



To: City of Olympia Mayor and City Council

Cc: Olympia Planning Commission

November 20, 2024

Honorable Mayor Payne and City of Olympia Councilmembers,

As part of the Olympia 2045 update of the Comprehensive Plan, the City Council has provided the Social Justice and Equity Commission with an opportunity to weigh in on the draft chapters to offer equity-related recommendations. This letter is intended to share with you the Commission's conversation regarding the Parks, Arts, and Recreation chapter, on which the Commission received a briefing at our May 20th, 2024, meeting. The Commission discussed the following:

1) Creating a sense of belonging in City parks facilities remains critical.

Commissioners recommend continuing to focus work on creating a sense of belonging and inclusion in the City's parks. The Commission felt strongly that Olympia's parks should be welcoming to all who visit them. The group was enthusiastic about the work that the Parks, Arts, and Recreation department team (including demographic analysis; ongoing diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging work; and GIS geospatial analysis) are doing to make these public spaces more welcoming and inclusive. We welcomed the policies as outlined in the draft chapter shared with the Commission and support the work in those areas.

The Commission's discussion included ideas for how to incorporate and honor local history and lift the voices of marginalized community members in those spaces. Though the Commission did not recommend one single idea, several were proposed, including incorporating storytelling where possible, not shying away from more painful parts of the city's history, and including sculptures and other historical markers in parks to highlight community history.

The Commission also acknowledges that many of Olympia's unhoused community rely on the city's parks. Commissioners recognize that that is the result of the region's housing crisis and encourage staff and City Council to consider how changes in parks development could impact these community members.

Commissioners appreciated an opportunity to review the draft chapter and thanks the City Council for that opportunity. It is our hope that our feedback is helpful to the chapter authors, and we appreciate the work being done to provide excellent parks facilities and arts and recreation opportunities in the Olympia community. Thank you!

Best Regards,

Mark Hodgson, Chair
Social Justice & Equity Commission

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