



City Council

Artesian Commons Update

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Title

Artesian Commons Update

Recommended Action

Committee Recommendation:

Not referred to a committee.

City Manager Recommendation:

Receive an update on the Artesian Commons Park and provide guidance to staff on working with the Artesian Leadership Committee to facilitate a public process to develop a revised long-term vision for the park.

Report

Issue:

Whether to receive an update on the progress that has been made and the ongoing challenges of the Artesian Commons Park, and discuss a general direction for moving forward.

Staff Contact:

Paul Simmons, Director, Parks, Arts and Recreation Department, 360.753.8462

Presenter(s):

Paul Simmons, Director, Parks, Arts and Recreation Department

Background and Analysis:

On May 3 2014, the City of Olympia opened Artesian Commons Park with the vision of creating a food-truck-based plaza area, while also preserving public access to the Artesian Well. The original vision for the park was based on a previously held "Project for Public Spaces" workshop. The goal of the project was to discourage already existing negative and illegal behaviors by transforming a problematic location downtown into an active park filled with positive behavior.

For a variety of reasons, the vision to attract a variety of food trucks never materialized. There were two vendors operating within the first month, but neither was able to successfully maintain their operation at this location. With limited programming and maintenance resources, Artesian Commons Park continued to struggle with destructive behavior, violence, and illegal drug use and dealing. In addition to those challenges, the park also struggled with excessive trash and debris due to the

heavy use of the park.

Based on the ongoing safety and sanitary struggles with the park, the Land Use and Environment Committee developed a recommendation to temporarily close the park at the beginning of 2015. However, that recommendation received strong public testimony that focused on the benefits of the park. Members of the public expressed that the park provided a location that helped social service agencies connect with people in need. Members of the public also described how this is one of the few places that they felt accepted and safe. The City Council decided to conditionally keep the park open under the following management structure:

1. Implement a series of immediate actions with the intent of improving the safety and security of the park.
2. Develop the Artesian Leadership Committee made up with a variety of community stakeholders to provide ongoing feedback and guidance for the operation and continued development of the park.
3. Facilitate a Long-Term Visioning Process.

The Artesian Leadership Committee was created two years ago to provide guidance and feedback about the design and operation of Artesian Commons Park. The Committee began meeting in April 2015, and has been providing that feedback and guidance nearly every month since. The immediate actions included the installation of a fence, basketball hoop, and additional security cameras. Additionally, permanent tables, chairs, and umbrellas have also been added to the park. Enhancements continue, as the City Council has approved the replacement of the existing portable restroom with a permanent, 24-hour Portland Loo restroom facility. This project is intended to be complete by the summer of 2017.

There has been an increase in ongoing maintenance, community partner support, programming and events. In 2016, the City Council also authorized use of year-end funds to create seasonal Well Host and Park Ranger positions to help build a positive presence at the park. The presence of these positions was a key factor in a more than 50% decrease in calls for police services and a 23% decrease in arrests when comparing 2015 to 2016.

As the park has continued to evolve, the Olympia Parks, Arts & Recreation Department has continued to seek input regarding the Artesian Commons Park. Attached are two reports provided by Common Action Consulting, who facilitated two public events to generate feedback from individuals who regularly use the park. The first process was hosted in 2014, and the feedback was used to inform several design enhancements that have since occurred. The 2016 process was used to provide the Well Host and Park Ranger with a resource to guide their efforts and priority focus areas.

In addition to the park user feedback, the Olympia Parks, Arts & Recreation Department also surveyed 414 water users in the summer of 2016 and 51 local businesses through a separate PBIA survey in early 2017. Some positive feedback from the water users was that 52% felt as though the creation of Artesian Commons Park has improved their experience, while an additional 35% indicated that the experience is about the same. In contrast to the positive feedback from the water users, 64% of downtown businesses surveyed indicated that they had a poor perception of the Artesian Commons Park, and an additional 22% rated their perception as fair.

We continue to make progress as we implement a variety of design and operational strategies at the

Artesian Commons Park. However, we are still faced with ongoing behavior challenges in terms of violent and illegal behavior. We are also challenged with a negative perception of the park within our business community downtown and throughout the community at large.

As we look to the future, our options become more limited in terms of design enhancements, primarily due to limited space and incompatible uses. There is a need to work with stakeholders and the community to take a step back and evaluate what we have learned over three summers. There is also a need to re-visit the long-term vision to confirm that our day-to-day efforts and short-term enhancements are consistent and working in support of a shared vision for the park.

Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):

The Artesian Commons Leadership Committee has been meeting nearly every month for two years and includes representatives from the following groups -

- Neighboring Property Owners
- Community Youth Services
- Downtown Ambassadors
- Olympia Police Department
- Parking and Business Improvement Area (PBIA)
- Olympia Downtown Association (ODA)
- Community Planning & Development - Downtown Liaison
- Olympia City Council
- Parks & Recreation Advisory Committee (PRAC)
- H2Olympia
- PB & J Project
- Olympia Parks Maintenance & Design
- Olympia Park Rangers
- Olympia Recreation Staff

Options:

1. Work with the Artesian Leadership Committee to facilitate a public process to develop a revised long-term vision for Artesian Commons Park.
2. Continue the current path of learning as we go, and evolving the Artesian Commons Park design and operation as resources allow.
3. Develop an alternative path forward for the Artesian Commons Park that may or may not include a combination of the options listed above.

Financial Impact:

Total operating costs for the maintenance, programming, and events at Artesian Commons Park is estimated at \$144,700 annually. In addition to all maintenance and program costs, this also includes the cost of the Well Host and Park Ranger.

In addition to the operating costs, there is currently \$40,000 remaining for continued enhancements from the 2016 Capital Budget.

Attachments:

2014 - Park User Outreach
2016 - Park User Outreach
2016 - Program and Events Report
2016 - Well User Feedback
2016 - Well Host and Ranger Planning Commission Update
2017 - PBIA Business Survey