

Courthouse Park Plaza Update

On Wednesday, August 21st, Skamania County Board of Commissioners held a joint meeting with the Stevenson City Council to discuss the Courthouse Park Plaza project and current Memorandum of Interlocal Agreement. City representatives answered a list of questions submitted by County Commissioners, and a recording of the meeting can be found on the city website at <https://www.ci.stevenson.wa.us/meetings>. Once questions were addressed about the water feature, parking, homeless concerns and ongoing maintenance, it was agreed that some alterations would be necessary to the interlocal agreement with regards to the jurisdiction of the project maintenance areas; the percentage of the Courthouse lawn area dedicated to the plaza decreased significantly in recent iterations of the design due to public and Commissioner feedback on features and scope. To avoid going through the agreement line by line, both agencies decided to meet within their own entities to discuss changes they would like to submit for consideration when modifying the Agreement to move forward with the project.

At the end of the discussion, City Council Member Pat Rice requested to open the remainder of the meeting for public comment in order for attendees witnessing the meeting an opportunity to share their concerns or reasons for support. While Commissioner Chair Asa Leckie was open to that after the discussion section of the meeting was closed, City Administrator Leana Kinley reminded everyone about the rules of the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA); as a Special Meeting for the City Council, only items listed on the agenda are allowed to be discussed and public comment was not part of the mutually-agreed-upon agenda. Any continued participation in a gathering of a quorum of council members would be a violation of the OPMA. Furthermore, this meeting was called by the County Commissioners to discuss the Park Plaza project as a continuation of their weekly meeting, which already offered the standard public comment period. OPMA standard is to announce a public hearing or public comment opportunity with advance notice to all residents, and by offering this opportunity only to people in the room would not have been transparent, fair or legal.

It is not the intent of either agency to deny public comment about the project. In-depth solicitation for community input on this project began in 2015 with community meetings, workshops, surveys and interviews to determine the viability and interest in the concept of a park plaza at the Courthouse lawn, which was highly favored. Most recently as the project work moved along and was ready to be fine-tuned, two county-wide surveys were conducted to gather input on the plaza design. Feedback from the community input resulted in the design change from the "Looking to the Future" design chosen in 2015 to the reduced footprint design in 2024. The City and County have not approved the final design and there is still opportunity to provide input on the project. There will be future meetings, workshops and public hearings to move the project forward. Funds gathered for the Courthouse Park Plaza can only be used for this project when applying for specific grants, or for other similar spaces for events when using tourism tax dollars. This project funding is not competing with schools, streets, Law Enforcement, Fire, mental health, housing, water or sewer projects. More information on this project can be found on the city website at <https://www.ci.stevenson.wa.us/planning/project/courthouse-park-plaza>.

ORIGINAL DESIGN CONCEPT APPROVED BY COMMUNITY, COUNTY & CITY:



LOOKING TO THE FUTURE 1
SCALE: 1" = 20' - 0"

STEVENS ON BUSINESS ASSOCIATION
CITY OF STEVENSON, WA



MOST RECENT ITERATION OF THE PROJECT BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM COMMUNITY, COUNTY & BUDGET CONSIDERATIONS:

