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City Council

Briefing on Martin Way District Study - Final Report

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Title

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Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Briefing only

Report

Issue:

In 2011, the Thurston Regional Planning Council received a grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to further the recommendations of TRPC's Urban Corridors Task Force. One aspect of the program funded by that grant is a study of infrastructure and how it can support economic development in the Martin Way corridor between Sawyer Street and Lilly Road.

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Background and Analysis:

The Thurston Regional Transportation Plan of 1993 included a vision of 'High Density Corridors' connecting the cities of Olympia, Tumwater, and Lacey. This concept of dense mixed use areas with quality transit service was incorporated into the Comprehensive Plans of the three cities and Thurston County. Nonetheless, during the last twenty years such development in these areas has been minimal.

In 2009 the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) convened an Urban Corridors Task Force composed of private and public agency representatives to explore issues related to these corridors (over the years, the term 'urban corridors' has gradually replaced the term 'high density corridors,' but

the concept is little changed). The Task Force issued its final report in July of 2012. Later in 2012, the Olympia City Council resolved to support the Task Force's recommendations.

Concurrently, TRPC, supported by the three cities, sought funding from HUD to take some of the next steps recommended by the Task Force. In addition to more general analysis, this program includes studies of three challenging areas:

1. The Brewery District of Tumwater, a former industrial site that is difficult to convert to residential and commercial uses;
2. The Woodland District of Lacey composed primarily of office buildings left vacant when the recession led the State to reduce its work force; and
3. The Martin Way District, an area bordering Martin Way west of Lilly Road in Olympia where large centrally-located parcels remain undeveloped, possibly due to a lack of urban infrastructure.

These three different types of challenges were selected to provide a variety of models for other jurisdictions. While Lacey and Tumwater focused on determining the appropriate new uses for vacated buildings where extensive public infrastructure is already in place, Olympia's study focused on why development consistent with the 'urban corridors' vision has not occurred in the Martin Way study area. In particular, is the lack of public infrastructure, such as streets and utilities, a significant barrier to the type of development envisioned? And if so, what options are available and viable for funding such infrastructure?

TRPC and the City retained the services of ECONorthwest to assist with answering these and similar questions. Public outreach to various stakeholders including property owners, business owners, employees and residents of the area has occurred through surveys, interviews, and public workshop conducted by the Economic Development Council, the Housing Authority of Thurston Count, and ECONorthwest.

The study's findings and recommendations are captured in the **attached final report** and are summarized as:

This study initially looked into the infrastructure needs and market conditions within the Martin Way study area to determine if the lack of infrastructure was a barrier to development with the purpose of then developing a strategy for funding those improvements. The Situation Assessment identified a number of infrastructure needs, particularly for biking, walking and stormwater mitigation. However, the Situation Assessment also determined that the current market conditions, not the infrastructure needs, as the primary reason for the lack of development in the study area.

The public workshop highlighted the interest of local residents and businesses in seeing improvement to the corridor and the current need to enhance safety and aesthetics along Martin Way. In total, all the infrastructure needs along the Martin Way corridor would be quite costly. In addition, the City has a variety of infrastructure needs and priorities, including potential investments in the downtown.

Given the limited near term development potential in the Martin Way study area and other infrastructure priorities in the City, it is likely not the right time to make large scale costly improvements to Martin Way corridor. Instead, the proposed Road Map outlines a strategy of advancing smaller projects to address current safety issues and developing partnerships in the area to support the

transformation of the Martin Way corridor over the near term.

Consultants from ECONorthwest will be present at the upcoming meeting to present these findings and recommendations.

The Martin Way District study area coincides with one of the three areas proposed in the draft update of the Comprehensive Plan for a “high density neighborhood” designation - mixed use areas with a minimum residential density of 25 units per acre, the highest density defined in the Plan.

The Martin Way District study also interfaces with the City’s Community Renewal Area (CRA) planning efforts. Martin Way, or the “Headwaters District”, is one of several opportunity sites explored for development potential.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Residents and business owners participated in a May 12, 2014 workshop. There was an alignment of interests for future improvements in the district, in particular for roadway improvements and increased pedestrian safety along Martin Way.

Options:

None

Financial Impact:

City’s share of the grant is \$85,000, matched by \$17,000 in City staff time.