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City Council

Discussion and Potential Guidance on the Comprehensive Plan Update including Background Information, Process and Next Steps Regarding Olympia's Urban Corridors

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Title

Discussion and Potential Guidance on the Comprehensive Plan Update including Background Information, Process and Next Steps Regarding Olympia's Urban Corridors

Recommended Action

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive and discuss goals and policies recommended by the Olympia Planning Commission and staff regarding Urban Corridors. Provide initial guidance on next steps.

Report

Issue:

The Planning Commission and City Manager have presented Council with recommendations on the Comprehensive Plan Update. City Council will hold a public hearing on a draft Comprehensive Plan Update at a date to be determined - most likely in June, 2014. Guidance is needed regarding the width of the Urban Corridors.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Leonard Bauer, Deputy Director, Community Planning & Development

Thera Black, Senior Planner, Thurston Regional Planning Council

Sophie Stimson, Senior Planner, Public Works Transportation, City of Olympia

Dennis Bloom, Planning Manager, Intercity Transit

Jerome Parker, Olympia Planning Commissioner

The Olympia Planning Commission has been notified of the meeting.

Note: The meeting will be set up "study session discussion" style around tables on the main floor of the Council Chambers.

Background and Analysis:

At its February 25 work session on the Draft Comprehensive Plan Updated recommended by the Olympia Planning Commission, the City Council referred several policy issues to future Council work sessions. The Council scheduled April 8 to consider the issue of Urban Corridors.

Urban Corridors are an integrated transportation and land use concept initially designated in 1994 by Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater and Thurston County. These are major arterials planned for high-density mixed land uses $\frac{1}{4}$ mile on either side. Along these corridors, the compact land uses are supported by a multimodal transportation system, including high-quality transit service. Urban Corridors are key to the region's strategy to avoid sprawl and reduce its dependence on the auto by providing an appealing housing alternative for people who want to live in an attractive, walkable, urban environment close to transit, work, services and shopping.

Olympia's current Comprehensive Plan describes mixed use corridors $\frac{1}{4}$ -mile on either side of the arterials in these corridors, but ultimately designated only the lots along the main street for commercial use. The remaining portions of the corridors were designated for low to medium density housing, with a target of 7 units per acre. In the July 2012 Draft of the Comprehensive Plan Update, staff proposed a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile wide Urban Corridor land use designation along each of the arterials. (See *Attachment 7 for explanation of how designations impact zoning.*)

During the public process for *Imagine Olympia*, residents of the Capitol Boulevard area opposed this proposal and strongly requested eliminating the Urban Corridor land use designation south of Interstate-5. In their March 2013 recommendation, the Olympia Planning Commission (OPC) supported staff's proposal. In their December 2013 recommendation, OPC recommended removing the area south of Interstate-5 from the Urban Corridor, as requested by the Capitol Boulevard residents, and also recommended reducing the width of the Urban Corridors along 4th/State and Harrison Avenue corridors to only the lots along the main arterials.

The reduction to areas designated as Urban Corridor along 4th/State and Harrison Avenues will minimize mixed -use and commercial uses in these corridors to the properties fronting those streets in the future. Without the ability for the broader corridor to include mixed-use and commercial uses, the transit system is not optimized to its fullest potential, nor is their ability to function as areas where people can work, access shopping and other services within their neighborhood.

A primary goal of *The Sustainable Development Plan for the Thurston Region* is:

By 2035, 72% of all (new and existing) households in our cities, towns, and unincorporated growth areas will be within a half-mile (comparable to a 20-minute walk) of an urban center, corridor, or neighborhood center with access to goods and services to meet some of their daily needs.

Maintaining the urban corridors for the $\frac{1}{4}$ mile width on either side of these arterials provides more land area and flexibility needed to achieve this vision. The Comprehensive Plan can direct that specific zoning be refined to address the unique characteristics of districts along these corridors, while maintaining the envisioned mix of land uses.

The staff recommendation is remove Capitol Boulevard from the Urban Corridor designation, and restore the width of the Urban Corridor along Harrison, Fourth and State to 1/4 mile on either side.

The staff recommendation reaffirms the 7 units per acre target, and allows for mixed commercial/residential uses throughout the corridor subject to 'transition policies.'

See Attachments for more background information, including:

- Draft goals & policies with OPC rationale
- OPC letters of recommendation to Council
- Draft Future Land Use, Transportation Corridor Map & UC Segment Maps
- FSEIS (Staff SEPA Analysis)
- FAQ on Urban Corridors
- Illustrations: Evolution of a Corridor; Urban Transit Corridors; Elements of a Walkable Urban Center
- Links to City's Urban Corridors Webpage & TRPC's Corridor Communities

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

During the Planning Commission's public hearings on the July 2012 (staff) Draft of the Comprehensive Plan, several public commenters raised 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;
- Comments 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.

Options:

A) Receive and discuss information. Provide initial guidance on next steps

Financial Impact:

None; this work item is an element of the Comprehensive Plan Update.