



Planning Commission

Briefing: Regional and Local Transportation Plans & Strategies Related to the Urban Corridors (Cont. review of the 'Urban Neighborhoods' proposals)

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Title

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Body

Issue:

Over the next few months, the Planning Commission will review two 'Urban Neighborhoods' proposals, included as part of their recommendation on the Comprehensive Plan Update. Tonight the Commission will receive a background briefing about regional and local transportation planning, including an overview of the Regional Transportation Plan, Urban Corridors Task Force and the Olympia Transportation Mobility Strategy, among others.

Staff Contact:

Amy Buckler, Associate Planner, Community Planning & Development,
360.570.5847

Presenter(s):

Chair Jerome Parker
Amy Buckler

Background and Analysis:

Please read the attachments for an overview of several concepts that will be presented tonight.

One aspect of the Planning Commission's recommendation on the Comprehensive Plan Update is referred to as the 'Urban Neighborhoods' proposal. In general, this relates to land use density and transportation downtown, along Capitol Way, State and Fourth Avenues, Harrison Avenue and the abutting single-family neighborhoods.

The Commission issued two versions of the "Urban Neighborhoods" proposal:

- 1) **March 18 Version:** On March 18 (the final date of OPC deliberations on the Comprehensive Plan), the Commission recommended a set of goals and policies and a map referred to as the 'Urban Neighborhoods' proposal. This version of the proposal is included in the OPC Recommended Draft of the Comprehensive Plan Update.

- 2) **The Addendum:** On May 6, 2013, the Commission recommended a revised version of the ‘Urban Neighborhoods’ proposal. This included the same set of goals and policies, additional policy recommendations and a revised map. This version is referred to as ‘The Addendum’ because it was attached to the Chair’s May 20 cover letter to City Council outlining the Planning Commission’s Comprehensive Plan recommendations.

The reason for the Addendum is that on March 18, the Commission felt they did not have enough time to fully address how the ‘Urban Neighborhood’ map, goal and policies should relate to other aspects of the Plan. In addition, there were some unanswered questions, such as the map lacked a legend, some terms were unclear to the staff, etc. Therefore, the Commission (including the four to-be-retired Commissioners Tousley, Leveen, Reddick, and Richards) agreed the remaining members should refine the map in May.

During April and May, the five remaining Commissioners (Parker, Horn, Bardin, Ingman, and Kiswa) deliberated on the Addendum. By the time they completed a vote on the refined version on May 6, there were four brand new Commissioners (Brown, Watts, Hoppe and Andresen) who also voted to approve the refined proposal.

The City released the Planning Commission’s recommended draft on May 20. Since that time, staff has completed a basic review of the Addendum and concluded some of the consequences may have been unintended by the Planning Commission. This was discussed with the Commission’s Leadership Team and Councilmembers.

Council Referral to OPC: On September 10, the City Council moved to push the timeline for their review of the Comprehensive Plan draft into early 2014; public hearings are likely to occur in January or February, with adoption of the updated plan to occur no later than June.

At the same time, Council referred the Urban Neighborhoods issue back to the Planning Commission for review and a new recommendation, if necessary. They directed the Planning Commission to issue a final recommendation on the ‘Urban Neighborhoods’ issue no later than December, in time for Council’s public hearings.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

According to the record, the primary intent of the ‘Urban Neighborhoods’ proposal was a response to public concern about the impacts of increasing density near or in existing single-family neighborhoods. Specifically, residents of the Carlyon, Wildwood and Governor Stevens neighborhoods (all situated south of I-5 along Capitol Way) provided a large percentage of the total comments to the Planning Commission in regard to the Comprehensive Plan Update.

In summary, these residents expressed:

- Concern that parts of their neighborhood are designated “Urban Corridor (UC)” on the Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use map. Policies in the draft plan describe the UC as extending about a ¼ mile into neighborhoods from either side of the arterial;
- Concern regarding additional policies that describe the UC as having more intensive land uses within the first 400’ from the arterial, including multi-story and commercial buildings.
- Questions about whether this is an appropriate vision for their neighborhoods, or the city-at-large;
- Fear about negative impacts to their neighborhoods, including: loss of historic homes and neighborhood character; impact to wildlife; traffic; and decreased safety.
- Confusion about the minimum and maximum densities allowed in UC, as well as in the R4-8 zone.

Summary of the Urban Neighborhoods Proposals:

Both the March 18 and Addendum versions propose the same set of Urban Neighborhood goals and policies. However, the maps are different, and the Commission also proposed new policy direction with the Addendum.

Urban Neighborhood Goal and Policies (same for both versions):

Goal 14: Olympia’s neighborhoods provide housing choices that fit the diversity of local income levels and life styles. They are shaped by public planning processes that continuously involve citizens, neighborhoods, and City officials.

PL14.1: Establish eight gateways that are entry/exit pathways along major streets to downtown Olympia and our Capitol. These streets will act as tree-lined civic boulevards that present a unified streetscape that enhances the grandeur of our Capital City.

PL14.2: High-density Neighborhoods concentrate housing into a number of designated sites: Downtown Olympia; Pacific/Martin/Lilly Triangle; and West Capital Mall. Commercial uses directly serve high-density neighborhoods and allow people to meet their daily needs without traveling outside their neighborhood. High-density neighborhoods are primarily walk-dependent. At least one-quarter of the forecasted growth shall be in downtown Olympia.

PL14.3: Protect and preserve the existing established Low-density Neighborhoods. Disallow medium- or high-density development in existing Low-density Neighborhood areas except for Neighborhood Centers.

PL14.4: Allow medium-density Neighborhood Centers in low-density neighborhoods to include both civic and commercial uses that serve the neighborhood. Neighborhood centers emerge from a neighborhood public process.

In sum:

- 8 gateways (landscaped entrance/exit pathways) to the Capitol Campus and downtown;
- Housing concentrated in “high-density neighborhoods” identified on the map;
- Downtown to accommodate $\frac{1}{4}$ of future growth;
- Current zoning stayed in low-density neighborhoods; except
- Allow medium-density around neighborhood centers as identified on the map.

The Addendum is attached. With the Addendum the Commission proposed a new map - one that would replace both the Future Land Map and the original Urban Neighborhoods map included with their March 18 recommendation. They also made additional changes to other policies in the Plan. In sum:

- Refining the gateways concept;
- Removing most of the UC designation, except for areas near Capitol Mall and the Pacific/Martin/Lilly triangle;
- Designating the former UC areas as “Low-Density Neighborhoods;”
- Defining new land use designations, including specific allowed densities:
 - Low: 14 units per acre (up from current 8)

- Medium: 15 to 30 units per acre (up from current 6 to 24)
 - Neighborhood Center: 15 to 30 units per acre
 - High Density Neighborhoods: 30 units per acre minimum (up from a current minimum of 15 to 30 along UC);
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- Establishing all neighborhood centers as medium density;
 - Establishing a 35' height limit in low- and medium-density neighborhoods, and allowed heights in high-density neighborhoods consistent with height and view protection policies recommended by the Commission;
 - “Grandfathering” current zoning in low-density neighborhoods;
 - Removing townhomes from policy regarding allowed uses in single-family neighborhoods.
 - Unknown impacts to facility master plans.

Initial Analysis:

The March 18 version identifies “nodes” where the City would focus density and investment along the corridors; a move that is consistent with regional transportation and land use goals. Further analysis still needs to be done to determine if current zoning downtown is adequate to accommodate ¼ of Olympia’s growth; depending, this could lead to some rezoning downtown.

Should the community move forward with the March 18 version, the map would be viewed as ‘an overlay,’ providing additional guidance for planning decisions. Hatched areas on the map would signify where the zoning density should be increased along the corridor, as well as the locations of proposed gateways. The concepts of “gateways,” “tree lined civic boulevards,” and “continuous [public] involvement” would need to be fleshed out at the implementation stage.

In May, the Commission set out to refine the March 18 map; however, the Addendum resulted in much more than a refinement, with bigger implications for the City than may have been intended. These include:

- The Addendum changes the Future Land Use map, which establishes the underlying land use vision for the City. Replacing areas of the Urban Corridor - a mixed residential/commercial land use designation - to a purely residential Low-Density designation would demand rezoning these areas to residential zoning. This would limit future commercial development along the arterial and render existing commercial non-conforming.
- Moving from mixed use zoning to residential zoning along the arterials may not be consistent with the Regional Transportation Plan (RTP), which calls for mixed use along the urban transit corridors to achieve higher densities that promote other community goals such as live/work balance, rapid transit, etc. Countywide Planning Policies say we will be consistent with the RTP, so if Olympia wants to move away from that, this is a conversation that needs to be had at the regional level. Meanwhile, this move could affect our ability to receive grant support from TRPC.
- Despite the high-density nodes, removal of commercial uses along other major sections of the bus corridor would reduce employment and services along the corridor, which may have cascading effects to current transportation plans. For example, planning for a dense mix of land uses is key to Strategy Corridor planning, as this is an assumed way to reduce auto trips, thereby reduce traffic

congestion. The assumption is used in fulfilling legal requirements regarding traffic congestion that may otherwise demand a minimum of 5 traffic lanes on the arterials.

- The Addendum changes the definition of Low-Density Housing such that the maximum allowed density is 14 units per acre. Most of the City is designated Low-Density Housing so this would raise the allowed density in single-family neighborhoods all over the City.
- Removes provisions for residential densities lower than 4 units per acre, such as the R-4 designation for areas with high groundwater in the southeast.
- May not be feasible to ‘Grandfather’ current zoning in the Comprehensive Plan through a land use designation that theoretically could allow for a future zoning change.
- The Addendum map was created using the July Draft version of the Future Land Use map, thus inadvertently undoes some of the Commission’s original recommendations (i.e., Light Industrial not separated from Industrial.)

Options:

The goal for tonight is to receive background information about regional and local transportation plans and strategies pertaining to the Urban Corridor and Urban Neighborhood issues. There will be an opportunity for questions and discussion. At the close of the briefing, staff will assist the Commission in determining next steps for this work item.

Financial Impact: Not known.