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Land Use & Environment Committee

State Avenue (Bigelow neighborhood) Zoning

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Title

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City Manager Recommendation:

Move to recommend that the Community Planning and Development Department's 2015 work plan (and - when adopted -- the Planning Commission work plan of 2016) include evaluating for revision of the City's development code to improve compatibility between new development in commercial zones with adjacent low-density residential areas. (Option 1)

Report

Issue:

Recent development has led some residents to believe the City's development code allows development bordering the south edge of the Bigelow neighborhood that is incompatible with the neighborhood, and inconsistent with the City's Comprehensive Plan. Should the City evaluate any changes in that area's zoning?

Staff Contact:

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Presenters:

Todd Stamm, Principal Planner

Jay Elder, Secretary, Bigelow Neighborhood Association

Background and Analysis:

In the early 1960s an area of about 10 blocks of single-family housing northeast of downtown in the vicinity of Olympia Avenue was zoned for 'Commercial Services - High Density' development. This change resulted in apartment buildings gradually replacing some of the single-family homes. About twenty years later, the area was changed to a low density residential zone, effectively ending the era of apartment construction. In 2005, a portion of the area along Olympia Avenue was designated as a local historic district. During this period the zoning along State Avenue at the southern edge of the Bigelow neighborhood changed little. The result is the neighborhood now includes a variety of housing types adjacent to a mix of residential and commercial land uses along State Avenue.

In 2013, John Tanasse proposed construction of a 3-story mixed use (office and housing) building on the north side of State Avenue. This proposal led residents of the area to question whether this type

of development was appropriate in this area.

In November of 2014, Jay Elder and 40 other residents of the area proposed an amendment of the Comprehensive Plan regarding the portion of the neighborhood along State and Olympia Avenues from Tullis Street to East Bay Drive. Ultimately the Council declined to consider that proposal as part of the package of 2015 Plan amendments; the proponents revised the proposal (see enclosed letter of March 19, 2015), and the Council referred the general issue to the Land Use and Environment Committee for consideration.

Current Zoning

As depicted on the attached map, this portion of the community has a variety of land use designations. The area along the north side of State Avenue has 'Professional Office/Multi-family Residential' (PO/RM) zoning west of Eastside Street and 'High Density Corridor - 1' zoning to the east. The comparable area south of State Avenue is in General Commercial and HDC-1 zoning. The zoning along Olympia Avenue is divided between Two-Family Residential 6 to 12 units per acre (R 6-12) to the east of Puget Street and Single-family Residential 4 to 8 units per acre (R 4-8) zoning to the west, with PO/RM and Residential Multi-family 18 units per acre (RM 18) zoning west of Pear Street.

The R 4-8 and R 6-12 districts are primarily single-family and 'duplex' residential zones, respectively, where two-story homes up to 35-feet tall are allowed. The RM-18 zone to the west is an apartment zone that allows 3-story buildings up to 35-feet tall. The three commercial zones in the area (PO/RM, HDC-1, and GC) allow different mixes of apartments and commercial land uses, with heights of up to 35-feet where within 100 feet of the R 4-8 and R 6-12 zones; and up to 60 feet (or more if housing is included) if further away. These commercial zones don't have specific limits on the number of stories, but as a practical matter these heights would result in buildings of up to three and five-stories.

In addition this area is overlaid with downtown design requirements south of Olympia Avenue and east of Eastside, high density corridor design requirements east of Eastside along State, and 'in-fill' design requirements in the remaining area to the north. The preservation-oriented historic district encompasses those properties along Olympia Avenue from East Bay Drive to Tullis Street.

Comprehensive Plan

This area is a location where three features of Olympia's Comprehensive Plan meet. It includes the northeast 'corner' of downtown at the intersection of State and Eastside, the 'Urban Corridor' extending east from there along State and Fourth Avenues, and the existing residential neighborhood to the north. As such, it exemplifies some of the challenges facing the community where differing land uses and development patterns converge.

The Plan emphasizes the need for new development to be compatible with existing neighborhoods. For example, it says,

Much of our community is already built. Many of our neighborhoods are more than 50 years old and our downtown is older still. These established neighborhoods provide the 'sense of place' and character of Olympia. To preserve this character, new buildings incorporated into the existing fabric must reflect both their own time-period and what's come before.

Citywide Context

The City is already planning to re-evaluate some of this mix of development regulations on a city-wide scale. In addition to a broad revisit of the City's design requirements, a specific work program is planned to target the high density corridor zones. The Planning Commission has suggested that the General Commercial and similar Commercial Services zones that preceded the Growth Management Act should be updated to reflect the vision of the Comprehensive Plan for less-auto-oriented development patterns. Plus the downtown area west of East Bay is being reviewed as part of the Downtown Strategy.

Staff Proposal

The issues raised by the Bigelow area residents highlight the continuing challenge of minimizing land use conflicts by ensuring gradual changes in scale in a developing and ever-changing city. Similar issues routinely arise where higher-intensity mixed use development is proposed near lower-density residential neighborhoods. For example, in 2014 the City revised the High Density Corridor zones to limit the height of new buildings near residential zones; but the Commercial Service zone a few blocks to the south of the Bigelow neighborhood would still allow 75 to 100-foot buildings directly across the street from the low density Eastside neighborhood. Because the issues of the Bigelow neighborhood are not unique, the staff recommends that they be evaluated not in this single location, but on a broader city-wide basis.

Specifically, the staff proposes a 2015 - 2016 work program to include evaluation of commercial zoning adjacent to low-density neighborhoods designated in the Comprehensive Plan. At minimum this evaluation should include review of:

- All aspects of the Professional Office/Residential Multi-family, Commercial Services - High Density, and General Commercial zoning districts with particular emphasis on compatibility with lower density residential zones (R 6-12 and lesser density zones); including possible replacement or merger with other districts.
- Review of any and all height bonuses available within 100 feet of low-density residential zoning districts; including any appropriate clarification of such bonuses.
- Review of the exception that allows structures to exceed height limits by up to 18 feet.

Note that this list does not include a review of the High Density Corridor - 1 zone. Staff proposes that any such review be part of the separate Urban Corridor code update mentioned above. Nor does it include review of the scope of the Downtown Design District, which more appropriately may be considered as part of the Downtown Strategy.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Property owners, business operators, and residents of the area have all expressed interest in this topic over the years; particularly during the recent review of the Tanasse project.

Options:

1. Incorporate evaluation of issues raised by Bigelow neighborhood into a city-wide work

program - as more specifically described above.

2. Amend work programs of CP&D and Planning Commission to include review of development regulations within area bounded by Thurston Avenue, Tullis Street, Fourth Avenue, and East Bay Drive as requested by area residents.
3. Do not revise work plans at this time.

Financial Impact:

This work item is not included within current work programs. Adding it would require additional resources or postponing other work.