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City Council

Isthmus Update and Schedule

Agenda Date: 3/21/2017
Agenda Item Number: 2.A
File Number: 17-0265

Type: study session **Version:** 1 **Status:** Filed

Title

Isthmus Update and Schedule

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Evaluate and discuss options for long-term planning, continued blight removal, and proposed interim improvements on the Isthmus.

Report

Issue:

Whether City staff should maintain the current work plan schedule of scoping the Isthmus Master Plan in 2017, and then begin that public process in 2018. Other items for consideration, is whether the staff should move forward with short-term improvements in 2017 to improve the appearance of the City-owned Isthmus properties while the long-term vision is being developed and eventually realized.

Staff Contact:

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Presenter(s):

Paul Simmons, Director, Parks, Arts and Recreation Department,
Keith Stahley, Director, Community Planning and Development,

Background and Analysis:

The City of Olympia has a long history of making investments on the Isthmus. This effort dates back to the early 1990's when the City purchased the former Elk's Building and Capital Marine Building. Acquiring those properties allowed for the development of the Heritage Fountain, which was dedicated on May 10, 1996. The City also acquired properties adjacent to the Heritage Fountain: the former GHB Building in 1995, followed by the Little Da Nang Building in 2008.

In 2013, the City made another substantial investment by acquiring an additional 2.3 acres located on

the west side of the Isthmus. Since that time, the City has successfully demolished four blighted buildings located on the Isthmus: the former Housing Authority Building, County Health Building, GHB Building, and Little Da Nang Building. Collectively, over the last thirty years the City has invested over \$5 million in acquisition, demolition, and development of the City-owned Isthmus properties. This effort was also supported by a \$100,000 donation from the Olympia Capitol Park Foundation.

Although the City has been successful in demolishing the blighted buildings, the foundations of the two former county buildings remain and little work has been done to improve the aesthetics of the properties. The current work plans for the Parks, Arts & Recreation Department and the Community Planning and Development Department identify a timeline of scoping the Isthmus Master Plan in 2017, and subsequently beginning that public process in 2018. Scoping will include clarification about whether this planning process will focus solely on City-owned properties, or will include the privately owned property on the Isthmus as well.

The proposed timeline is based on workload capacity issues for staff in both departments, and also in response to previous concerns from members of the public that too many planning processes at once can overwhelm and detract from public participation. This approach takes into consideration the timing of several planning projects that will help inform the Isthmus Master Plan; such as the Downtown Strategy, Sea Level Rise Plan, and West Bay Park and Restoration Master Plan. There is also new ownership of the Capitol Center Building, and they are in the early stages of preparing plans to redevelop the property. The outcome of their redevelopment will impact future uses on the Isthmus and should be considered in any Isthmus planning process.

In 2016, members of the City Council Finance Committee inquired about the timeline for next steps related to the Isthmus properties, and expressed concerns with the proposed timing of the Isthmus Master Plan process and the current appearance of the City-owned properties. Additionally, at the 2017 City Council Retreat, some Council members expressed additional concerns with the proposed timeline outlined in the staff work plan.

In response to concerns expressed at the Finance Committee meeting and the City Council retreat, staff has developed a series of options for the City Council to evaluate and discuss for moving forward.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

Historically, the Isthmus has been at the forefront of several community discussions related to the CRA (Community Renewal Area), Downtown Strategy, and various park planning efforts. The purpose of the Isthmus Master Plan will be to facilitate a public visioning process for the Isthmus properties. At this point, continued blight removal and interim improvements have not been discussed further at the community level.

The Olympia Capitol Park Foundation made a contribution of \$100,000 to support previous efforts of blight removal and demolition.

Options:

Option 1 - Stay the course - Begin scoping the Isthmus Master Plan in 2017, start the public process in 2018. No interim improvements.

Option 2 - Continue blight removal with interim improvements; and stay the course scoping the

Isthmus Master Plan in 2017, start the public process in 2018.

Option 3 - Expedite the long-term planning. Scope the Isthmus Master Plan now, and begin the public process late in 2017. This option would require further delay of the West Bay Park and Restoration Master Plan.

Financial Impact:

The 2015 Capital Facilities Budget allocated \$670,000 for the project titled “Isthmus Remediation”. These funds may be allocated towards any continued blight removal, interim improvements, or additional park planning efforts.

Attachments:

[Site Map](#)

[Parks Planning & Design Work Plan](#)

[Community Planning and Development Major Planning Projects](#)

[Isthmus Planning Handout](#)