



Planning Commission

Special Presentation: Urban Greenspace

Agenda Date: 12/9/2013
Agenda Item Number:
File Number: 13-1006

Type: report **Version:** 1 **Status:** Filed

Title

Special Presentation: Urban Greenspace

Report

Issue:

A panel of four regional experts will discuss and take questions from Planning Commissioners on urban greenspace. Topics to be explored include the wide range of health and community benefits that result from integrating nature into the urban environment, and how to preserve, create, and manage urban greenspace for long-term benefit.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Stacey Ray, Associate Planner

Dr. Kathleen Wolf, Research Social Scientist, University of Washington

Betsy Bermingham, Landscape Architect, Anchor QEA

Jennifer Chang, South Sound Green Cities Project Coordinator, Forterra

Darren Sandeno, Landscape Architect, Parametrix

Background and Analysis:

Planning for Growth

Since the 1970's, the population and economy of the Puget Sound region has been growing. According to the Thurston County Profile <<<http://www.trpc.org/data/Pages/profile.aspx>>>, the county's population more than doubled between 1980 and 2010. Forecasters expect Olympia's population and employment will continue to increase over the next 20 years. In 2010, the estimated population of Olympia and its Urban Growth Area was 58,310 residents. Forecasters expect our population will increase to 84,400 by 2035, a rate of approximately 2% a year.

In the early 1990s, the Washington State Growth Management Act <<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A>> (GMA) was passed in response to rapid and sprawling growth. Many parts of the state were experiencing a decrease in quality of life, negative effects on the environment, and increased costs for municipal infrastructure and

maintenance. GMA directs urban areas, such as Olympia, to absorb more of the state's population growth than rural areas to preserve forests, wildlife habitat, farms, and other valuable lands. Focusing growth in urban areas also reduces vehicle traffic, pollution, and the cost to provide city services to protect the health, safety and quality of life of residents.

Urban Greenspace

Olympia is expected to welcome over 20,000 new residents over the next two decades, and with that awareness comes a need to understand how we can create a denser community while maintaining and even enhancing livability. A significant element of livability is access to the natural environment, and unless conscious efforts are made provide for greenspace, denser development could lead to diminished opportunities for residents to come into daily contact with nature.

For the purpose of this discussion, “urban greenspace” is defined broadly and may include trees, gardens, courtyards, landscaped plazas, street trees, rooftop gardens, green walls, preserved sensitive areas, and pocket parks. The intent by the Planning Commission (Commission) is to explore a full spectrum of potential opportunities to engage with nature.

Urban Greenspace Preservation in Olympia

Currently, Olympia has several tools and methods by which public and private urban greenspace is preserved.

The Parks, Arts, and Recreation (Parks) and Public Works city departments acquire land specifically for public preservation and use. Parks land acquisition is separated into three different categories: neighborhood parks, community parks, and open space. Parks are designed to serve community members with recreation opportunities, such as athletic fields, community gardens, and other special uses. Open space is defined as primarily undeveloped land that is set aside to provide access to nature and to protect the natural character of the site. Open space may include trails, wetlands, wetland buffers, geologically hazardous areas, prairies or meadows, and undeveloped areas within existing or more developed parks. Public Works also acquires and preserves critical habitat land for storm and surface water management and the protection of healthy aquatic habitat and riparian areas.

The preservation of private greenspace is accomplished through a variety of regulatory requirements, and often a result of requirements for new development. Examples of private preserved greenspace include:

- critical or sensitive areas (wetlands, stream buffers, steep slopes, etc.);
- homeowner’s association-owned and managed forested areas, parks, and trails;
- rooftop gardens; and
- landscaped urban plazas.

Other forms of greenspace that are available for public use, but that are often on private property include community gardens, parking lot landscaping, school recreational facilities, and neighborhood trails or parks.

Guest Presenters

The Commission has invited four regional experts to present on the topic of “Urban Greenspace,” and participate as a panel to respond to Commissioner’s questions:

- Dr. Kathy Wolf, Research Social Scientist, University of Washington (Seattle)
- Betsy Bermingham, Landscape Architect, Anchor QEA (Seattle)
- Jennifer Chang, South Sound Green Cities, Project Coordinator-Forterra (Tacoma)
- Darren Sandeno, Landscape Architect, Parametrix (Olympia)

The Commission is interested in the impact urban greenspace has on a community; What are the physical, mental, and emotional or social, environment, and economic benefits of incorporating greenspace into the built environment? Guest presenters will explore this question by addressing the following topics:

- the environmental and psychological benefits of greenspace;
- the community stewardship benefits of greenspace;
- techniques for incorporating greenspace into urban environments; and
- practices for the stewardship of greenspace for long-term benefits.

Please see Attachment A for complete biographies for each of the four guest presenters.

Additional Information

Please see Attachment B for links to additional information on urban greenspace. The articles and references in Attachment B have been selected by members of the Planning Commission as recommended background information for the panel discussion.

Presentation Availability

This presentation will be videotaped and replayed on Thurston Community Television (TCTV), Channel 3. Visit the TCTV website for scheduled air dates and times.

The presentation will also be available for viewing live or after December 9 on the City’s website. Visit <https://olympia.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>, and select “Media” in the subject line for the Planning Commission meeting dated December 9, 2013.

This is the third in a series of special Planning Commission briefings intended to provide background for the community about planning issues related to growth and development. The first presentation, “Visualizing Density,” was held on September 9, and the second presentation, “Small Infill Housing,” was held on October 7, 2013.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

This topic is of interest to community members citywide.

Options:

This topic is informational only; following the presentation, Commissioners will have an opportunity to

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discuss the topic and ask questions of the panelists and staff.

Financial Impact:

None.