

Olympia Planning Commission

August 4, 2025

Olympia City Council
PO Box 1967 Olympia
WA 98507-1967

SUBJECT: Olympia 2045 Comprehensive Plan Land Use and Urban Design Chapter

Dear Mayor Payne and Councilmembers:

The Planning Commission is pleased to recommend approval of the Land Use & Urban Design Chapter of the Olympia 2045 Comprehensive Plan with revisions, suggested modifications and comments below. The Planning Commission appreciates the effort and time that City of Olympia Staff have invested in engaging with the Planning Commission. The Commission had briefings on the Chapter on July 15, 2024, and on April 21, 2025. The Social Justice and Equity Commission also received briefings on January 27, 2025 and on May 19, 2025. The Planning Commission conducted a public hearing on July 21, 2024. Planning Commission deliberations started on July 21, 2025, and continued on August 4, 2025.

The Planning Commission supports the improvements made throughout the chapter and would like to highlight a few in particular:

- The new *Urban Residential* land use category that simplifies multiple residential categories and provides higher maximum densities for consideration during potential future rezones.
- The addition of PL19.6 to support small scale commercial uses in more places. This policy addition garnered some concerned public comment, but with careful implementation in collaboration with the community, it has the potential to provide many benefits, including more social interactions in neighborhoods and reduced vehicle miles traveled. In response to public comment, we have suggested some additional language below.
- The addition of PL1.15, to provide consideration towards achieving environmental justice within our community.
- Finally, while the current Land Use & Urban Design Chapter has many goals and policies that are responsive to climate change, we look forward to the incorporation of the Climate Element of the Comprehensive Plan in this chapter.

After completing deliberations, the motion to recommend approval of the chapter includes the following suggested modifications:

Suggested Modifications:

- Add “sustainable” to Policy PL10.6 which supports City of Olympia coordination with the Port of Olympia for future economic development.

Adjusted policy:

*PL10.6 Coordinate with the Port of Olympia on future **sustainable** economic development.*

- Add a new policy supporting pedestrian-focused streets and the implementation of very low speed streets, pursuant to [SB 5595](#).

New policy:

PL17.11 Support the designation of ‘shared streets’, and a network of ‘shared streets’, through interdepartmental coordination and planning and community engagement. Evaluate development regulations to ensure they are consistent with the designs and goals of ‘shared streets’ as defined in State law.

- Adjust the newly proposed Policy PL19.6:

Adjusted policy:

PL19.6** Allow small scale commercial uses within neighborhoods through conditional use permits until design standards are developed. **Commercial uses in residential zones should be appropriately scaled and designed to serve nearby residents.

- Remove Policy PL17.8:

Existing policy:

PL17.8 Limit drive-through facilities to the vicinity of the Plum Street freeway interchange.

This policy was reviewed in the last couple of years as part of a proposed rezone on Plum Street. At that time, the Planning Commission felt that the policy did not provide the specificity it should and it was not clear what constituted ‘vicinity’ or if the policy was intended to apply City-wide. The planning commission did not come to a consensus on a more specific definition of ‘vicinity’ (i.e. south of 5th, 8th, or Union). Our suggestion is to strike the policy all together in favor of a comprehensive review addressing drive throughs on a city-wide scale. We understand that the issue of drive-through uses will most likely be on the 2026 work program for a City Council subcommittee, such as Land Use and Environment Committee, and possibly addressed by the City Council afterwards. Removing the policy allows for changes to the zoning code without necessitating changes to the Comprehensive Plan. We note that drive-through uses are already strictly regulated in the zoning code.

- Adopt a policy under GL1 that supports affordability through a generous “zoning buffer” (zoning capacity beyond that which is needed for growth and/or expected to be developed) to avoid land scarcity and speculation. The buildable lands report shows that Olympia has very little ‘excess’ capacity if we meet our growth targets, which could drive land costs up as Olympia grows. Consider adopting a policy to support a healthy zoning buffer:

New Policy:

PL1.20: Maintain zoning capacity 5-10x the projected need for housing in order to support affordable development and avoid land scarcity and speculation. Zoning capacity should be distributed across at least 25-50% of the buildable lands within city limits.

- As part of the Urban Corridors strategy, revise the Future Land Use map to expand the 'Urban Corridor' land use category to a consistent distance along the entirety of the designated corridors.

In support, restore PL13.6. Include modifications to PL13.6 to avoid conflict with priority language in the Transportation Chapter and Transportation Master Plan:

Existing (bold, strike through for removed text):

PL13.6 Focus public intervention and incentives on encouraging housing ~~and walking, biking and transit improvements~~ in the portions of the urban corridors nearest downtown and other areas with substantial potential for redevelopment consistent with this Plan. These include, for example, the area from the Fourth Avenue/Pacific Avenue intersection east to Pattison Avenue, and the area near the intersection of Harrison Avenue and Division Street, the Martin Way Corridor, and the Capital Mall Triangle Subarea.

Proposal:

*PL13.6 Focus public intervention and incentives on encouraging housing in the portions of the urban corridors nearest downtown and other areas with substantial potential for redevelopment consistent with this Plan. These include, for example, the area from the Fourth Avenue/Pacific Avenue intersection east to Pattison Avenue, and the area near the intersection of Harrison Avenue and Division Street, the Martin Way Corridor, and the Capital Mall Triangle Subarea. **Corridor improvements should support increased housing capacity while coordinating with broader goals for pedestrian and multimodal infrastructure, consistent with the Transportation and Climate chapters.***

- Strengthen language regarding annexations and the creation of "islands" in Policy PL25.4 by changing "avoid" to "do not allow".

Existing:

PL25.4 Encourage and assist property owners in existing unincorporated "islands" to annex into the City. Avoid annexations that create "islands" of unincorporated land within city limits.

Proposal (change in bold):

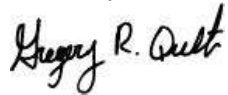
*PL25.4 Encourage and assist property owners in existing unincorporated "islands" to annex into the City. **Do not allow** annexations that create "islands" of unincorporated land within city limits.*

- Adjust Policy PL6.1 to clarify the design review process to avoid burdening needed housing production, particularly affordable and infill housing. Where applicable, incorporate language from Olympia's Affordable Housing Emergency Declaration, as well as requirements from middle housing legislation.

We understand this update work is being completed in a phased manner, with each chapter being considered individually. We also understand that final adoption will not occur until the entire draft is reviewed for internal consistency as well.

We appreciate the opportunity to review the proposed chapter and provide a recommendation for moving this portion of the periodic update forward. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gregory R. Quetin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Greg Quetin
Chair