

Olympia 2045: Climate Element Phase 3 Public Comment Summary

May 2025 – June 2025

Introduction

In 2023, the Washington State Legislature passed HB1118, which added a climate goal to the Growth Management Act (GMA). The act established a requirement for local jurisdictions to include a Climate Element within their comprehensive plans starting in 2025. The Climate Element must address both climate mitigation (the reduction of greenhouse gases) and resilience (the ability to prepare for, recover from, and adapt to climate change impacts). The second draft of the Climate Element goals and policies was published on May 20, 2025. The public comment period for this draft lasted for one month, from May 20, 2025 to June 20, 2025.

Community Engagement Process

We gathered public comment on the second draft through an online Engage Olympia survey and direct email. The content included in the public comments is summarized and responded to in the following section.

Engage Olympia Survey

The Engage Olympia survey was posted on May 20, 2025, the date that the goals and policies were posted, and was closed on June 20. We received 55 visitors to the website and 12 survey responses. The survey asked four questions:

1. Do you disagree or agree with the general direction of these draft goals and policies?
2. Why did you answer the way you did?
3. Would you like to see any changes to these draft goals and policies?
4. What changes would you like to see?

Of the 12 respondents, 10 (or 83%) either strongly agreed or agreed with the direction of the chapter. One respondent disagreed and the other respondent strongly disagreed with the direction of the chapter. Commenters generally supported the climate work outlined within the Climate Element; specific comments noted gaps within the Resilience sub-element and one respondent disagreed with environmental justice components. Additionally, 83% of the respondents would like to see changes to the goals and policies. These requested changes are summarized and discussed in the “Summary of Feedback” section below.

Direct Emails

We received 11 direct email responses during this comment period. Two of the comments came from Washington State agencies.

Summary of Feedback

Renewable Energy Generation and Electrification Needs

Respondents generally indicated strong support for Olympia’s goals to electrify buildings and transportation. Several respondents highlighted the importance of ensuring the electrical grid could meet the increasing energy demands of electrification. They recommended including policies to streamline permitting, siting and installation of electrical infrastructure and local renewable energy projects.

Respondents also commented on the need to make the electrification transition accessible and affordable to all by providing incentives, technical assistance and clear guidance for electrification requirements. Some respondents requested stronger action to rapidly phase out natural gas, while others requested phased implementation to mitigate unintended impacts. One respondent suggested exploring establishing a municipally run public utility. Another respondent recommended limiting future nuclear energy use by private companies and AI data centers within the City.

Staff Response: Additional policies were included in the Utilities chapter to address barriers to timeliness in siting, permitting and approval of electrical infrastructure and local energy projects. These policies are meant to expedite projects that maintain grid capacity and reliability.

Many of the existing GHG mitigation goals focus on expanding access and providing resources for energy efficiency and electrification, while overarching environmental justice goals guide the structuring of these programs to ensure equitable implementation and outcomes. Additional language was added to further clarify this intent.

Suggestions related to establishing a municipally owned utility and limiting nuclear energy and AI centers will be highlighted for City Council consideration.

Weatherization and Affordability

Respondents emphasized the need for streamlined climate-friendly housing and expansion of weatherization and energy efficiency initiatives to support both mitigation and resilience goals. Comments emphasized the importance of preserving small-scale affordable housing and making weatherization and energy efficiency upgrades accessible

to all Olympians, especially those most vulnerable. Several respondents requested the inclusion of policies to address resilience, energy efficiency, and walkable neighborhoods specifically for affordable housing.

Staff Response: Many of the existing goals and policies within the Climate Element support weatherization and energy efficiency, with an emphasis on programs to support retrofits for low-income households and vulnerable populations. An additional goal and new narrative were added to emphasize the resilience benefits of existing weatherization and electrification policies.

Overarching environmental justice and land use goals and policies guide the entire chapter and implementation actions. In other words, all current and future weatherization and energy efficiency programs and policies will consider and prioritize equity and affordability considerations. This ensures the most vulnerable populations are supported by electrification, efficiency and weatherization policies and programs.

Additionally, resilience, energy efficiency, and walkable neighborhoods are well addressed in multiple chapters of the comprehensive plan (e.g., Land Use and Urban Design and Transportation). The goals and policies included in these chapters apply to all types of housing, including affordable housing.

Sea Level Rise, Managed Retreat, and Future Shoreline Development

A few respondents provided detailed comments about the approach to sea level rise within the Climate Element. They suggested including language to more clearly acknowledge the impact of sea level rise on marine ecosystems, affirm no net loss of ecosystem function for shorelines, restrict hard armoring of the shoreline, and mitigate compounding impacts of sea level rise, including marine contamination, pollution and groundwater surfacing. Moreover, the respondents suggested revisiting the approach and conclusions from the Olympia Sea Level Rise Response Plan around strategic retreat. Lastly, one respondent noted that the current approach appears to be more focused on emergency response, rather than long-term strategies to address sea level rise impacts.

Staff Response: The policies related to sea level rise in the Climate Element focus on mitigating the predicted risks only through 2045, the current comprehensive plan period. The strategies outlined in the Climate Element correspond to and support the mid-term strategies published in the Olympia Sea Level Rise Response Plan (2019). Long-term adaptation strategies, which manage increasing levels of sea level rise through 2100, can be found in the Olympia Sea Level Rise Response Plan (2019).

During the development of the Sea Level Rise Response Plan, the City considered the costs, benefits and impacts of managed retreat. Given the significant cost associated with relocating existing public infrastructure and the value of cultural amenities provided by the downtown core, the City determined that wholesale retreat is not a pragmatic solution within the planning horizon (2100). However, strategic retreat of targeted areas and structures will likely be needed as a part of a comprehensive sea level rise response.

Groundwater ponding impacts due to sea level rise are not expected in the current comprehensive plan cycle and are therefore not emphasized.

Policies related to the health of Budd Inlet and marine ecosystems can be found within the Natural Environment chapter; several have been added as cross-listed policies with the Climate element to emphasize their connection to climate resilience. This includes policies related to remediating pollution before redevelopment.

The Shoreline Master Program (SMP)¹, which is found in the Natural Environment chapter, already includes significant restrictions for constructing armored shorelines, prioritizes living shorelines and includes protections to limit and mitigate development impacts to shoreline ecosystems.

Ecosystems

Responders noted a gap in strengthening ecosystem biodiversity and protecting critical areas.

Staff Response: Additional policies from the Natural Environment chapter were cross-listed, focusing on supporting biodiversity and critical areas. The narrative language was also updated to reflect further support for these initiatives.

Urban Growth Area (UGA) and Infill Development

Many respondents showed support for urban infill development and increasing density within the urban core and in already developed areas. To support this goal, respondents recommended adding flexibility and streamlining the City's approach to infill development and tree protection. Respondents also showed support for 10-minute neighborhoods.

There were conflicting comments on how to advance development within the urban growth areas (UGA). One respondent recommended not annexing identified UGAs until we have reached urban densities within the current city limits, while another respondent suggested

¹ Additional guidance and standards regarding development in future tidal inundation areas (i.e., areas exposed to frequent tidal flooding under future sea level rise) will likely be addressed in the forthcoming update to the Shoreline Master Program.

reducing the size of the current UGA. In previous comment cycles, one respondent noted that UGA should be developed for affordable housing when needed and that offering additional flexibility with tree retention policies would encourage more infill development.

Many commenters emphasized the need to proactively plan, maintain and develop open, green space as we pursue infill development and create future plans for the UGA.

Staff Response: Many policies within the land use and urban design chapter, as well as the overall narrative, support the City's priority for infill development, promoting density and maintaining access to green space. Additional policies from the Parks, Arts & Recreation chapter were cross-listed with the Climate element to address concerns about green space in the UGA.

Comments regarding flexibility for tree retention policies to better enable infill development will be addressed in the more detailed Climate Element Implementation Plan. Comments regarding the UGA will be shared with City Council for their consideration.

Green and Open Space

Respondents supported equitable access to, protection and expansion of green space for all Olympians and for added climate resiliency.

Staff Response: The general sentiment of these comments aligns with many of the goals and policies listed throughout Natural Environment, Parks, Arts & Recreation, and Land Use and Urban Design.

Supporting Transit

Many respondents supported Intercity Transit's fare-free system, and encouraged faster, more frequent, and more reliable service in the future. In addition to priorities for public transit, respondents supported overall urban design and street development that is accessible, safe, and connected. This includes installing crosswalks, secure bike parking, shading and benches. One respondent noted concerns about future public transit accessibility in the UGA as it develops.

Staff Response: The Climate Element, as well as the full Transportation and Land Use and Urban Design chapters, offer significant alignment with the direction voiced by the respondents. Encouraging continued fare-free transit is an existing policy within the Transportation Chapter and was added as a cross-listed policy in the Climate Element.

Olympia's long-standing Urban Corridor policy envisions the provision of high-frequency transit (at least every 15 minutes on weekdays) within designated urban corridors. Other areas in the City may not achieve sufficient density and the necessary land uses to support

the same transit frequency. The City supports and coordinates with Intercity Transit's long-range plans as the regional public transportation provider.

EV Purchase Incentives

Respondents included several suggestions for expanded rebates and financing for electric vehicles.

Staff Response: Existing goals and policies focused on electric vehicle adoption support a wide range of approaches to reduce financial barriers to EV adoption. Many of the specific suggestions are addressed within this overarching policy language. Additional details on specific programs and actions to implement these will be addressed in the forthcoming Climate Element Implementation Plan.

Solid Waste, Recycling, Compost

Respondents submitted comments related to expanding plastic recycling, including glass recycling, providing compost services to multi-family residences and outlawing single-use plastics.

Staff Response: Existing policies within the Utilities chapter broadly address the comments around single-use plastics and compostable packaging. Some respondents requested additional policies to address services that are already provided (i.e., composting service) or are not feasible at this time (i.e., glass recycling). Composting service is available for multi-family properties; however, building owners must subscribe to the service. Glass was removed from recycling services due to regional facility closures; glass recycling services may be provided again in the future if sufficient recycling facilities become available. Additional details on specific programs and actions to implement these policies and increase overall waste diversion will be addressed in the forthcoming Climate Element Implementation Plan.

Hazard Prioritization, Mitigation, and Response

A few respondents requested more clarity around hazard mitigation and prioritization of hazards. Two respondents specifically requested that the Climate Element reference the All Hazards Mitigation Plan for the Thurston Region. One respondent requested that the Climate Element identify extreme heat as the highest risk to public health in Olympia and implement the Thurston County Extreme Heat Emergency Response and Illness Prevention Plan. Two respondents also requested that the City take additional action to install cooling in the homes of vulnerable residents.

Staff Response: Additional language was included to reference the Hazard Mitigation Plan throughout the Element. We also included clarifying language to prioritize hazards for emergency management, outreach, and response that pose significant risks to public health, as guided by the hazard mitigation plan.

The Thurston County Extreme Heat Emergency Response and Illness Prevention Plan (i.e., Extreme Heat Incident Response & Illness Prevention Plan) is an implementation action identified in the Hazard Mitigation Plan for the Thurston Region. Thurston County is leading the work to implement this action; however, work is still ongoing. This plan is not identified in the Climate Element because it is still under development, and it is unknown what/if any role the City would have in implementation. However, this intent is addressed by existing policy language, which directs the City to coordinate with regional partners to develop and implement the regional Hazard Mitigation Plan as well as extreme heat and wildfire smoke strategies.

Additionally, existing goals and policies to address energy efficiency and building electrification also provide significant public health benefits during extreme heat, through the provision of cooling and passive survivability. Additional narrative and policy language was added to the Land Use and Urban Design section to emphasize this connection.

Clear Action

Respondents encouraged stronger action to be taken throughout the Climate Element.

Staff Response: Language was strengthened throughout the Element where it is within the City's jurisdiction and relevant to the proposed policy.

Education and Outreach

Two respondents recommended including policies related to general education and outreach on climate change causes and impacts. One respondent commented on the need for more specific education and outreach for extreme heat events. One respondent recommended including general outreach about the contribution of greenhouse gas emissions by the meat industry.

Staff Response: It is outside the City's scope to provide broad public education about the causes and impacts of climate change. The Element emphasizes more specific awareness and engagement on actionable topics within the City's responsibilities, such as land use, transportation, buildings, energy, water and waste, as well as hazard mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. Education, outreach, and awareness efforts for extreme heat events are covered in multiple policies throughout the Element.

Outside of Scope and Forwarded Comments

Several comments were outside the scope of the Climate Element. When appropriate, we forwarded these comments to the corresponding chapter leads. A summary of these comments is provided below.

Divestment from Statewide Investments in Fossil Fuels. One commenter suggested lobbying the Washington State Investment Board to divest from fossil fuels. This is outside of the scope of the Climate Element and will be highlighted for consideration by City Council.

Tracking Insurance Rates. One commenter suggested tracking residential and commercial insurance rates to effectively address risk. This is outside of the capacity and scope of the City.

Automated businesses. One commenter recommended the City discourage highly automated businesses, large national or global, publicly traded companies. This is outside of the scope of the Climate Element and was forwarded to the Economy chapter lead.

Homeless response. All comments related to housing and homeless response, including illegal burning concerns, were forwarded to the Housing and Public Safety chapter leads.

Safe Streets. All comments related to street layouts, safe crosswalks and sidewalk access were forwarded to the Transportation chapter lead.

Link Light Rail Connection. A comment related to lobbying for a link light rail hub was forwarded to the Transportation chapter lead.

Affordability. Comments related to overall affordability in Olympia were forwarded to all chapter leads.

Summary of Draft Changes

Changes to Goals and Policies

The most significant changes to this draft are the addition of several new policies to address opportunities and gaps identified by commenters. These include:

- Additional policies that expedite permitting for local energy projects to meet capacity needs and maintain service reliability as we pursue electrification.
- Additional policies focused on providing technical support, financial incentives, and flexible implementation to improve energy efficiency and electrification outcomes.
- Additional policies encouraging retrofits for cooling and air filtration.

- Additional policies encouraging resilient infill development.
- Additional policy and narrative prioritizing the highest risk climate-related hazards and actions as identified by the Hazard Mitigation Plan.
- Additional policy incorporating urban design practices that mitigate urban heat and stormwater runoff. This would encompass de-paving initiatives.
- Modifying existing policies and narrative to include an emphasis on critical area protection and enhancing biodiversity.
- Strengthening language and increasing clarity to focus on climate action, rather than passive study.

Other gaps were addressed by cross-listing additional existing policies from other Comprehensive Plan chapters. These include:

- Additional policies that account for no net loss of ecosystem function for shorelines and wetlands.
- Additional policies that focus on clean up, restoration, and protection of Budd Inlet from contamination.
- Additional policy that focuses on the balance between sustainable growth and environmental protection of the urban tree canopy.
- Additional policies related to urban greening and equitable access to green space.
- Additional policies focused on reshaping the transportation system. This includes expanding bike lanes, retrofitting streets for safety, maintaining fare-free transit, encouraging connections with rail and studying car-free streets.
- Additional policies related to park and open space in the urban growth area and along urban corridors.

Changes to Narrative

Significant changes to the narrative in this draft include:

- Added introductory text to clarify the implementation timeline of the comprehensive plan and emphasize the City's role in inspiring broader climate action.
- Clarified language around environmental justice to emphasize the importance of prioritizing co-benefits and minimizing unintended impacts on closely related issues such as environmental pollution and housing affordability.
- Added new narrative to the introduction summarizing how climate is integrated in each chapter of the comprehensive plan.
- Added new narrative to the Natural Environment section acknowledging the impact of climate change on ecosystems, including critical areas and biodiversity, and the commitment toward nature-based solutions.

- Added new narrative to the Land Use and Urban Design section to better describe how building upgrades support preparedness for climate hazards, such as extreme heat and wildfire smoke.
- Moved EV charging narrative and policies into the Transportation section to improve clarity and organization of the chapter.
- Added new narrative to the Utilities section to describe the importance of working with PSE to ensure sufficient electricity is provided to meet growing demand.
- Added new narrative to the Public Safety section recognizing that risk mitigation for extreme weather events requires a collaborative approach with regional partners and proactive strategies in the built environment to ensure safe shelter for all residents.

Comments that were not addressed were either outside of the scope of the Climate Element, already addressed in other comprehensive plan chapters, or determined to be better suited for the forthcoming Climate Element Implementation Plan.