

## **Courthouse Park Plaza Update**

City Council Meeting 1/20/22

### **What is the history of the Courthouse Park Plaza project?**

- Initial big idea: local business and community leaders aspire to create a vibrant downtown. Need a central gathering place.
- The Stevenson Downtown Association is formed as a non-profit organization to help lead project efforts, fundraising, and advocacy for a park in the heart of downtown at the site of the Skamania County Courthouse lawn.
- Lengthy public engagement process about concept and designs includes 5 public meetings, 2 community surveys, and many additional individual meetings.
- The City and County work together to approve initial design plans for a Courthouse Park Plaza project, based on the community feedback.
- Fundraising efforts begin, funds are secured from private donations.
- 2019: Downtown association applies for and receives approval of \$150,000 grant through Rep. Chris Corry and the WA State Legislature Capital Projects budget (grant administered by Dept of Commerce)
- SDA contracts with the County engineering team as consultants to assist with archeological requirements for the property.
- 2020: \$500K grant application & presentations to RCO (WA State Recreation and Conservation Office) - ultimately, did not receive this grant
- The County and Archeological Investigations Northwest (AINW) finalize the cultural resource survey report (archeological and pedestrian analysis)
- WA Department of Archaeological & Historical Preservation (DAHP) finds that the project (any project) disturbing the lawn would have an adverse impact on Skamania County's Courthouse historic significance and original design.
- DAHP wants to list the County Courthouse on the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), as a measure to mitigate the adverse impact on Skamania County's Courthouse property.
- County and Downtown Association are currently reviewing NRHP option and other mitigation solutions.
- MOU is underway between City and County for plaza management by the city as a public city park once constructed
- Lots of community effort, and partnership with Stevenson Downtown Association, City & County, to get us where we are many years after the initial big idea
- More specific history included below

### **Why are we here today?**

- Legislature Capital Projects grant through Dept of Commerce - the \$150K already allocated to Park Plaza - has requirements that the SDA can't satisfy (property deed of trust, title insurance, to name a few)
- Commerce requests amending the grantee contact to a government entity who would oversee the property, and amend the plaza description to be simplified in order to release funds (project description needs to be fully funded before grant payout).

### **What does this mean?**

- We are asking for the City be listed as the grantee on this Commerce contract and any future government grants for the Courthouse Park Plaza
- We are asking for the City to take the lead in managing the Courthouse Park Plaza project, while the Downtown Association would continue to be a key partner and provide continued private fundraising, communications and advocacy support
- Another MOU between City and County would need to be agreed upon in the future
- Removes the Downtown Association from being the go-between with project contactors (including the County) with LTAC funding

### **Why would the City take the lead on the Courthouse Park Plaza?**

- The Courthouse Park Plaza project already overlaps with future city projects, such as a City Parks Plan and Upper Russell Street improvements.
- RCO round of grant funding in 2024 allows time to finalize plans for this major grant application (with the Downtown Association's support on this process and with presentations)
- Timeline provides breathing room from current priorities of Waste Water Treatment Plant and 1st Street, etc.

### **Additional detailed project progress since March 2020:**

- Department of Archaeological & Historical Preservation (DAHP) concurred with the County's cultural resource survey methodology described in the EZ-1 form, also known as the Historic & Cultural Resource Review form, would be sufficient for the proposed project.
- The County consulted with the concerned tribes about details of the proposed project and a cultural resource survey and historic property inventory would be conducted on Skamania County's Courthouse property. The County also informed the tribes that they were in contact with the State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) and DAHP about the proposed project.
- Archeological Investigations Northwest, Inc. (AINW), an on-call consultant for the County, had their Archeologists conduct a pedestrian and subsurface survey of the Courthouse property.
- AINW also had their Architectural Historian document the interior and exterior of the adjacent buildings to the proposed project and the grand staircase for the historic property inventory.
- AINW informed the County that an artifact was found during the pedestrian and subsurface survey with the initial shovel testing. AINW was able to conclude the resource was a single site after additional shovel testing was performed, along with delineation of the resource and establishment of a resource boundary.
- The County had AINW submit the State of Washington Archeological Site Inventory Form to DAHP for review of the one stone flake resource. DAHP evaluated the resource and concurred that the resource did not meet the National Register Criteria. An Official

Resource Number (ORN) was provided for the one stone flake resource to be included in the cultural resource survey report.

- The County and AINW finalized and submitted the cultural resource survey report with two historic resource forms and an archeological resource form for DAHP's review of the proposed project.
- DAHP's reviewed the materials under Governor's Executive Order 21-02 and agreed that Skamania County's Courthouse was eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) under Criteria A and C; the Skamania County's Sheriff's Office was not eligible for listing in the NRHP; and the project as proposed would have an adverse impact on Skamania County's Courthouse.
- DAHP's conclusion of the proposed project required the County to have further consultation with DAHP and develop Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to mitigate the adverse impact on Skamania County's Courthouse property.
- The County also had further consultation with the concerned tribes by sending a copy of the cultural resource survey report for their review of the proposed project. The Confederate Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation recommended a cultural resource monitor be present for all ground disturbing work on the proposed project that was beyond the previously disturbed soils in the subsurface testing (approximately 40 cm in depth).
- The County proposed an Inadvertent Discovery Plan (IDP) for all ground disturbing activities on the proposed project be incorporated into the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with DAHP to the Confederate Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation.
- The Confederate Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation thought an IDP was a reasonable mitigation measure for the proposed project. They would also appreciate an opportunity to review the plan before it is finalized.
- The County, AINW, Stevenson Downtown Association (SDA) and DAHP discussed additional mitigation measures and the implementation of these measures into the MOU.
- DAHP presented to the County's Board of Commissioners about the National Register for Historic Places (NRHP). DAHP has recommended listing Skamania County's Courthouse in the NRHP as a mitigation measure option in the MOU to offset the adverse impact of the proposed project.
- The County and SDA reviewed a draft of the MOU and IDP completed by AINW for the proposed project. The County followed-up with these drafts to the Department of Commerce (DOC) and DAHP for feedback, review, and signatory questions.
- DAHP doesn't know that they want to consider a DAHP Level II mitigation as sufficient replacement in the MOU as an equivalent alternative to listing the Skamania County Courthouse on the NRHP.
- DOC Assistant Attorney General (AAG) took an initial look at the MOU and would likely want to make some adjustments to the MOU language. However, DOC has larger questions around adding SDA as signatories to the MOU as the Commerce grantee and current project manager. DOC is requiring a formal agreement of the long term of the site before they could enter into a grant contract for the funds.