



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 Utilities chapter, on which the Commission received a briefing at our June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2024, meeting. The Commission discussed the following:

**1) Waste ReSources' large item pick-up fees remain a barrier for some community members.**

The Commission recommended that the City offer free large item pick-up day(s), where community members who need to dispose of large items can have them picked up and disposed of at no cost. The cost of large item pick-up can be prohibitive for some Olympians and dedicating time and resources for free large item pick-up would increase equity for those for whom the cost is a significant barrier. Additionally, some community members do not have access to a truck to haul away large items, so additional assistance would make the large item pick-up process more equitable and accessible for community members.

**2) Working with developers and property owners to share rate discount information, indexing rate assistance to United Way's ALICE index, reducing the GFC discount, and allowing property owners to pay sewer hook-up fees over time would all boost equity in the City's utility rates.**

The Commission also recommended changes to the City's rate assistance programs to increase equity in those processes. One recommendation made was to work with developers and building owners who receive the General Facility Charge (GFC) discount to educate residents about the City's rate discount programs, particularly those who have developed or own affordable housing units to share rate assistance information directly with their residents.

The Commission also recommended using United Way's ALICE index (Asset-Limited, Income-Constrained, Employed) to determine discount eligibility. Using the ALICE index would cover community members who live above the federally-defined poverty level but who still receive less income than the basic cost of living in the area. Commissioners expressed that using the ALICE index would help the City to move towards a more accurate picture of financial hardship and felt that this would be an important step in ensuring equity when determining which ratepayers qualify for the City's utility assistance programs.

The Commission also recommended that the City consider reducing the GFC discount further from 50% (where it is currently set at) to 0%. Furthermore, we felt that offering a property lien or other mechanism to allow property owners to pay the discounted sewer hook-up fee over time. This would apply to property owners who participate in the City's septic to sewer program, and it would provide some sort of payment plan option to

spread payments out and further reduce barriers that arise when program participants connect to the sewer system.

**3) Need to consider community members with disabilities in policies and procedures regarding street trees.**

The Commission also recommends that planning for street trees include community members with disabilities. For those who use a wheelchair or may have other mobility limitations, street trees can block access. Commissioners want community members with lived experience of mobility limitations to participate in decision-making around street trees and we encourage greater funding to address the maintenance of street trees in order to limit mobility and equity issues around sidewalks and water/sewer lines on private property.

**4) As the community continues to address the housing and homelessness crises, some public spaces have seen an increase in garbage and that raises access issues for those with mobility-related disabilities.**

Finally, the Commission also recommends that the City consider equity for community members with disabilities in its garbage collection and utilities planning relating to parks and public open spaces. We felt that ensuring that the City's public spaces are cleared of any harmful materials (e.g., garbage, discarded sharps, etc.). Those waste issues can negatively impact all community members' experiences of the City's parks, but may raise access issues for those with disabilities.

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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