

TO: Mayor Marchione and City Council

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DATE: October 15, 2013

**SUBJECT: STAFF REPORT: UTILITY UNDERGROUNDING PHASE 2
AMENDMENTS – KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

The purpose of this staff report is to summarize key considerations and policy alternatives related to utility undergrounding in preparation for a Council study session on October 29, 2013. This memo also describes additional background information staff will provide for this study session.

REQUESTED DIRECTION AND SCHEDULE

At the Council’s October 15, 2013, meeting, staff will ask whether this additional background information provides a sufficient basis for the study session. At the study session, staff would like to know which considerations are of particular importance to the Council, and preferred policy alternative(s) for further evaluation as part of utility undergrounding Phase 2 Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code.

Following the study session, staff will develop proposed policy and code amendments as appropriate, including review by the Technical Committee and Planning Commission. The Planning Commission’s recommendation will be presented to City Council in early 2014 for consideration and potential action.

BACKGROUND AND FOLLOW UP TOPICS

Utility Undergrounding Phase II amendments follows up on City Council action in September 2012 (Phase 1), which amended the Redmond Zoning Code to exempt Single Family Residential development from undergrounding distribution lines along public right-of-way. During Phase 1 Council members and staff expressed interest in revisiting this topic as it relates to other land uses and City capital projects.

The topic concerns existing utility poles and associated aerial wiring, including electrical distribution lines, telecommunication lines (phone, cable, and fiber) and other aerial utility equipment. Staff assumes the City will continue to prohibit construction of new utility poles, and that short plats will be addressed on a case-by-case basis, as agreed as part of the Phase 1 Amendments.

As part of Phase 1 discussion and recent conversation at the September 2013 Planning and Public Works Committee meeting, Council requested additional information as shown below, which will be addressed at the October 29 study session:

- How much overhead utilities remain and where?
- Whether overhead vs. underground utilities are more reliable?
- Which configuration is ultimately more cost-effective?
- Whether other technical options exist for relocating utilities underground?
- Whether utilities ultimately prefer overhead or underground configuration and why?

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Prior to developing proposed policy and/or amendments, staff would like to confirm the underlying considerations for utility undergrounding. The list below represents staff's understanding of the key considerations relevant to the undergrounding issue, and is compiled from the Comprehensive Plan, Zoning Code, prior City Council direction, staff and stakeholder input, and best practices.

1. Aesthetics

Impact of overhead utilities on Redmond's visual landscape.

2. Environmental Quality

Trees trimmed or removed to accommodate overhead utilities.

3. Safety and Reliability

Utility poles and overhead power lines are susceptible to wind damage, and can become safety hazards.

4. Equity

The configuration of utility poles and overhead power lines is not uniform, meaning the requirement to relocate utilities is similarly uneven.

5. Coordination

Private development occurs at different rates and locations, making relocation of aerial facilities after development difficult to coordinate and sequence.

6. Cost

The cost of relocating aerial utilities underground is not scaled according to the scope and cost of development.

Mayor Marchione and City Council

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7. Maintenance

Underground utilities are less accessible for maintenance purposes than overhead facilities, though storm-related repair needs would likely be less.

SUMMARY OF POLICY ALTERNATIVES FOR DISCUSSION

1. Make no changes

2. Exemptions for other land uses; similar consideration for City capital projects

3. Exemptions based on geography

4. Fund-based

If you have any questions as you review this memo, please contact Pete Sullivan, 425-556-2406, psullivan@redmond.gov.