



City Council

Approval of Final Scope and Consultant Criteria for the Downtown Strategy

Agenda Date: 5/19/2015
Agenda Item Number: 6.B
File Number: 15-0484

Type: decision **Version:** 1 **Status:** Passed

Title

Approval of Final Scope and Consultant Criteria for the Downtown Strategy

Recommended Action

Land Use & Environment Committee Recommendation:

LUEC's recommended scope for the Downtown Strategy is provided in **attachment 1**

City Manager Recommendation:

Move to approve a final scope and consultant criteria for the Downtown Strategy detailed in attachments 1 and 2.

Report

Issue:

Whether to approve the final scope and consultant criteria for the Downtown Strategy.

Staff Contact:

Amy Buckler, Senior Planner, Community Planning and Development (CP&D), 360.570.5847

Presenter(s):

Amy Buckler

Leonard Bauer, Deputy Director, CP&D

Keith Stahley, Director, CP&D

Background and Analysis:

In fall of 2015, the City will kick off a public process to form a Downtown Strategy. The Strategy will identify priorities - steps we take over a 5-6 year period that will have the greatest strategic impact to forward our community's downtown vision and goals.

The City Council tasked its Land Use & Environment Committee with making a recommendation on the scope for the Downtown Strategy. Council reviewed LUEC's recommendation on March 26, and directed staff to hold an open house to inform the public and receive input.

APRIL OPEN HOUSE

City staff hosted an open house for the public on April 29, 2015. The purpose of the open house was

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

There were approximately 90 people in attendance. Input received is in **attachment 3**.

FINAL DRAFT SCOPE FOR THE DOWNTOWN STRATEGY

Attachment 1 reflects the Land Use & Environment Committee's recommended scope for the Downtown Strategy

CONSULTING FIRM - NEXT STEPS

The City will hire a consulting firm to help lead and coordinate this process. **Attachment 2** includes draft consultant criteria for inclusion in the request for qualifications (RFQ).

The City Council is expected to approve the final scope and criteria for the consultants on May 19. Staff will release a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in early June, and hopes to have consultants on board no later than August 31, 2015.

The Land Use & Environment Committee is scheduled to review and provide feedback on an early draft of the RFQ on May 21. After that, staff will finalize the RFQ and solicit for qualifications through a broad array of channels.

The Land Use & Environment Committee's previous input about such consultants includes:

- Expectation to hire a firm with a high degree of expertise and experience with urban design and public participation
- Demonstrated success in other cities and downtowns similar to Olympia
- It is likely that the lead consulting firm may need to contract with other experts in order to perform all the duties called for in the scope
- The lead firm would be responsible for coordinating all consultant efforts in to a coherent and implementable strategy
- The RFQ will flow directly from the scope approved by City Council

BACKGROUND ON PREVIOUS MEETINGS

At their March 26, 2015 meeting, the City Council directed staff to: preliminarily move forward with the Land Use & Environment Committee's (LUEC's) recommended scope; and hold an open house for the public in April to inform and gather input about how people would like to be involved.

At their February 26 meeting, LUEC discussed a draft public participation and communication plan and the Downtown Strategy's relationship to other planning efforts. The Committee suggested the consulting firm criteria (to be presented to Council in May) should include that the firm have strong experience with public participation. LUEC also 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.

At their January 29 meeting, LUEC recognized that more issues have been proposed for consideration within the downtown strategy than the City has time or budget to address. Thus, they discussed a draft framework and *priority* topics, along with specific work items that staff proposed be completed during strategy development. LUEC directed staff to move forward with the proposal after making a few small changes.

At their 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, and reviewed examples of the types of illustrations typically found in a downtown strategy.

At their December 11 meeting, LUEC reviewed downtown planning history and some associated myths, and provided feedback on principles to shape the scoping process. 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.

The City adopted a Comprehensive Plan update in December of 2014 that directs the City to have a ‘plan for downtown,’ now referred to as *The Downtown Strategy*.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

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

See **attachment 3** for public input from the April 29 Open House

In addition, 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

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Options:

Approve, modify, or do not approve the proposed scope and criteria.

Financial Impact:

For 2015, \$250,000 has been budgeted to form a Downtown Strategy. Additional funds may be appropriated for 2016, but it is uncertain at this time.