

EUGENE CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY



Work Session: Green Alleys

Meeting Date: September 8, 2014
Department: Public Works Engineering
www.eugene-or.gov

Agenda Item Number: A
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ISSUE STATEMENT

This work session is in response to council interest in green alleys after receiving “The Eugene Green Alley Project Report” prepared by a University of Oregon student and receiving comments on green alleys during the public forum at a council meeting in March of this year.

BACKGROUND

Green Alley

Green Alley - An alley designed and constructed incorporating best management practices of environmentally sustainable design. – “The Chicago Green Alley Handbook.” Elements of environmentally sustainable design include managing stormwater through vegetated infiltration or filtration facilities; recycling materials during construction, reducing the urban heat island affect by using high albedo materials such as concrete, and illuminating alleys with LED lights with cutoff fixtures.

“The Eugene Green Alley Project Report”

The “Eugene Green Alley Project Report” provides an overview of the City’s improved and unimproved alleys with a focus on the Friendly and Whiteaker neighborhoods. It identifies three green alley types – high-density auto, low-density auto, and low-density pedestrian and proposes design concepts for each type.

Numerous stormwater best management practices (BMPs) are identified to manage the quantity and quality of stormwater runoff. Examples of BMPs include permeable pavement, infiltration trenches, vegetated swales and rain gardens. The BMPs are similar to the BMPs in the City’s “Stormwater Management Manual.”

Case studies from three cities – Chicago, Vancouver, and Los Angeles - were reviewed and summarized in the report.

Significant community outreach in the Friendly and Whiteaker neighborhoods was conducted as part of the “Green Alley Project.” An online survey was completed by 95 people. One question asked individuals who lived adjacent to an alley their satisfaction with the alley’s current condition. Out of 59 responses, 48 were somewhat to very dissatisfied. Fifty-one people living adjacent to an alley would want their alley improved if it did not cost them anything and 28 people were willing to incur cost for an alley improvement.

“The Eugene Green Alley Project Report” is available electronically at www.eugenegap.com.

Eugene Alleys

There are approximately 43 miles of alleys within the City of Eugene. Almost all of the alleys are located in neighborhoods that are south of the Willamette River and east of Garfield Street. Many alleys provide access to property and/or serve as utility corridors. There are approximately 18 miles of alleys that have been improved to City standards and are maintained by the City as part of the pavement preservation program. There are 23 miles of gravel alleys that were maintained by the City until 1989 when the “grade and gravel” program was eliminated due to budget constraints. The remaining two miles of alleys are unimproved alley right-of-way.

Public Improvement Design Standards

The design and construction of alleys is governed by the City’s “Public Improvement Design Standards” (PIDS) manual. The standards for the design and construction of alleys in the PIDS manual are flexible enough to support the green alley concepts identified in both “The Eugene Green Alley Project Report” and “The Chicago Green Alley Handbook.” Furthermore, the stormwater development standards updated by the City Council earlier this year require a hierarchy of best management practices that promotes green infrastructure. The updated stormwater development standards will apply to any future alley improvement project.

Financing Alley Improvements

Alley improvements have been predominantly financed through direct assessments to abutting property owners. The entire cost of alley improvement projects are assessed. Assessment projects may be initiated by the City Council or by a petition of the property owners representing properties that will bear more than 50 percent of the assessable costs. Assessments may be financed through the City and owner-occupied residential properties can defer assessment until the sale or transfer of the property or may qualify for a low-income subsidy.

West University Neighborhood Alley Improvement Project

The most recent alley improvement project was completed in 2005, and included 23 alleys in the West University Neighborhood. The alley improvement project was initiated in response to a recommendation by the West University Task Force following a riot in the neighborhood in September 2002. The task force identified the benefits of improving the alleys as providing better access for services such as fire, emergency medical care, garbage, and deliveries; making alleys safer for pedestrians, cyclists, and vehicles; and improving the livability of the neighborhood.

The \$1.851 million project improved alleys to a standard 14-foot-wide concrete alley including catch basins and piping from catch basins to the stormwater system. The project preceded the adoption of the City’s stormwater development standards and did not include any provisions to address stormwater quality. Street lighting was also not part of the project.

The full cost of the project was assessed to 160 tax lots. Property owners assessed for the improvements represented a wide cross section of land uses including numerous non-profits, institutions, commercial businesses, multi-family residences and owner-occupied single-family homes. Twenty-two percent of the assessments were less than \$5,000 or greater than \$20,000. Thirty-eight percent of the assessments were between \$5,000 and \$10,000 and 39 percent of the assessments were between \$10,000 and \$20,000.

The WUN alley improvement project was a successful large scale pilot project to improve the unimproved alleys in an entire neighborhood. A task force set the objectives of the project as one of the tangible actions in response to a riot. The improvements were fully funded with assessments to the properties adjacent to the alleys.

RELATED CITY POLICIES

TransPlan Policy -

- TSI System-Wide Policy # 4 Neighborhood Livability – Support transportation strategies that enhance neighborhood livability.

Comprehensive Stormwater Management Plan Policy -

- Policy 1.5 – Develop new design standards and maintenance practices that meet the multiple objectives of the Stormwater Plan.

COUNCIL OPTIONS

This is an informational work session, no action is required at this time.

CITY MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

No action is required on this item.

SUGGESTED MOTION

No action is required on this item.

ATTACHMENTS

None.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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