

EUGENE CITY COUNCIL

AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY



Work Session: Downtown Improvements

Meeting Date: January 11, 2016
Department: Planning & Development
www.eugene-or.gov

Agenda Item Number: A
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ISSUE STATEMENT

This work session follows up on direction given by the council on December 15, 2015, and will specifically focus on downtown high-speed fiber internet and improvements to the park blocks. Based on council discussion and feedback on the identified priorities, a subsequent work session on funding mechanisms will follow.

BACKGROUND

On December 14, 2015, the council directed the City Manager to schedule a work session to inform the City Council on a downtown high-speed fiber project and improved park blocks and all the mechanisms for funding these projects. The January 11 work session will allow council to talk more about goals for both of these priorities and will help inform the second work session on funding options, which is tentatively scheduled for January 20.

Downtown High-Speed Fiber (Broadband)

At the November 18, 2015, work session “Economic Prosperity – Technology Sector,” the council heard from staff, Lane Workforce Partnership, and the Technology Association of Oregon (TAO) on efforts to assist the local technology industry. The presentation noted that expanding fiber optics is critical for spurring economic development, by attracting and strengthening the types of businesses that rely on this up-to-date technology. The two critical components of expanding fiber optics include A) installing downtown fiber and B) establishing the “Middle Mile” connection between local and regional internet exchanges, with the following anticipated benefits:

- Increased internet speed for lower monthly costs;
- Increase number and size of technology businesses and related jobs, in accordance with the Regional Prosperity Economic Prosperity Plan;
- Reduced costs and increased computer speed for City, Lane Community College, Lane County, Lane Council of Governments (LCOG), 4J and Bethel school districts; and
- Low-cost broadband service for residential buildings in the service area, including two affordable housing projects.

A. Installing Downtown Fiber

The 2013 City of Eugene Broadband Strategic Plan identified the development of a downtown fiber network as a strategic goal. After completion of the Strategic Plan, City staff worked with

LCOG and the Eugene Water & Electric Board (EWEB) on a successful pilot project, to test the feasibility of implementing a downtown network. The City, EWEB, and LCOG identified a workable method to connect several commercial buildings by running fiber optics cables through existing electrical conduit. Independent Internet Service Providers (ISPs) are now providing high speed internet service to the connected buildings, the speed and price of which is comparable to cities in the U.S. known as 'gigabit cities.' With LCOG, EWEB, and TAO, the Fiber Implementation Plan is underway to construct fiber connections to approximately 120 additional downtown buildings. The project also anticipates the ability to extend beyond downtown in the future. EWEB has estimated the total cost to construct the downtown network to be about \$2.7 million.

B. Establishing The "Middle Mile" Connection

The Fiber Implementation Plan also includes the costs and benefit of leasing a publicly operated connection from a local internet connection point owned and operated by LCOG to large, regional internet exchanges in Portland and San Jose, California. The fiber planning team refers to this connection as the 'Middle Mile', as it provides the connection between major service providers and local ISPs. In Eugene, there is a constrained supply of access to the regional exchange points, so the connection speed is lower and cost is higher than in larger cities. Establishing the Middle Mile connection is essential for the downtown fiber project and will build on and enhance the benefits of the downtown fiber network. The City, other public agencies, school districts, and ISPs would then have access to wholesale rates comparable to those that exist in the Portland and San Jose markets. The rates would be significantly lower than the retail rates available today. Based on initial cost estimates, this publicly operated connection will have an initial capital cost of \$350,000 and a \$6,000 monthly fee.

More information on the Fiber Implementation Plan is in Attachment A.

Park Blocks

The Park Blocks are a living legacy of the forethought and civic spirit of the earliest founders of Eugene. On a direct path to the Willamette River from downtown, the design, appearance and function of the Park Blocks are a key part of the Willamette to Willamette initiative. In 2021, they will likely be one of the most visited places downtown, as athletes, visitors, media and local residents make their way to the center of the city. The Park Blocks need to represent the best vision for an inviting civic space and provide a lasting legacy for generations to come.

Originally delineated as a large square in 1854, the site has undergone significant changes with new designs and structures through the last 152 years. By 1875, the City Hall, jail and the fire house were built on what is today the south Park Blocks. By 1897, the Park Block was cut into four quadrants, with the construction of 8th Avenue and Oak Street through the site. In 1915, The Eugene Public Market, the original Lane County Farmers' Market, opened on the site. In 1958, the Butterfly Parking Lot was built on the northwest quadrant, and Lloyd Bond's design for the two remaining blocks was completed, which is the design in place at present.

Today, the two south Park Blocks are owned by the City of Eugene and are a park and open space for general public use. While they are used daily, they are best known for the Saturday Market, now in its 40th year and the Farmers' Market, now 100 years old, which fill the space with

significant activity at least weekly for over half of the year. When the space is not programmed and filled with activity, longstanding issues with use, infrastructure, safety, design, and context prevent the Park Blocks from being an inviting civic showcase. Without intensively programmed events such as the markets, even in the best weather, they are a space that is underutilized by the community.

The two north blocks are owned by Lane County; the east block is occupied in part by the Public Service Building, which overlaps into the original open square, as well as the Free Speech Plaza, dedicated in 2005. The plaza design has low walls that enclose the space resulting in less visual or physical access to the other three quadrants. On the northwest block, the space in front and to the sides of the Butterfly Parking Lot have been used for the Lane County Farmers' Market, but do not provide adequate space for the farmers or circulation space for visitors.

Redesigning the Park Blocks for a more functional and inviting space as well as recreating the original four quadrants has been a part of the community's conversation for many years. The Eugene Downtown Plan, adopted in 2004, supports the careful design of parks and plazas downtown, including the consideration of the four corners that were historically part of the original Park Blocks, as well as the following implementation strategies and project:

- Prepare an open space plan for downtown that includes the Park Blocks, parks adjacent to downtown and the riverfront path system.
- Reinforce the continued use of the Park Blocks for the Saturday Market and Farmers' Market.
- Work with Lane County to develop a mixed use or civic structure in place of the butterfly parking lot on Oak Street between 7th and 8th Avenues, to better integrate this site with the Park Blocks.

In 2004, shortly after the Downtown Plan was adopted, the Mayor's Civic Visioning Committee released its report and recommendation including a redesign of the Park Blocks, with the northwest quadrant added and the south Park Blocks upgraded. In 2006, the Park Blocks Master Plan was completed, which reinforced the goal of reclaiming the northwest quadrant and proposed significant upgrades to the south Park Blocks as well as to Park Street, which borders the Park Blocks.

The Park Blocks today reflect the uses and vision that have evolved over time. Although plans and policies have called for redesign and comprehensive changes, in recent years only minor design revisions and infrastructure upgrades have been undertaken. The limited work is due in part to funding constraints and competing priorities for staff, such as focused attention on redevelopment opportunities, including Broadway Commerce Center and Lane Community College, to bring people and jobs back to downtown. Now that the downtown revitalization efforts have resulted in renewed confidence, investment and activity, the community conversation about the design and use of public open spaces highlights the importance of creating and maintaining successful downtown public spaces. The Park Blocks are a critical component of this conversation and demonstrate the continuing need for a downtown environment that is inclusive, welcoming, and active, as part of the city's heritage and legacy.

2021 Implications

The upcoming World Track and Field Championships in 2021 is an opportunity to showcase the community to the entire world. The event itself will only last several weeks, but the improvements, amenities and infrastructure put in place will serve as a lasting legacy for the community. Improvements to the primary downtown public spaces – the Park Blocks, Hult Center Plaza, Broadway Plaza (Kesey Square), the plaza at the new City Hall, the new riverfront park, and the pedestrian path system – will provide a network of unique gathering spaces that can accommodate numerous uses, activities, and civic events. Elements such as a completed Willamette to Willamette connection, with improved sidewalks and two-way automobile and bicycle traffic on 8th Avenue, will make the connection between the university area, the riverfront path and the heart of downtown a safe, inviting and convenient pathway.

The impact of high-speed fiber also promotes an active, bustling downtown, with more creative businesses and employees, expanded retail and restaurant offerings, and downtown residential units. The provision of high-speed fiber demonstrates a commitment to prosperity goals and to embracing a new economy, while reimagined and improved public spaces create a downtown that welcomes the whole community. Both these efforts can inspire the world in a way that is authentically Eugene.

RELATED CITY POLICIES

Downtown improvements for high-speed fiber and park block improvements address many goals for Eugene and downtown, including:

Envision Eugene Pillars

- Provide ample economic opportunities for all community members.
- Promote compact urban development and efficient transportation options.
- Protect, repair and enhance neighborhood livability.
- Provide for adaptable, flexible and collaborative implementation.

Regional Prosperity Economic Development Plan

- Strategy 5: Identify as a Place to Thrive - Priority Next Step - Urban Vitality
 - As we foster a creative economy, dynamic urban centers are an important asset. Eugene, Springfield and many of the smaller communities in the region recognize the importance of supporting and enhancing vitality in their city centers. Building downtowns as places to live, work and play will support the retention and expansion of the existing business community and be a significant asset to attract new investment. The Cities of Eugene and Springfield will continue to enhance their efforts to promote downtown vitality through development and redevelopment.

City Council Goal of Sustainable Development

- Increased downtown development

Eugene Downtown Plan

- Downtown development shall support the urban qualities of density, vitality, livability and diversity to create a downtown, urban environment.

- Emphasize Broadway, Willamette Street, 5th and 8th Avenues as Great Streets through public improvements and development guidelines. Include portions of these streets as follows:
 - 8th Avenue between Willamette Street and the Willamette River.
- Enhance public places throughout downtown through the careful design of civic buildings, streetscapes, parks and plazas. Include public art and other elements to create special places for all ages.
- Connect special places downtown with enhanced street designs, public art, directional signs, transit routes and historic markers to create an inviting and memorable route through downtown.
- Support public safety activities that increase visibility, access actual and perceived safety for individuals and property downtown.
- Enhance functional designs for streets, sidewalks and related public improvements with carefully chosen design elements, including materials, alignments, plantings and streetscape elements.
- Use downtown development tools and incentives to encourage development that provides character and density downtown.
- Actively pursue public/private development opportunities to achieve the vision for an active, vital, growing downtown.

Climate Recovery Ordinance

An active, inviting, well-designed public open space downtown enhances walkability and livability, supports downtown as a 20-minute neighborhood, and reduces reliance on fossil fuels.

The impact of high-speed fiber to incrementally reducing vehicle miles traveled is under study by different organizations. There is evidence to show that the information and communication technology sector can play a role in addressing climate change and facilitating efficient and low carbon development. A link to one such study is here:

<http://gesi.org/files/Reports/Measuring%20the%20Energy%20Reduction%20Impact%20of%20Selected%20Broadband-Enabled%20Activities%20within%20Households.pdf>

COUNCIL OPTIONS

The council is asked to give feedback on scope of downtown fiber and Park Block improvements to inform the January 20 work session on funding options.

CITY MANAGER’S RECOMMENDATION

No recommendation at this time.

SUGGESTED MOTION

No motion offered at this time.

ATTACHMENTS

- A. Eugene Fiber Implementation Plan

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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