

Our Vision for the Future:

A diverse, inclusive, and sustainable community where everyone has access to high-quality housing that is safe, stable, and affordable.

What Olympia Values:

Our city is committed to fostering well-planned neighborhoods that reflect our heritage while embracing innovation and ensuring that housing options are available for all income levels and life stages.

- **Affordability & Accessibility** – We strive to provide housing options that meet the needs of all residents, across every level of affordability, ensuring that no one is left behind.
- **Sustainability & Smart Growth** – We embrace responsible development practices that preserve our environment, promote efficient land use, and encourage diverse housing types within vibrant, walkable neighborhoods that include access to transit services.
- **Equity & Inclusion** – We work to eliminate barriers to housing, prevent displacement, and create a community where people of all backgrounds and income levels feel welcome and can thrive.
- **Collaboration & Innovation** – We partner with regional stakeholders, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and for-profit organizations to develop creative solutions that expand housing opportunities.
- **Community & Livability** – We prioritize the quality of our neighborhoods by promoting well-designed housing that supports diverse communities, public transportation access, and local economic growth.

Through these commitments, we will ensure that our community remains a welcoming and thriving place for generations to come.

Provide a Variety of Housing Types to Meet All Needs

Olympia is fortunate to have a variety of residential and mixed-use neighborhoods, offering single-family detached and attached homes, condominiums, small-scale multiple-unit buildings, and apartments. However, we are in a housing crisis. Demand for housing is greater than supply, and costs are increasing. The ability to own a home is out of reach for many who live here or may want to someday call Olympia “home”.

Stable housing is a cornerstone to our quality of life. As a community, we want to have a variety of housing types that are accessible and affordable to all current and future residents.

The City of Olympia has been working on a number of actions to reduce homelessness, increase affordable housing, and collaborate with other jurisdictions and agencies to explore regional solutions to these issues. Examples include a voter-approved Home Fund to create permanent supportive housing, reducing code barriers, providing development incentives, preapproved building plans to encourage accessory dwelling units, adopting a declaration of emergency concerning the lack of affordable housing, and championing the formation of an

interjurisdictional Regional Housing Council that sets funding priorities to advance equitable access to safe and affordable housing in Thurston County. Additionally, the City has taken action including less than market value sale of land and providing funding for low income housing development, increasing the types of housing allowed in low density neighborhoods, reducing setbacks and allowing deferral of impact fees. Some of these actions are ongoing, while others can be strengthened or extended to new areas.

Adequate and affordable housing is critical to a healthy community. The Growth Management Act directs each community to plan for it by:

- Promoting a variety of residential densities and housing types.
- Encouraging preservation of existing housing stock.
- Identifying sufficient land for housing, including government-assisted housing, housing for low-income families, manufactured housing, multi-family housing, group homes, and foster-care facilities.
- Planning for and accommodating housing for all income levels by updating goals, policies, zoning, and land capacity to include moderate-density housing, emergency and supportive housing, and future housing needs by income bracket.
- Addressing equity and displacement by identifying and mitigating racially disparate impacts, engaging vulnerable communities, and adopting anti-displacement and affordability-preservation policies.

The strategies of this chapter depend on well-formulated design standards to promote flexibility and innovation while enhancing the character of neighborhoods. We seek to establish and encourage diversity in housing opportunities and link diverse neighborhoods. With a strong foundation in preserving our heritage, our community can incorporate new housing and other developments in a manner that continues our legacy of well-planned neighborhoods. The housing goals and policies below provide a framework for residential land uses in Olympia and its urban growth area (UGA) as well as support for affordable housing.

While Olympia offers a diverse range of housing types, the city faces a significant risk of physical displacement*, particularly due to the loss of existing low-income homeownership and inadequate supply of affordable rental units for very-low-income households (households that make 30–50% of our area median income). Our housing strategy must prioritize preserving and maintaining existing affordable units to prevent displacement and keep people in their homes.

The Housing Displacement Analysis evaluated Olympia’s existing housing policies and identified that certain policies focused on preserving neighborhood character may have contributed to exclusionary outcomes by limiting the development of diverse and affordable housing types. These policies — often in single-family residential zones — can have racially disparate impacts by restricting access to high-opportunity neighborhoods for lower-income and black, indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) households. In response, Olympia is committed to revising land use policies to promote equitable access and prevent displacement.

Olympia has not been exempt from acts of racial housing discrimination. Historic plats throughout the City of Olympia have included racial covenants that explicitly prohibited persons who are “other than the Caucasian race.” Olympia’s urban core has been identified as having the highest density of racial and ethnic minorities, most likely due to this area historically being one of the few within the City limits to allow apartments and affordable rental properties. Downzoning in the 1980’s and 1990’s further limited most of Olympia’s residential areas to single family homes and townhomes – typical homeownership options. Whether intentional or not, this had the effect of excluding most renters - disproportionately people of lower income and people of color – from finding residency in these neighborhoods.

The City of Olympia unanimously adopted a City Council resolution requesting the Washington State Government and the Federal Government to create a commission to study reparations for the descendants of enslaved African people and to implement recommendations of that commission. Meanwhile, connecting our own Olympia Strong initiatives, Comprehensive Plan, Fair Housing Assessment, Capital Facilities, and non-government and governmental partnerships to our plans, and research cities that have taken similar actions. These actions will continue to help the City remove remaining systemic racial barriers.

*Displacement is due to eviction, acquisition, rehabilitation, or demolition of property, or the expiration of covenants on rent or income-restricted housing.



An Olympia neighborhood with a mix of apartments and town homes.

Many factors contribute to the need for more and varied housing:

- Olympia’s growing residential population.

- Varying household incomes.
- The capitol's legislative session, which creates a demand for short-term housing.
- College students seeking affordable housing near transportation corridors and services.
- Households are getting smaller, yet new housing often remains focused on larger and more expensive builds.
- There is a lack of housing that is both affordable and accessible for low-income disabled and senior households
- An increasing proportion of seniors.

Olympia is part of a larger housing market extending throughout Thurston County and beyond. Thus, planning for housing is done based on anticipated shares of this larger area. The 2020 Census indicated that Olympia and its urban growth area included approximately 30,735 housing units. According to the Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) [2024 Population and Housing Data](#), about 52% were single-family homes, 45% were multi-family (shared-wall) units, and 3% were manufactured housing. The 2024 housing needs analysis projects that Olympia and its urban growth area will require approximately 14,295 new housing units by 2045 to accommodate population growth.

Based on existing zoning and development patterns, Olympia and its urban growth area have a combined capacity of approximately 18,941 housing units, ensuring adequate space for anticipated growth. Nearly 3,468 units can be accommodated in mid-rise multifamily zones, 7,352 units in low-rise multifamily zones, and 1,152 units in moderate-density zones. Additionally, Olympia's accessory dwelling unit (ADU) capacity is projected to be approximately 310 units over the planning period.

Because Olympia generally allows small group homes and manufactured housing wherever single-family homes are permitted, allows larger group homes by special approval, and does not discriminate with regard to government-assisted housing, foster-care, or low-income housing, the area is expected to adequately accommodate all types of housing. Furthermore, Olympia is actively working to ensure that zoning regulations do not act as a barrier to the development of affordable housing.

A key finding in the [2024 housing needs assessment](#) is that while land availability is not a constraint in Olympia, affordability remains a critical issue. To meet all housing needs, it is necessary to allocate enough land that will be suitable for a variety of housing types and costs, including detached homes, duplexes, group homes, small cottages, apartments, special needs housing, manufactured housing, and accessory dwellings. This approach will help provide both variety and affordability in housing options.

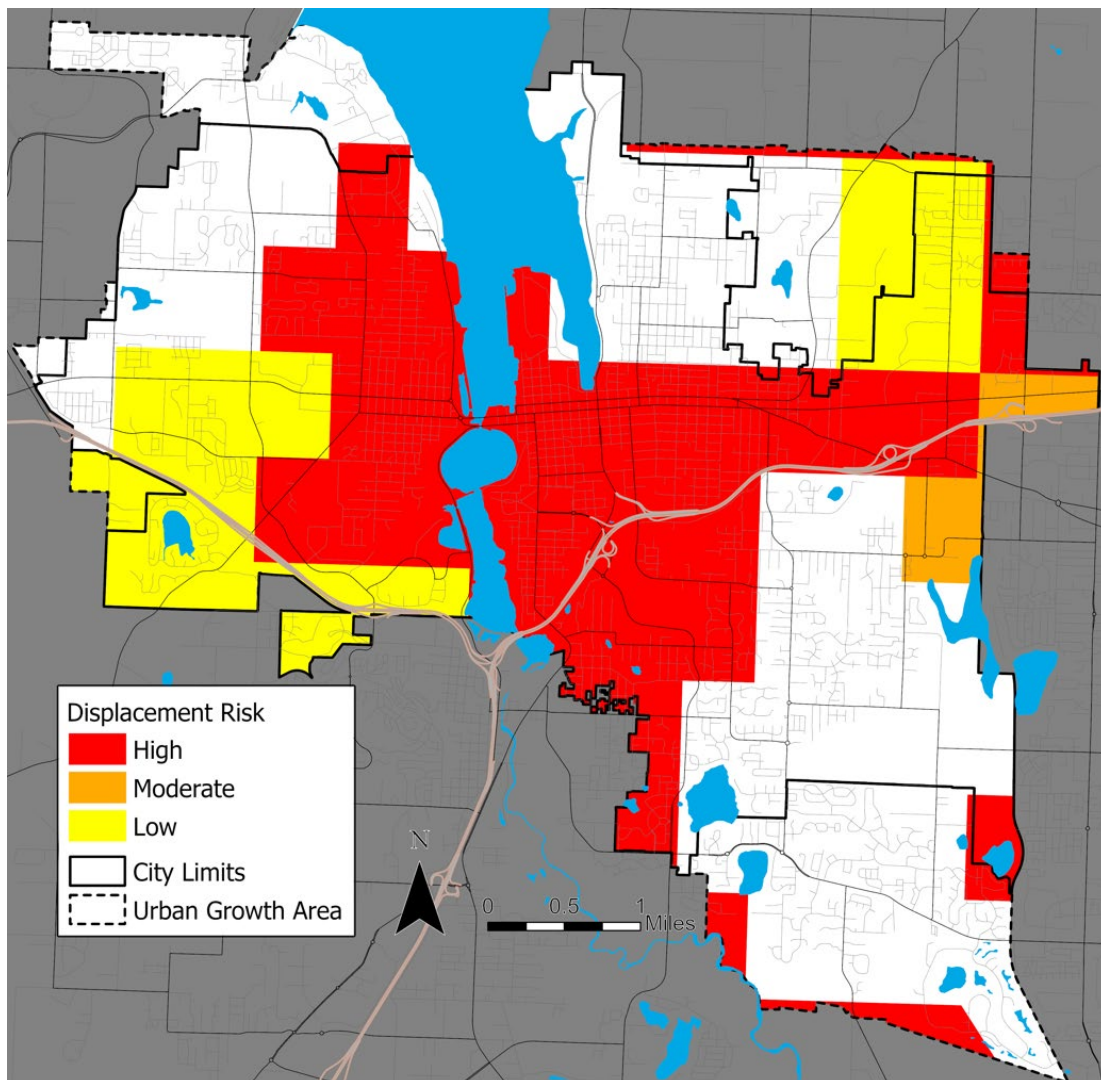
The 2024 analysis indicates that of the 14,295 new housing units needed by 2045, Olympia will need approximately 7,616 additional housing units affordable to low-income households (0-80% area median income). To meet these needs, Olympia will need to implement policies that promote affordability, prevent displacement, and encourage the construction of a diverse range of housing types.

Olympia Housing Needs by 2045 (City and UGA)

Income Level		Zone Categories Serving These Needs	Housing Need	Aggregate Need	Total Capacity	Surplus
Extremely Low- Income	0-30% PSH	• Low-rise Multifamily • Mid-rise Multifamily • ADUs	1,098	7,616	12,282	4,666
	0-30% Other		2,617			
Very Low-Income	30-50%		3,312			
Low-Income	50-80%		590			
Moderate Income	80-100%	• Moderate Density	2,328	3,623	5,404	1,781
	100-120%		1,296			
High Income	120%+	• All Zones	3,054			
Emergency Housing (Beds) – Not calculated in total			286	286	2,223	1,937
Total			14,295			

Note: State law does not require jurisdictions to plan for housing affordable to households earning more than 120% of the area median income. This is included so the number of units can be summed up to the total projected housing units necessary based on population projections.

In addition to the housing needs assessment, the Housing Displacement Analysis identified increased risks to physical displacement. Since 2015, Olympia has experienced several housing trends that highlight growing risks of physical displacement. Notably, there was a decrease in both low-income and extremely low-income homeownership, despite an overall increase in homeowner households. At the same time, the number of cost-burdened and severely cost-burdened homeowners rose, indicating that many residents are struggling to afford the costs associated with remaining in their homes. While there was a modest increase in affordable rental units for extremely low-income households, the city saw a significant decline in units affordable to very-low-income renters (30–50% of area median income). These combined trends suggest that Olympia must focus not only on building new housing but also on preserving existing affordable units and supporting vulnerable homeowners and renters who are at risk of displacement.



Displacement risk in Olympia and the Urban Growth Area.

GH1 The range of housing types and densities is consistent with the community's changing population needs and preferences.

PH1.1 Support increasing housing densities through the well-designed, efficient, and cost-effective use of buildable land, consistent with environmental constraints and affordability. Use both incentives and regulations, such as minimum and maximum density limits, to achieve such efficient use.

PH1.2 Adopt zoning that allows a wide variety of housing types and densities.

PH1.3 Allow 'clustering' of housing with the adjacent neighborhood to preserve and protect environmentally sensitive areas.

PH1.4 Disperse low- and moderate-income and special needs housing throughout the urban area.

PH1.5 Promote affordable housing across the community by streamlining regulatory reviews, reducing delays and costs, eliminating barriers to development, permitting accessory dwelling units, and allowing a wide range of housing types.

PH1.6 Allow manufactured homes on individual lots, promote preservation of existing manufactured home parks, and enable these parks in multi-family and commercial areas, all subject to design standards ensuring that the units are appropriately scaled and designed to integrate with surrounding housing and land uses.

PH1.7 Encourage and provide incentives for residences above businesses.

PH1.8 In all residential areas, allow small cottages, townhouses, and accessory dwelling units.

PH1.9 Encourage multi-family structures to be located near collector streets with transit service, arterial streets, or neighborhood centers to support accessibility and connectivity (Climate).

PH1.10 Ensure that multi-family structures are designed to be compatible with adjacent housing and are 'stepped' to follow the natural topography of the site.

PH1.11 Require a mix of single-family and multi-family structures in villages, mixed residential density districts, and apartment projects when these exceed five acres; and use a variety of housing types and setbacks to transition to adjacent low-density areas.

PH1.12 Encourage adaptive reuse of non-residential buildings for housing (Climate).

PH1.13 Consider energy and transportation affordability alongside other fixed housing costs in affordable housing policies and programs (Climate).

PH1.14 Ensure future climate-exacerbated hazards and their impacts are mitigated in new and existing construction (Climate).

GH2 Eliminate racially disparate impacts in housing access, affordability, displacement, and neighborhood opportunity by addressing the legacy of exclusionary practices and promoting equitable development.

PH2.1 Regularly evaluate local housing policies, zoning, and development regulations for disproportionate impacts on BIPOC residents, low-income households, and historically excluded communities.

PH2.2 Partner with organizations, especially those organizations led by members of the BIPOC community, to acquire, preserve, and rehabilitate affordable homes in areas vulnerable to gentrification.

PH2.3 Partner with community organizations and initiatives (such as the Black Home Initiative) to increase access to homeownership for BIPOC residents.

PH2.4 Incentivize development of affordable homeownership housing to address the racial wealth gap for low- to moderate-income BIPOC residents.

PH2.5 Promote equitable development by identifying opportunities for affordable housing development, lot splitting, and infill in high-opportunity and historically redlined or deed-restricted areas where BIPOC residents were previously excluded from renting or buying homes.

PH2.6 Evaluate zoning and availability of affordable housing development incentives in high-opportunity areas and areas where racially restrictive covenants were prevalent to ensure medium and high-density residential development is allowable and encouraged.

PH2.7 Identify properties with expiring tax credits and partner with the Housing Authority of Thurston County or other entities to preserve affordable housing units and prevent resident displacement if units are converted to market rate.

PH2.8 Prioritize work in reparative justice, as directed by City Council in Resolution M-2576, to increase Black homeownership with particular focus as part of the City's housing strategy following the City's Affordable Homeownership Research Study.

Affordable Housing for All

Adequate and affordable housing is critical to a healthy community. It must be located near jobs and services or on bus routes. It also must be safe and well-maintained.

The City addresses housing needs for our most vulnerable community members through its [Consolidated Plan](#), which is updated every five years. The Consolidated Plan identifies Olympia's priority housing, shelter, social services, economic development, and public facility needs. The City works with other jurisdictions, private industry, and nonprofit organizations to find solutions to low-income housing needs.

One Community Plan

In March 2019, the City of Olympia launched a yearlong planning effort aimed at finding community agreement around how to best respond to the homeless crisis. At the time, homelessness in Olympia appeared to be growing dramatically. In the summer of 2018, tents started to appear in Downtown parking lots, growing from 75 in August to over 300 by early October. In January of 2019, Thurston County's annual homeless census counted 394 unsheltered persons, up from 124 in 2017. Many of these individuals were sleeping in Olympia, in the woods, under bridges, in vehicles, and on Downtown streets.

The City of Olympia responded by creating a Community Work Group made up of 11 volunteers with different life experiences and perspectives. Their role was to deeply listen to the voices of the community to identify the strategic direction. This process included hearing from over 1,200 people through 20 different community conversations and two online surveys. Community members engaged in important civic dialogue, face-to-face with one another and across significant differences. The Community Work Group heard from a wide and diverse cross-section of stakeholders, including people experiencing homelessness, neighborhood residents, faith leaders, business and property owners, Downtown visitors and employees, and people representing social services, emergency services, hospitals, and school organizations. The result was the One Community Plan that outlined strategies for responding to the immediate crisis, as well as long-term prevention strategies; it aims to help people experiencing homelessness as well as the broader community.

[Housing Action Plan](#)

The City of Olympia Housing Action Plan, adopted in 2021, began as a collaborative effort between the Cities of Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater. Together with help from Thurston Regional Planning Council, the Cities developed a Regional Housing Needs Assessment and Housing Gap Analysis, a Landlord Survey, and a draft set of actions to address identified housing gaps. Grounded in data and strategies common across all three Cities, Olympia's Housing Action Plan identifies specific actions the City of Olympia will take to address housing needs. This plan is also intended to inform the City's Comprehensive Plan policies and guide implementation of actions that help the City meet its housing needs and strategic objectives.

GH3 Affordable housing is available for all income levels throughout the community.

PH3.1 Promote a variety of residential densities and housing types so that housing is available in a broad range of costs.

PH3.2 Encourage preservation and rehabilitation of existing homes to remain affordable and habitable for lower-income households (Climate).

PH3.3 Take steps to ensure housing is available to all income levels based on projected community needs (Climate).

GH4 Deteriorating residential areas within the City are revitalized.

PH4.1 Support efforts to preserve the historic features or character of historic properties in City housing rehabilitation programs.

PH4.2 Provide assistance and incentives to help low-income residents rehabilitate properties they cannot afford to maintain.

GH5 Special needs populations, such as people with developmental disabilities, the homeless, the elderly, and others who have difficulty securing housing, have adequate, safe, and affordable housing.

PH5.1 Disperse housing for low-income, moderate-income, and special-needs residents throughout Olympia and its Urban Growth Area, and discourage concentration of such housing in any one geographic area.

PH5.2 Provide density bonuses to builders who provide low-income housing in market-rate developments, and tie the bonus to affordability.

PH5.3 Encourage new housing on transportation arterials and in areas near public transportation hubs (Climate).

PH5.4 Encourage self-help housing efforts in which people earn home equity in exchange for renovation or construction work, such as "sweat equity" volunteer programs.

PH5.5 Require a percentage of new housing units, especially in publicly funded or incentivized developments, to meet universal design or accessibility standards.

PH5.6 Promote and support modifications to existing housing to improve accessibility for people with disabilities or mobility challenges.

PH5.7 Retain existing subsidized housing.



Unity Commons opened in Olympia as a collaboration of multiple regional housing partners to provide emergency and permanent supportive housing.

GH6 Prevent displacement and increase housing stability through tenant protections.

PH6.1 Establish and enforce tenant protection policies that make it easier for tenants to access housing and stay housed. Ensure policies consider additional barriers faced by marginalized renters to increase access to housing and housing stability.

PH6.2 Establish and enforce tenant protection policies that reduce upfront and ongoing housing costs to reduce housing cost burden.

PH6.3 Require adequate advance notice for rent increases above a certain threshold to allow tenants to adjust or find alternative housing.

PH6.4 Develop and maintain a formal relocation assistance program for tenants who are displaced (due to redevelopment, substantial rent increases, or eviction without cause, or other

reasons). Consider supportive program elements such as financial assistance, moving cost coverage, and connections to alternative housing.

PH6.5 Take steps to improve environmental health, habitability, and energy efficiency in rental housing.

PH6.6 Consider adoption of policies to help renters access homeownership opportunities. Consider a Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Ordinance (TOPO) to give renters the first right to purchase their rental unit if the landlord decides to sell.

PH6.7 Encourage and support community land trusts, tenant cooperatives, or nonprofit ownership models to protect residents from displacement due to redevelopment or corporate acquisition.

PH6.8 Increase transparency in rental housing market practices and transactions to ensure housing consumers are protected and informed.

Social Services Fulfill a Vital Need

People in our community may face challenges at different times in their lives, such as job loss, health issues, or other unexpected events that make it difficult to meet basic needs. Our community responds through a network of religious, charitable, and local government organizations working together to ensure everyone has access to the support and resources they need.



Community volunteers help build tiny homes for Quince Street Village.

GH7 Our community is safe and welcoming, and social services are accessible to all who need them.

PH7.1 Support nonprofit and faith-based charitable organizations that provide funding or oversight for social service funding (Climate).

PH7.2 Work with other local governments to provide financial support and oversight of social service funding.

PH7.3 Support programs and projects that assist low-income people and those at risk of homelessness with public funding (Climate).

PH7.4 Identify barriers to social service, shelter, and housing resources for low-income people and those at risk of becoming homeless.

GH8 There is enough emergency housing, transitional housing, permanent housing with supportive services, and independent affordable housing.

PH8.1 Encourage a strong network of emergency shelter resources for homeless and at-risk families with children, childless adults, unaccompanied youth, and victims of sexual and domestic violence.

PH8.2 Take a regional approach with other jurisdictions so that support for a broad range of social services and resources, including shelter and housing, can be maximized.

PH8.3 Encourage businesses, charitable non-profit organizations, and faith-based community organizations to provide shelter and housing services.

PH8.4 Support coordinated service delivery models to maximize the best use of public, charitable, and privately-funded shelter and housing resources.

PH8.5 Support best practices that reflect current standards of care and incorporate emerging models that optimize the use of public and charitable resources.

PH8.6 Encourage shelter and housing providers and programs to locate in the greater Olympia area, or near transportation arterial hubs, so residents can easily access them.

PH8.7 Work toward making the community more aware of homelessness in Olympia and how it can be prevented as a way to encourage charitable support and involve community members to help reach positive outcomes.

PH8.8 Use data to continually assess the community's need for shelter and housing and who it is serving. Use this data to continually improve these services.

PH8.9 Revise policies that limit or prevent the community from providing shelter and housing resources.

PH8.10 Coordinate land use, housing, transportation, and capital facility planning to support all aspects of shelter and housing resources, including emergency shelter, transitional housing, permanent housing with supportive services, and low-income housing.

PH8.11 Integrate group homes into all residential areas of the community. Set zoning standards to ensure group home sizes (number of residents and staff) are compatible with allowed densities and that transportation and other services are available.

PH8.12 Evaluate regulations so the City can be more flexible in locating shelters and increasing capacity (Climate).

GH9 The existing low-income housing stock is preserved.

PH9.1 Continue to fund the repair and rehabilitation of housing using federal, state, and local funding sources (Climate).

PH9.2 Support applications by the Housing Authority of Thurston County and other nonprofit housing developers to construct or purchase existing units that are affordable to low-income households.

PH9.3 Support applications from eligible affordable housing developers to federal and state funding sources to build new, or rehabilitate existing, housing to meet low-income housing needs.

PH9.4 Encourage and provide technical assistance to private developers and non-profits applying for below-market-rate state or federal loans to construct or rehabilitate low-income, multifamily rental housing.

PH9.5 When Community Development Block Grant, Home Fund, or Housing and Urban Development-funded buildings are at risk of being converted to market-rate status, inform the tenants of any purchase and relocation options available. When possible, help the Housing Authority of Thurston County and nonprofit organizations buy such housing.

PH9.6 Enforce policies* that provide financial and relocation assistance to people who are displaced from their homes as a result of construction and development projects using federal funds.

**Per section 104(d) of the Housing and Community Development Act of 1974 as amended, requiring the replacement of low- and moderate-income housing units that are demolished or converted to another use, in connection with a Community Development Block Grant project.*

GH10 New low-income housing is created to meet demand.

PH10.1 Continue to support projects funded by low-income tax credits and revenue bonds.

PH10.2 Investigate and support appropriate multi-jurisdictional support for the Housing Authority of Thurston County bond sales.

PH10.3 Promote partnerships between public and private nonprofit organizations to increase housing and home ownership opportunities for people with special needs, and for low- and moderate-income households.

PH10.4 Continue to encourage development of co-living housing (also known as single-room occupancy) units downtown, along urban corridors, and in other areas. This could include encouraging alliances between public, private, and nonprofit organizations.

PH10.5 Evaluate the possibility of supporting a program that would allow low-income tenants of manufactured home parks to jointly purchase and renovate permanent sites for their manufactured homes. Consider funding programs to subsidize the interest rates, loan origination fees, or other costs of acquiring the land.

PH10.6 Help low-income and special needs residents find ways to purchase housing, such as shared or limited-equity housing, lease-purchase options, co-housing, land trusts, and cooperatives.

PH10.7 Work with jurisdictional partners through the county-wide Home Consortium, to fund affordable housing projects that serve low- and very low-income residents.

PH10.8 Continue to administer the Housing Tax Credit program to develop both market-rate and low-income housing.

PH10.9 Support nonprofit and faith-based organizations in their efforts to provide emergency homeless shelters (Climate).

PH10.10 Donate, lease, or sell surplus City-owned land to developers for low-income housing.

PH10.11 Continue developing incentives to decrease the costs of development and increase the production of affordable housing units.

PH10.12 Explore new and creative financing sources available to support the development of affordable housing units.

For More Information:

- [Thurston Regional Planning Council Housing Affordability](#)
- [Housing Displacement Analysis and Comprehensive Plan Recommendations for the cities of Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, and Yelm](#)
- [One Community Plan](#)
- [Housing Action Plan](#)
- [Thurston County/City of Olympia 2023-2027 Consolidated Plan](#)
- [Washington State Department of Commerce Displacement Risk Map](#)