 2013, and May 23, 2013; Committee recommendation of August 26, 2013, is reflected in City Manager's recommendation below.

City Manager's Recommendation:

Move that:

- 1) The timeline for the periodic Comprehensive Plan update be changed to conclude the Council's review no later than June of 2014 instead of December of 2013,
- 2) The Director of Community Planning be directed to retain the services of a third-party consultant to review the draft Plan and recommend edits and revisions consistent with the State's "Plaintalk" guidelines, and
- 3) The Planning Commission's alternative 'Urban Neighborhoods' proposal known as the "May addendum" be returned to the Commission for further review and refinement by the Commission as soon as possible.

Report

Issue:

How and when should Council review the Comprehensive Plan update recommended by Planning Commission?

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Todd Stamm, Principal Planner, Community Planning and Development, (360) 753.8597

Background and Analysis:

The Washington Growth Management Act requires that certain counties and their cities periodically review and, as necessary, update their Comprehensive Plans and development regulations. Olympia began such an update in 2009 with the intention of completing the update by 2012. After Olympia began this process, now known as "Imagine Olympia," the Act was amended to postpone Olympia's due date to June 30, 2016. Nonetheless, the City chose to continue the in-progress update and set a new target of December 2013 to complete the update.

In July of 2012, the staff released a proposed update of the Plan based on extensive public outreach. That update focused primarily on creating a document that was accessible and 'web-based,' included up-to-date information, and addressed some new issues such as climate change. Pursuant to a 'charter' agreement between the Planning Commission and the Council, the Commission then held a public hearing and issued its recommendation regarding the update in March of 2013. In May of 2013 the Commission, including some new members, issued an 'addendum' to its recommendation.

Postpone adoption target from December to June

Unfortunately, although the Commission completed its work on schedule, the City Council has been involved in review of the Shoreline Master Program update and has been unable to turn its attention to the Comprehensive Plan update. The result is that there appears to be inadequate time remaining in 2013 for the Council to adequately review the proposed Plan update. To complete Council review by December it would be necessary to conduct a minimal level of public outreach in September to inform the public that Council review is beginning, provide appropriate Council briefings in late September and October, hold the Council's public hearing late October or early November, and conclude review with deliberation in November and December and action late in December - all concurrently with the annual budget process.

Rather than press this important matter to a conclusion in 2013, the staff now recommends that a new target of June of 2014 be established. This will allow the staff and Council to conduct public outreach during the remainder of the year, including a series of neighborhood and organization presentations. The Council's public hearing on the Plan update would then be scheduled early in 2014, with deliberation to follow. Specific details and dates would be established following Council concurrence with this new schedule, but in general the new schedule would include:

September - Reinvigorate public interest: Public announcement of new schedule. Upon invitation, staff presents overview of proposed update at local organization meetings, such as business and homeowner associations. Staff issues analysis of proposal.

October - A public conversation: A series of four public workshops. These informal opportunities to learn about and comment on the proposed update would be held downtown, and in the west-side, northeast and southeast neighborhoods. Format would involve general public and specific stakeholders, such as neighborhood associations, in an open discussion of the proposal. Details would be confirmed by Land Use and Environment Committee in September.

November/December - Council 'GMA' briefing(s): One or more Council study sessions regarding the Growth Management Act and the issues presented by the Comprehensive Plan

update. These would be televised and webcast meetings, possibly with guest speakers.

December - 'Check-in': Council to decide whether to proceed with proposed Comprehensive Plan public hearings early in 2014. Decision to 'stay the course' would lead to public hearings (s) in January and/or February followed by Council deliberations to conclude no later than June 2014.

Although the timing is different, this schedule includes the same elements as the process outlined at a Land Use and Environment Committee meeting in May. During this same September-to-June time period, staff would continue with already-scheduled related activities outlined in the following table. This approach will keep the City on course for complying with the State-mandate of completing the Plan update and other Growth Management Act compliance steps by July 1, 2016.

Related Programs & Activities	Target Date	Key Stakeholder(s)
Capital Facilities element update	December 2013	Public Works Department
Subarea Planning 'model' process	December 2013	Coalition of N'hood Associations
High-density-corridor zone amendment	December 2013	Property owners
Plan-consistent development code revisions	June 2014	Varies with amendment
Martin Way 'focus area' study	June 2014	Owners/tenants of area
Plan implementation strategy (action plan)	July 2014	Public & potential partners
Comprehensive Plan performance measures	July 2014	Sustainable Thurston (TRPC)
Critical areas code update	December 2014	Natural resource agencies
First 'pilot' subarea plan	December 2014	Selected neighborhood
Downtown Master Plan update	'TBD'	Numerous

Another clear-writing review

One of the stated goals in the scope of the Plan update as established by Council is, "Improve public access to the Plan by eliminating redundancy, editing for readability and reorganizing the document to improve accessibility and ensure that it is adapted to internet searching and display." To this end, all of the members of the staff that authored the update attended "Plain talk" training offered by the State, and the City retained the services of a clear-writing consultant to review and make recommendations regarding an early draft and another consultant to provide staff with training specific to the Plan.

Despite these efforts, it is likely that the document could still be improved. Therefore, the staff recommends that a clear-writing consultant be retained to review the latest draft before proceeding to formal public hearings and make recommendations for appropriate improvements. Such review would be limited to clear-writing (Plain talk) edits and organization of the document to improve

communication and would carefully avoid making substantive changes to the proposal. It is likely that one of the two consultants mentioned above would be selected.

Review of Urban Neighborhoods Addendum

In March when the Commission issued its Plan update recommendation, that recommendation included an “Urban Neighborhoods” proposal with a map, a goal and four policies; all of which were refinements of the current Comprehensive Plan. The Commission continued discussing this aspect of the recommendation and on May 6 adopted an alternative Urban Neighborhoods proposal. This alternative was attached to the Chair’s letter conveying the Plan update recommendation and is generally known as the ‘May addendum.’

The ‘May addendum’ differs from the current Plan in some substantial respects. For example, it would nearly double the planned residential density of much of the City, while reducing the size of the proposed mixed-use ‘urban corridors’ and shifting the focus of the remaining corridor area to becoming ‘high density neighborhoods.’

In the staff’s opinion, simultaneous review of the proposed March and May alternatives may lead to public confusion. In addition, substantial effort will be needed to evaluate the May addendum’s consistency with other aspects of the Plan, such as adequacy of utility and transportation facilities.

The May-addendum alternative is not without merit. In some respects, it reflects aspects of the Sustainable Thurston report now being prepared by Thurston Regional Planning Council. One of the later specific steps in the City’s program for ensuring GMA compliance in 2016 is to compare the Comprehensive Plan with the results of the Sustainable Thurston process.

The staff believes that the Council should proceed with review of the Comprehensive Plan update as recommended by the Commission in March. At the same time, the Council should direct that the Commission reconsider the May addendum and as soon as possible forward a refined version or other alternative that the Commission deems appropriate. This approach would allow the Commission to carefully consider any alternative to the March recommendation and to forward it to the Council in due course. Note that forwarding such a recommendation prior to Council hearing in early 2014 would require restructuring of the Commission’s remaining 2013 meeting calendar but may not require removing any 2013 work program items.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

There has been extensive public interest in the Comprehensive Plan update, including direct contacts with over one thousand interested parties.

Options:

1. City Manager’s recommendation above.
2. Each aspect of the recommendation is independent; the Council may elect to recommend any combination or none of the three actions.

Financial Impact:

Although not intended, unless additional resources are provided extension of the Comprehensive Plan update process into 2014 has the potential to delay other long-range planning activities.