

DATE: May 14, 2018
TO: Hood River Urban Renewal Agency - Kate McBride, Chair
FROM: Steve Wheeler, Administrator
SUBJECT: Urban Renewal Advisory Committee – Project Recommendations –
The Heights

OVERVIEW

Over the last year the Hood River Urban Renewal Advisory Committee (URAC) has been formulating a recommendation for prioritized improvement projects in The Heights urban renewal project area. After careful consideration of the Goals and Objectives of The Heights area District, originally established in 2011 (and subsequently revised), URAC is presenting three recommendations to the Urban Renewal Agency:

- In conjunction with ODOT, evaluate re-establishing two-way traffic flow on 12th and 13th streets;
- Develop a project, or projects, to underground utility lines;
- Develop a series of related streetscape improvements to include various traffic calming features that enhance pedestrian and bicycle friendliness.

These recommendations come after considerable public involvement that including two well-attended public meetings in October and November of 2017.

BACKGROUND

The Heights urban renewal district was established in 2011. It covers approximately 96 acres centered around State Highway 281. It has a total maximum indebtedness of \$8,495,000, 99 percent of which remains. The first several years of this district were centered on growing its tax increment revenue.

In developing its recommendations URAC considered the Goals and Objectives of The Heights Urban Renewal plan, plus the related Outline of Major Project Activities. The Goals are as follows:

- Goal 1: Economy
- Goal 2: District Identity
- Goal 3: Recreation
- Goal 4: Traffic and Transportation

- Goal 5: Public Utilities
- Goal 6: Public Involvement
- Goal 7: Housing (Added in 2016)

Five separate types of project activities were contemplated in The Heights UR Plan, as follows:

- A: Infrastructure Improvements;
- B: District Identity/Streetscape
- C: Redevelopment Assistance
- D: Acquisition
- E: Housing Assistance (Added in 2016)

When originally established the Goals and Project Activities were wide-ranging, and became even more so when Housing was added in 2016. It was never considered realistic that The Heights area urban renewal projects would touch every possible goal and project type, and indeed they do not. However the proposed project categories do touch on many of them, particularly Goals 1,3,4,5 and 6 and Activities A, B and C.

Following this consideration URAC conducted (with excellent help and assistance from Elaine Howard Consulting) two very well attended public input meetings. The first, on October 19, 2017 had over 50 attendees. It reviewed how urban renewal works in a general sense and the concepts behind tax increment financing. As a community refresher course, of sorts, it also reviewed the project parameters as outlined in The Heights UR plan.

The second meeting was held on December 9, 2017, and had even greater attendance than the November meeting. Over 75 people attended what was considered a “project input meeting,” at which a variety of project options were displayed. Through a controlled dot exercise people could vote their priorities. There was a concurrent online voting component that ran through November 22. At the November 9 meeting three project categories were described. Category 1 were projects up to approximately \$750,000 in estimated costs and one to two years out before they could be initiated. Categories 2 and 3 were, respectively, \$750,000-\$1,500,000 and two to three years out and greater than \$1,500,000 and with an unlimited initiation time frame. On November 9 there was also a “write-in” board plus a similar component to the online survey.

All of this was carefully analyzed and cross-tabulated by Scott Vanden Bos of Elaine Howard Consulting. As the rankings were prepared two trends emerged. First, in the combined rankings undergrounding overhead power lines was the most requested type of project. After that, three related project types garnered significant support –

improving the local streetscape, using angled parking and developing projects to enhance traffic calming and improve bike and pedestrian friendliness.

Finally, there was a strong write-in component requesting consideration of a return to two-way traffic on 12th and 13th streets. These requests appear to meld with the proposed traffic calming and bicycle pedestrian safety categories for those two modes of transportation.

During the winter URAC spent the better part of two meetings considering and discussing this large amount of community input. What has emerged are the three following recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Consider a return to two-way traffic on 12th and 13th streets. Over thirty five years ago the sections of 12 and 13th street, between May and Belmont streets were changed from two-way to one-way only, southbound on 13th and northbound on 12th. To improve pedestrian and bicycle safety and enhance a more local business friendly atmosphere the agency is requested to work with ODOT to evaluate a possible return to two way traffic. URAC recognizes this is very much a shared conversation; the roads are ODOT owned and controlled facilities. The request is for collaboration and evaluation. To that end there is an email that follows this report describing, from ODOT's point of view, a process forward and some considerations for this type of project. The recommendation is to approach ODOT for further evaluation of the realistic feasibility of converting one-way to two-way traffic on these street sections.
2. Develop a project, or multiple projects, to underground the current street level utility lines in The Heights. The major focus will be on 12th and 13th streets between Belmont and May Streets. Side street undergrounding could also be considered. In all of this it is recognized that detailed coordination with Pacific Power, which owns and controls the poles, and ODOT, which controls the right-of-way, will need to take place. More than just power lines are carried on the poles. Century Link, Charter Communications, Gorge Net and others are also carried, so considerable organization is necessary. In the proposed Urban Renewal Budget for fiscal year 2018-19 \$15,000 is budgeted for a detailed engineering review to evaluate the realistic scope and scale of this project. This is not to be confused with development of construction contract documents, a larger endeavor, but rather to ascertain the art of the possible for this project when compared with the resources available to The Heights District.

3. Develop a project, or projects, to meld a system of enhanced streetscapes, traffic calming and pedestrian/bicycle features that could contain some, or not limited to the following:

- Bump-outs at street corners for pedestrian crossings;
- Decorative features such as planter boxes, etc.;
- Improved street lighting for public safety;
- Improved and decorative building facades;
- Enhanced pavement treatment for sidewalks;
- Diagonal parking on side-streets;
- A "festival street" designation category for one or two side streets;
- Designating certain streets as "truck only" streets

Priority locations for these and/or other enhancement features are 12th and 13th streets between May and Belmont along with 13th Street between State St. and Sherman St. A key feature of this recommendation is hiring a creative urban design professional to develop simple, effective solutions that integrate progressive planning and engineering principles into cohesive projects. \$20,000 is contained in the proposed Urban Renewal Agency budget for this work. Similar to recommendation 2, this will not be developing construction documents but will create definable project(s).

FINANCIAL REVIEW

The Heights District tax revenues have been increasing significantly over the past several years. See the table below of tax increment revenues:

15-16 (actual)	16-17 (actual)	17-18 (budget)	18-19 (est.)
\$124,546	\$148,761	\$168,024	\$191,741

When the specific costs become more known and detailed it will be recommended to conduct a financial review to evaluate the following:

- Debt capacity to fund projects;
- Develop realistic timing to coordinate project development with financial capacity. This could include breaking some projects into smaller components to get a start while the District is still relatively young and growing.
- Provide advice on the type of debt to use. Some options are revenue bonds backed by tax increment financing, commercial bank loans or internal City loans.

CONCLUSION

The work of URAC over the past year to develop the project recommendations has been well done, and I believe well-received, by the local Heights community. These proposed project types reflect the general will of the community with additional insight provided by URAC, as most of its members live and or work in The Heights. While the consultants cannot be available tonight, Chair Jack Trumbull will be available to help answer questions from Agency members. We recommend the Agency ask any questions they may have and then give direction on these recommendations.

A special thanks to Elaine Howard Consulting (Elaine Howard and Scott Vanden Bos) for their work on this endeavor. The Urban Renewal Advisory Committee consists of:

Jack Trumbull, Chair

Jody Behr

Abby Capovilla

Kelly Emerson

Patricia Gates

Tina Lassen

Pat McAllister

Respectfully Submitted

Steve Wheeler, Administrator