

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN**

The City of Olympia's Comprehensive Plan builds upon our community's values and our vision for the future. A set of goals and policies provides more detailed direction for the realization of the values and vision. In turn, these serve as the framework upon which City regulations, programs and other plans are formed.

As many as 20,000 additional people are expected to join our community over the next two decades. This Plan is our strategy for maintaining and enhancing our high quality of life and environment while accommodating both the changes since the 1994 Comprehensive Plan was adopted and the changes projected over the next 20 years.

The Comprehensive Plan is not just a plan for City government. Developed out of input from thousands of people in our community at different times over decades, the Comprehensive Plan truly is the community's plan. Many of the goals and policies listed call for coordination and collaboration among individual citizens, neighborhoods and civic groups, and City government. As always, there will be challenges and change, but the intent is to build on the creativity and strength of our community to shape how we develop.

### **How to Use this Document**

This Comprehensive Plan is separated into nine chapters:

- Olympia's Vision;
- Public Participation and Partners;
- Natural Environment;
- Land Use and Urban Design;
- Transportation;
- Utilities;
- Economy;
- Public Health, Parks, Arts and Recreation;
- Public Services.

*(A tenth chapter, Capital Facilities, will be reviewed and approved by the City Council as an element in the Comprehensive Plan in 2013.)*

There are many issues that connect these chapters. For example, policies related to trees exist in the Natural Environment chapter as well as under Land Use, Transportation, Utilities and even Economy. Likewise, policies related to walk-ability are included under both Land Use and

Transportation. If viewing an electronic version, use the 'search' function to find all of the policies related to specific topics.

The goals in this Plan are the end states we hope to achieve as a community; some will take longer than others to realize. Policies describe how the City will act in a broad sense to achieve these goals. At times, goals or policies may seem to be in conflict with each other. For example, a goal to increase density may seem to conflict with a goal to preserve open space. The complex challenges and opportunities we face as a community often require us to strike a balance between different goals and policies to provide the best outcome for the community as a whole. Thus, individual goals and policies should always be considered within the context of the entire Plan.

There may be a period of time after the City Council adopts changes to the Plan before staff, the public and policy makers are able to take action to implement the plan. The City will make every effort to quickly and reasonably develop, review and adopt any new or revised regulations to conform to this Plan.

### **Implementation**

This Update to the Comprehensive Plan does not include specific actions or measurements. A companion document to the Plan is an "action plan" or "implementation strategy" that includes specific timeframes and actions for implementing the Plan. This strategy will establish priorities, set responsibility and determine how we will measure progress toward our goals. This is also an important tool for communicating and tracking what the City and Olympia residents are doing to help our community achieve its vision.

The City looks for partners from all sectors of the community: residents, businesses, developers, non-profits, the faith community, schools, neighborhood associations, other government agencies and organizations to help implement the Comprehensive Plan. Partnerships will help our community work together to realize our common vision.

There are many different types of actions that could be taken to implement this Plan. Some elements in the Plan are implemented through the development code and Engineering Design and Development Standards (EDDS), which, along with other government actions, must be consistent with the Plan under state law. Other elements in the Plan depend heavily or exclusively on community involvement.

### **Context for the Comprehensive Plan**

In the early 1990s, the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed in response to rapid and sprawling growth in many parts of the state that was causing a decrease in quality of life, negative effects on the environment, and increased costs for municipal infrastructure and maintenance. Revision of our Comprehensive Plan was a requirement for

Olympia under GMA and Olympia adopted a revised Comprehensive Plan under the Act in 1994.

The Act requires most urban counties and cities in the state to prepare comprehensive plans to address how they will manage expected growth. It directs urban areas, like Olympia, to absorb more of the state's population growth than rural areas, thereby preserving forests, animal habitat, farmland, and other important lands. Focusing growth in urban areas also reduces traffic, pollution, and the costs of providing city services that protect the health, safety and quality of life of citizens.

The Act defines 13 goals, plus a shoreline goal, to guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans. These focus on "smart growth" principles that maximize use of land and existing utilities, protect historic and natural resources, and lower traffic and housing costs. Fortunately, Olympia has been taking this approach for a long time.


Olympia has long understood the merits of planning for the future and had a Comprehensive Plan as early as 1959. In many ways, our earlier plans created the community we have today. For example, during community outreach for the 1994 plan, citizens expressed a desire for Olympia to become a "City of Trees." In response, the community developed several goals and policies to guide a new Olympia Urban Forestry Program. Since then, we've planted thousands of street trees, and been consistently recognized by the National Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree City USA.

### **A Changing Community**

Since the 1970s, the population and economy of the Puget Sound region have been growing. According to the [Thurston County Profile](#), the county's population more than doubled between 1980 and 2010. Forecasters expect Olympia's population and employment will continue to increase over the next 20 years. In 2010, the estimated population of Olympia and its Urban Growth Area was 58,310 residents. Forecasters expect our population will increase to 84,400 by 2035, a rate of approximately 2% per year. A majority of this increase will be due to in-migration. People are attracted to living here because we have a relatively stable economy, a beautiful environment, friendly and safe neighborhoods, good schools and lower living costs than our neighbors to the north. Many of these new residents will work within the current City limits and the unincorporated Urban Growth Area.

### **Olympia and its Urban Growth Boundaries**

In 2012, Olympia's urban growth area was about 16,000 acres. This includes about 12,000 acres within City limits and 4,000 acres in the unincorporated area, which may eventually be annexed into the City. In cooperation with Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater, Thurston County has established and periodically reviews Urban Growth Areas. In these areas, urban growth is encouraged; outside of them, rural densities and services will be maintained.

Much of the land in the City is already developed, but there is still adequate room to accommodate our expected population and employment growth. This land capacity analysis can be found in the Thurston County [Buildable Lands Report](#) .

### **Preserving Our Sense of Place and Connections**

The City embraces our Comprehensive Plan as an opportunity to enhance the things Olympians care about. As we grow and face change, Olympians want to preserve the unique qualities and familiarity of our community. We draw a sense of place from the special features of our city: walk-able neighborhoods, historic buildings, views of the mountains, Capitol and Puget Sound, and our connected social fabric. These features help us identify with our community, enrich us, and make us want to invest here socially, economically and emotionally.

During development of this Plan, many people expressed a desire to maintain a “small town feel.” Olympians want to feel connected to each other and to our built and natural environment. We want to live in a friendly and safe community where we know our neighbors and shopkeepers, and run into friends along the sidewalk. We value harmony with nature, thriving small businesses, places to gather and celebrate, and an inclusive local government.

Olympians expressed that they are willing to accept growth as long as our environment and sense of place is preserved. That means protecting the places and culture that we recognize as “Olympia,” even if those things are a little different for each of us. It also means focusing on our community values and vision as we grow.

### **Key Challenges**

Beyond our community's values and vision are other influences that present both challenges and opportunities. Implementation of this Plan will require creative solutions to:

**Become a More Sustainable City:** The City needs to develop an integrated framework to compare lifecycle costs and benefits of all City investments and to encourage sustainable practices by individuals and organizations through education, technical assistance, and incentives.

**Accommodate Growth:** Increased growth in Olympia is anticipated. Citizens need to integrate the: quantity of new residents, demographics, likely places of residence, housing typology, and prevention of rural and city sprawl. In addition, citizens need to identify housing and service programs for increased populations of seniors and homeless.

**Integrate Shoreline Management Program (SMP):** Special coordination is necessary to integrate the SMP with the Comprehensive Plan. Olympians value ample public space along their marine shoreline and waterways to balance growth downtown.

**Comment [AB1]:** I make a few suggestions in this section where I think the changes made at the 3/13 meeting resulted in a missing word or something. It was almost 10 p.m. after all!

**Revitalize Our Downtown:** Located on Puget Sound and along the Deschutes River, [downtown](#) [is](#) the site of many historic buildings and places, and [is](#) home to many theaters, galleries, and unique shops as well as the State Capitol. [At the same time](#), Olympia’s downtown has yet to become the walkable, comfortable place the community desires. To add vibrancy while retaining our desired small town feel will require more downtown residents, better amenities, attractive public places, green space, thriving local businesses, and integrated standards for design.

**Conserve and Protect Limited Natural Resources:** As we grow, Olympia will become a higher density city and our land and water supplies will need to support more people. We can take advantage of growth as a tool to reshape our community into a more sustainable form; to do so we must balance growth, using our resources wisely and the [considering the](#) carrying capacity of the land.

**Address Climate Change and Sea-Level Rise:** Sea-level could rise in Olympia by 50 inches or more over the next century due to warming of the oceans and settling land. This will put much of Olympia's downtown at risk of flooding since it lies only one to three feet above the current highest high tides. Over the next 20 years, the City will continue to explore how to address sea-level rise impacts on our downtown.

**Fund a Long-term Vision:** The economy fluctuates and funding circumstances change. This affects our ability to carry-out planned actions over the years. Present resources are already stretched thin, and there is little ability to take on new programs without new revenue sources. We must identify funding strategies and develop partnerships to provide the diversity and flexibility to fund our vision.

#### **For More Information**

- . The [Washington State Growth Management Act](#) [↗](#) establishes rules to guide the development of comprehensive plans and development regulations that shape growth over a 20-year horizon
- . The [Buildable Lands Report](#) [↗](#) prepared for Thurston County by the staff of the Thurston Regional Planning Council helps Olympia to determine the quantity of land to provide for population and employment growth.
- . The City of Olympia [Sustainability web pages](#) have information about what the City is doing to put sustainability into action.