MEMORANDUM

To: City Council

From: Kurt Triplett, City Manager

Date: September 12, 2017

Subject: FORTERRA PUBLIC OUTREACH RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION:

That the City Council receives the results of Forterra/EMC’s focus groups, polling information and recommendations at the September 18, 2017 study session.

BACKGROUND DISCUSSION:

Beginning last fall, several Eastside cities began discussions with Forterra regarding growth concerns in their communities, especially regarding the greater urban densities these traditionally suburban communities have established in certain areas of the cities under the Growth Management Act and the city Comprehensive Plans. Councilmember Shelley Kloba and the City Manager initially attended these meeting on behalf of Kirkland. When Councilmember Kloba was elected to the State House of Representatives in November of 2016, the Council designated Deputy Mayor Jay Arnold as her replacement.

Each of the Eastside cities are experiencing explosive development as a result of strong economic growth and job creation, particularly in the technology sector. Many new residents are moving to the Eastside cities because of the job opportunities, the strong schools and the exceptional quality of life. However existing residents are feeling the burden of this growth through traffic, congestion, conversion of undeveloped land to housing, and a perceived sense of loss of small town feel and values.

Frequently these frustrations of existing residents have emerged as calls for moratoriums on growth and development. The common experience of each of the cities highlighted the need for research to develop a greater understanding of community perspectives on growth, a more transparent narrative for discussing related issues with local businesses and residents, and a tool kit for providing education to residents about regional and local growth management strategies.

To address these research needs, the cities of Issaquah, Kirkland, Redmond and Sammamish each made contributions to Forterra to partner with EMC Research to develop a project plan that included focus groups and research polling. The Kirkland City Council authorized $40,000 towards this effort as part of the 2017-2018 budget adoption in December of 2016.
Forterra/EMC has recently completed a two-step public research process. The team held a series of focus groups with people from two types of cities: 1) cities at the edge of the growth boundary (Issaquah and Sammamish), and; 2) cities closer-in and further along the path of development (Redmond and Kirkland). The goal of the focus groups was to uncover current attitudes about life on the Eastside, perceptions and values related to change, and how reactions to change and growth differ — and perhaps evolve — from place to place. The focus groups were designed to produce localized insights into how residents perceive growth in their immediate vicinity.

The research team then used the results from these focus groups to develop themes and messages regarding growth and greater density as the basis for a regional poll. The goal of the polling was to understand how residents of the Eastside are feeling about growth and development, and what expectations they have of city leadership to respond to these growth impacts.

The Forterra/EMC poll was conducted between June 19 and 28, 2017. There were 600 total interviews across the Eastside cities. Forterra and EMC tabulated the results and developed findings and narrative themes in July.

As part of the contract, Forterra and EMC will provide individual briefings to each City Council, as well as provide the poll and focus group data to all parties. Forterra and EMC presented to the Redmond City Council on August 22, 2017, and are attempting to schedule presentations to the other three cities.

Given the Kirkland City Council’s previously scheduled study session topics, the best date for a study session presentation of Forterra’s findings was the September 19, 2017 Council meeting. That date is a conflict for the EMC principles who conducted the poll but they have agreed to have Forterra and Kirkland staff present their results. In addition, Forterra has developed some thematic message recommendations from the poll results. Michael Beneke, the Vice President of Communications for Forterra, will be attending the study session to present those recommendations.