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Land Use & Environment Committee

Draft Urban Forestry Strategic Plan Briefing

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Title

Draft Urban Forestry Strategic Plan Briefing

Recommended Action

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive a briefing on the status of the draft Urban Forestry Strategic Plan

Report

Issue:

Staff and Elizabeth Walker, Terra Firma Consulting, will provide an update on the development of an Urban Forestry Strategic Plan (Strategic Plan). Work to date on the Strategic Plan has emphasized understanding the existing challenges to providing comprehensive urban forestry program services and identifying possible strategies to address those challenges.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Michelle (Shelly) Bentley, Associate Planner, Community Planning and Development

Leonard Bauer, Deputy Director, Community Planning and Development

Elizabeth Walker, Terra Firma Consulting

Background and Analysis:

The Urban Forestry Program has experienced significant funding and staff reductions over the last four years, which have resulted in a decline in urban forestry community services and management activities. The program is currently staffed with one full-time employee, an Associate Planner in Community Planning and Development (CPD). Funding for the Urban Forestry Program was discussed during 2014 2015 Council budget discussions, and at the Land Use and Environment Committee (LUEC). As a result, the CPD Associate Planner position was increased from 0.5 to 1.0 FTE. LUEC also directed staff to develop options for how to structure, fund, and manage or improve the Urban Forestry Program.

To accomplish this, staff applied for and was awarded a \$10,000 USDA Forest Service and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (WADNR) Urban and Community Forestry Program Community Forestry Assistance Grant. The grant funds were used to hire a consultant,

Elizabeth Walker of Terra Firma Consulting, to work collaboratively with staff and members of a PRAC sub-committee to develop the Strategic Plan.

In 2013, the Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC) included in their work plan an item to discuss the Urban Forestry Program, and make recommendations to the Council for how it could be improved. A sub-committee was formed with PRAC member Robert Dengel serving as its Chair; members included representatives from the Planning Commission, Utility Advisory Committee, Parks, and the local urban forestry professional community. In March 2014, the Sub-Committee completed their work and delivered a final report to LUEC.

The consultant met with the PRAC Sub-Committee during the course of developing the Strategic Plan to better understand and integrate their recommendations and priorities into the process.

The purpose of tonight's briefing is for staff to share the work accomplished to date on the draft Urban Forestry Strategic Plan. This will focus on a set of key challenges and proposed strategies as outlined in an Executive Summary and a table outlining the current staffing levels of the Urban Forestry Program. The draft Strategic Plan also includes proposed strategies organized by the following budget scenarios: no new funding, one-time investment of additional Short Term funding, Long-Term increase in program funding, and Permanent ongoing funding.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

An Urban Forestry Strategic Plan, once adopted, could impact how the City administers the Urban Forestry Program citywide.

Options:

None; briefing only.

Financial Impact:

The hiring of a consultant to complete an Urban Forestry Strategic Plan was funded in 2014 and 2015 by a USDA Forest Service and WADNR Community Forestry Assistance Grant.