

# Olympia Planning Commission

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October 4, 2021

Olympia City Council  
PO Box 1967  
Olympia, WA 98507

Dear Mayor Selby and City Councilmembers:

The Olympia Planning Commission (OPC) is pleased to provide its recommendation on the proposed 2021 Comprehensive Plan Amendments. The OPC conducted a public hearing on August 2, 2021, and considered the written public comments and testimony provided.

The City proposed amendments were considered in three parts, as follows:

- Part A: Text amendments requested by the Public Works Department regarding transportation concurrency.
- Part B: Text and transportation map amendments requested by the Public Works Department regarding street connections in the southeast portion of Olympia, in the area known as “LBA Woods”.
- Part C: Text amendments requested by Council to improve language around equity and inclusion, including defining neighborhood character.

The Commission recommends approval of Part A as proposed; Part B as proposed and with the minor text amendments requested by the Washington State Department of Transportation; and recommends approval of Part C, as summarized below.

1. Accept changing the word “citizen” to “community member” or “resident” throughout the plan.
2. Accept changing all gender references in the plan to gender neutral pronouns.
3. In regard to the proposal to add a definition of Neighborhood Character, as proposed in the Land Use and Urban Design Chapter, the following language is recommended:

*Neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct “identity.” Neighborhood characteristics are not stagnant and will change over time. Consideration of neighborhood character will vary by the unique features of a neighborhood and includes its physical attributes that contribute to its sense of place and identity. These elements may include, but are not limited to, a neighborhood’s land use, urban design, visual resources, and/or historic resources. This includes design elements of buildings (mass, scale, materials, setting, and setbacks), parks and open space, provision of City utilities, street grids and connections, and street trees.*

*Our community considers it essential that all neighborhoods become accessible, sustainable, and culturally inclusive.*

- *Accessible: Includes ADA compliancy, multimodal mobility, and housing affordability.*
- *Sustainable: Promotes a healthy environment, a diverse and resilient local economy, and historic preservation, including, reuse, and adaptability of existing buildings.*
- *Culturally inclusive: Recognizes, supports and promotes diverse housing types, strong arts and historic preservation, and the various contributions of diverse Olympians, past and present.*

*Neighborhood character will be balanced with other plan goals and policies, such as increasing the variety of housing types and providing pedestrian oriented streets, and implemented through the City's development regulations.*

4. In regard to the equity language proposed in the Community Values and Vision Chapter, the Commission recommends the following language be used in place of the proposed language in the application:

#### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We acknowledge that Olympia resides within the traditional lands of the Steh-Chass of Budd Inlet (aka the Squaxin Island Tribe). The Tribe has offered these words for acknowledgement:

“The Squaxin Island Tribe’s habitation of what is now Olympia spans thousands of years. The ancestral families who lived and thrived here named it Steh-Chass, and occupied prosperous villages along the shores. Archeological findings of ancestral artifacts in the area suggest habitation by Squaxin ancestors since the retreat of the glaciers during the last Ice Age. Today, the Squaxin people continue stewardship of these ancestral lands, from the Deschutes watershed and what is now Budd Inlet. The Steh-Chass (Squaxin) continue to call themselves ‘People of the Water’ because of the bounty of the region’s waterways, which have sustained the people for millennia.”

The City of Olympia will continue to strengthen our government-to-government relationship with the Squaxin Island Tribe to support our shared environmental, economic, and community goals.

#### **EQUITY**

##### **What Olympia values:**

As evident through the City’s Housing Needs Assessment, our community is becoming more diverse. This includes changes in racial demographics, an increase in the number of aging adults, and changes in average household size and income. Olympians value and respect the identities and lived experiences of our community members, regardless of race, color,

creed, national origin, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, or ability. We believe that embracing equity enhances the livability and vibrancy of our beautiful city for all residents.

**Our Vision for the Future:**

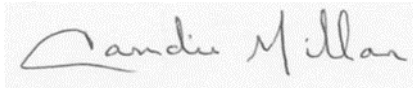
We envision a future where Olympia has a diverse and inclusive community, a robust and resilient local economy, and a strong multicultural arts and heritage presence for all to enjoy.

To build a truly livable and vibrant city, we understand that we must provide equitable access to the necessities of life, including housing, mobility, food, services, education, and meaningful work. We must consider the diverse needs of our residents in planning the long-term growth and development of Olympia. Giving everyone an opportunity to participate in the civic, economic, and cultural life of the city will lead to greater quality of life and sustainable local economy.

The Commission recommends continued discussion of equity and inclusion, including any definition of Neighborhood Character. We recommend the continued discussion become part of the next Periodic Update of the Comprehensive Plan. Public processes, such as a study session, would be helpful to address and discuss the issues further with the community.

The Commission agreed that the proposals, as amended by the Planning Commission recommendation, are consistent with the Final Review and Evaluation Criteria in OMC 18.59.040. Thank you for the opportunity to review and make a recommendation on the proposed annual amendments.

Sincerely,



**Candi Millar, CHAIR**  
Olympia Planning Commission




**Aaron Sauerhoff, VICE CHAIR**  
Olympia Planning Commission

# Olympia Planning Commission

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor Selby and Honorable City Councilmembers  
**FROM:** Rad Cunningham, Commissioner   
**DATE:** October 4, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** 2021 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments, Part C, Equity and Inclusion


### Dissenting Viewpoint

The intent of the proposed comprehensive plan amendments put forward by council was to answer the demand for immediate action on equity in Olympia. If I had the option, I would have voted to adopt them without amendment. In my years as a planning commissioner, I have read many comment letters and listened to hours of testimony where neighborhood character was used to oppose zoning changes that would make affluent single family zoned neighborhoods more inclusive. I think the language adopted in our letter, adapted from a definition of neighborhood character CNA proposed, undermines the intent to define neighborhood character such that it cannot be used as an exclusionary tool. Similarly, I believe the equity language the commission recommended in the Community Values and Vision chapter weakens the language originally proposed by council. Although I could not vote against including additional equity language in the comprehensive plan, I lament leaving out critical pieces like recognizing our history of mortgage discrimination and the commitment to working with the Social Justice and Equity Commission on an equity framework for the upcoming comprehensive plan update.

# Olympia Planning Commission

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor Selby and Honorable City Councilmembers  
**FROM:** Greg Quetin, Commissioner   
**DATE:** October 8, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** 2021 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments, Part C, Neighborhood Character

I support the definition of “neighborhood character” suggested by the Olympia Planning Commission and particularly the City Council’s intent in bringing forward this amendment. However, I consider moving this amendment forward now as part of an effort to reduce harm and I think that removing “neighborhood character” from the comprehensive plan altogether should be considered in the next Comprehensive Plan update. After considering the definition of “neighborhood character” in relation to this amendment to the Comprehensive Plan it is my conclusion that the amorphous definition of “neighborhood character”, and its history of use as a justification to exclude people in the United States, render the term of little use and considerable harm in our planning documents.

I suggest that we incorporate or highlight more concrete and specific issues into our land use and planning documents in the place of “neighborhood character”. Measurable aspects of our built environment, (for example, public services, affordable housing, transportation, noise, light, pollution, and public health) can serve as grounded points of discussion around which the priorities of the community can be discussed. In concert with these changes, I urge a proactive effort to embrace a process of Equitable Development, defined by the Environmental Protection Agency as an approach for meeting the needs of underserved communities through policies and programs that reduce disparities while fostering places that are healthy and vibrant. This process can work to improve input from across the community, particularly from those with less access to traditional avenues of input, and with consideration for future residents and generations who will call Olympia home.

Thank you for your efforts on these issues.

# Olympia Planning Commission

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## MEMORANDUM

**TO:** Mayor Selby and Honorable City Councilmembers  
**FROM:** Tracey Carlos, Commissioner  
**DATE:** October 12, 2021  
**SUBJECT:** 2021 Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments, Pact C, Neighborhood Character

First I would like to say thank you for your commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion in defining neighborhood character. I was impressed by the council's definition that stripped out all of the various ways that neighborhood character has been used throughout the US to exclude people from being able to live in communities. The issue is much larger than our city, which is evident when you see how many planning documents neighborhood character is referenced in around the US.

I voted to accept the City Council's recommendation with the added section from staff but I do believe it needs further study in future updates. It is my belief that we need to remove the phrase from the Comprehensive Plan completely. While redefining it helps, it is a bandage where surgery is needed. I am hoping to see us have study sessions that delve further into the history of racism in city planning so that we all can understand why this is so important.

I also agree with Commissioner Quetin that we incorporate or highlight more concrete and specific issues in our land use and planning documents in the place of neighborhood character. The arguments that it should remain in the Comprehensive Plan because of all the other documents it is in misses the point. The point of systemic racism is that it is pervasive and needs to be removed everywhere it spread to not ignored because it was successfully spread.

We live in a wonderful community that takes pride in setting trends in how to fix problems like these and I want to see us set the trend here too for Washington State. So again, thank you for bringing this issue forward in the Comprehensive Plan amendments so that we may address it.