



## City Council

### Briefing on Scope for the Downtown Strategy

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#### **Title**

Briefing on Scope for the Downtown Strategy

#### **Recommended Action**

##### **City Manager Recommendation:**

1. Receive briefing from staff on LUEC's recommended scope for the Downtown Strategy (attachments 1-6) and ask any questions.
2. Move to make any immediate changes to the scope (the scope will be considered preliminary until adopted by Council in May)
3. Move to direct staff to proceed with an open house at the end of April. Provide any guidance for this event, including Council's preferred level of involvement in this event.

#### **Recommended Action**

##### **Land Use & Environment Committee Recommendation:**

LUEC's recommended scope for the Downtown Strategy is provided in attachments 1-6.

LUEC also recommends the City set aside the excerpts from the old Comprehensive Plan (also referred to as "The [Proposed] Downtown Plan" in attachment 11) while the downtown strategy is being developed, and refer to these excerpts but do not readopt them at this time.

#### **Report**

##### **Issue:**

Overview of the Land Use & Environment Committee's (LUEC's) recommended scope for the Downtown Strategy (attachments 1-6) and next steps

##### **Staff Contact:**

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##### **Presenter(s):**

Amy Buckler  
Leonard Bauer, Deputy Director, CP&D  
Keith Stahley, Director, CP&D

### **Background and Analysis:**

The Comprehensive Plan directs the City to have a 'plan for downtown. Now referred to as *The Downtown Strategy*, this effort is of considerable interest to the community. Two distinct elements of work are 1) Scoping, and 2) Strategy Development.

### WHAT IS THE DOWNTOWN STRATEGY?

The purpose and fundamental concept for the strategy is shown in **Attachment 1**

### SCOPING

The Council's Land Use & Environment Committee (LUEC) was tasked with developing a recommended scope for the downtown strategy. **Attachments 1-6** describe LUEC's recommendation.

Scoping for the downtown strategy will continue through May of 2015 (**Attachment 7**). After tonight, the remaining scoping tasks include:

- An open house and opportunity for public to provide comment in April;
- Council approval of final scope and criteria for a consulting firm to assist the City with strategy development (May);
- LUEC review of a draft RFQ/P for the urban design firm (May)

As soon as possible in June, staff hopes to release a Request for Qualifications and Proposal for engaging the Olympia public (RFP/Q) to hire an urban design firm to assist the City with strategy development. Staff's expectations include: City is looking for an urban design firm to lead and coordinate this process; this firm will have substantial experience and demonstrated success in other cities and downtowns similar to Olympia. They will also have extensive public participation experience. Given the scope that is being considered it is likely that this firm may need to contract with other experts in order to perform all the duties called for in the scope. The firm would be responsible for coordinating all consultant efforts in to a coherent and implementable strategy. The RFQ/P will flow directly from the scope adopted by City Council.

### BACKGROUND

At its December 11 meeting, the Land Use & Environment Committee (LUEC) reviewed downtown planning history and some associated myths (**Attachment 12**), and provided feedback on principles to shape the scoping process (**Attachment 7**). The committee also reviewed the content of excerpts from the old Comprehensive Plan referred to as "The [Proposed] Downtown Plan" and recommend these excerpts be referred to as necessary during development of the Downtown Strategy, but not re-adopted at this time. (*See next section for further explanation.*)

At its retreat on January 8, 2015, the City Council discussed what the downtown strategy is and their preference regarding the purpose and fundamental concept for the strategy (**Attachment 1**). The Council also reviewed examples of the types of illustrations typically found in a downtown strategy (**Attachment 9**).

At their January 29 meeting, LUEC recognized that many more issues have been proposed for consideration within the downtown strategy than the City has time or budget to address. Thus, the

Committee discussed a draft framework and *priority* topics, along with specific work items that staff proposed be completed during strategy development (**Attachment 3**). One of these work items is to establish urban infill exemptions under the State Environmental Protection Act (SEPA); this is described further in **Attachment 4**. At the meeting, the Committee requested some small changes, but overall directed staff to move forward with the proposal.

At their February 26 meeting, LUEC discussed a draft public participation and communication plan (**Attachment 5**) and the Downtown Strategy's relationship to other planning efforts (**Attachment 6**). In addition to making a few refinements, the Committee:

- Suggested the urban design consulting firm criteria (to be presented to Council in May) should include that the firm have strong experience with public participation.
- Asked staff to help Council provide consistent and clear messages to the public about the strategy by providing talking points at every step in the process (staff will present some initial talking points this evening)
- Asked staff to provide information about the implications of options for "adopting" or "accepting" the final downtown strategy (*see next section*).

#### OPTIONS FOR FINAL ACTION ON THE DOWNTOWN STRATEGY

As part of the Comprehensive Plan Update, sections of the existing Comprehensive Plan specifically related to downtown (with exception of GL17-19) were moved to a separate 26-page document (**Attachment 11**) and proposed to be adopted separately from the Plan. Thus, "the downtown plan" would not formally be part of the Comprehensive Plan, rather a separate goal and policy document. The rationale for removing these sections from the Comp Plan was to free the downtown plan from the limited annual Comprehensive Plan amendment process, allowing more flexibility for the City - in working with other downtown stakeholders - to make changes as needs arise.

The LUEC asked staff to return with more information about the implications of "adopting" vs. "accepting" the final strategy. In reviewing the issue, staff recognized the policy language in the adopted Comprehensive Plan directs that the downtown plan be "adopted."

PL17.1: **Adopt** a Downtown Plan addressing - at minimum - housing, public spaces, parking management, rehabilitation and redevelopment, architecture and cultural resources, building skyline and views, and relationships to the Port peninsula and Capitol Campus.

Adoption can occur by motion, resolution or ordinance. The specific method can be determined by City Council at a later date.

#### APRIL OPEN HOUSE

Staff has tentatively scheduled a public open house on Wednesday, April 29 and Thursday, April 30, 2015. The purpose of the open house is to:

- Inform the public about what the Downtown Strategy is, how people can be involved and generally when, and to share information about known existing conditions in downtown
- Receive public comment on the draft scope, with targeted questions about how people want to be involved during strategy development

#### **Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):**

The attached proposal is based on previous public comment from various engagement efforts, including *Imagine Olympia*.

Over the past two months, staff has discussed ideas and concerns about the Downtown Strategy with various community members, in which the following issues were raised:

- Communication about and strategy itself should be clear that new development should enhance, and not erode, downtown's natural environment
- Express what the connection is to the Sustainable Thurston Plan
- Hire an expert urban design consultant team with experience in other cities and a track record of successfully implementation
- Connections to the public waterfront are important to the entire downtown
- Important topics to consider are liquefaction, sea level rise, pollution, views, maintaining visual connection to the Capitol, building setbacks and step backs, neighborhood parks to serve 5,000 new residents and the Isthmus
- Need:
  - An inclusive, transparent public process to help shape the strategy
  - The Planning Commission's role to be defined
  - Strong involvement of downtown stakeholders
  - Strong visuals to engage public
- Do not allow a single interest group to take over the process

**Options:**

Tonight, staff is asking the City Council to:

4. Receive briefing from staff on LUEC's recommended scope for the Downtown Strategy (attachments 1-6) and ask any questions.
5. Move to make any immediate changes to the scope (the scope will be considered preliminary until adopted by Council in May)
6. Move to direct staff to proceed with an open house at the end of April. Provide any guidance for this event, including Council's preferred level of involvement in this event.

**Financial Impact:**

Scoping is included in base budget; \$250,000 of 2014 year end savings is anticipated for this process in 2015.