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City Council

Comprehensive Plan Policy Related to Street Connectivity

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Title

Comprehensive Plan Policy Related to Street Connectivity

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive and discuss information related to street connectivity. Provide guidance on next steps.

Report

Issue:

On February 25, policy language about street connectivity was forwarded to a Council Study Session for further consideration. Direction is needed on language to be included in the Public Hearing Draft of the Comprehensive Plan Update. City Council will hold a public hearing on the draft plan later in 2014.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Sophie Stimson, Senior Planner, Public Works Transportation

The Olympia Planning Commission (OPC) was notified of the meeting.

Background and Analysis:

Street connectivity is a major policy area of the Comprehensive Plan and the *Olympia Transportation Mobility Strategy*. Street connectivity policies help to achieve safety and efficiency and increase travel mode choices in our transportation system. Street connections are important because they allow for short trips and direct route options for walking, biking, driving and to access transit. A connected street grid also provides better access for emergency and commercial vehicles. See the link below for the City's webpage on street connectivity for more background.

The current Comprehensive Plan has strong language about the value and need for connections. Policies describe the placement of streets in the network. However, Olympia has not achieved all street connections planned and documented in the Comprehensive Plan and required through code regulations. There is a cumulative impact on the transportation system when these connections are not made. See the attached list of major street connections (excludes local access streets) considered since 1995.

The reasons street connections are not made include objections from adjacent neighborhoods, objections from the property developer, or a topographic or environmental constraint.

When a street connection is proposed, staff is often asked to provide an analysis that reviews the potential implications of a street connection. Current policy 3.20f is used to guide this analysis.

In proposed policy PT 4.21, which replaces policy 3.20f, the OPC recommends a review of every street connection. Evaluating all street connections undermines the base assumption that street connections have value and will require a great deal of City staff resources. This evaluation is estimated to take 80 to 160 hours of staff time, and there are approximately two to four connections on any given year.

Staff has a new policy proposal, developed since the Planning Commission draft plan was published and after the Council's February 25 discussion. In response to Council's discussion, staff recommends a policy to analyze a street connection only when the connection is anticipated to create exceptional impacts. The exceptional circumstances could include:

- Environmental impacts, such as the connection crosses a significant wetland or critical area;
- Community impacts, such as the connection results in removal of homes and buildings; or,
- Safety impacts, such as vehicle volumes on the street exceed the volumes of the adopted classification of that street.

The specific exceptional circumstances, under which a street connection warrants additional analysis, will be defined in the Engineering Design and Development Standards (EDDS) with public involvement. The policy states that if a proposed street connection meets one of these criteria, it will be further evaluated with quantitative measures to understand its effect on the function of the street network.

A comparison of current, OPC recommended, and staff recommended policy language is attached.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

During the OPC's deliberations on the draft Comprehensive Plan Update, residents from the Park Drive and southwest Olympia areas expressed concerns about street connections.

Options:

Option A. Receive and discuss information related to street connectivity. Provide guidance on next steps.

Financial Impact:

Street connections are typically built as part of the development of private property.

Attachments:

- Table comparing policy language
- List of Major Street Connections considered since 1995