

# Executive Summary

Sustainable Thurston ... A community conversation

**I**n 2010, the Thurston Regional Planning Council received a Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to craft a sustainable development vision and strategies to guide the region through 2035.

The Sustainable Thurston project began in early 2011 with a simple question for the Thurston Region's quarter-million residents:

How do you want your community to look, function, and feel in 2035? Online and in person, thousands of people considered the challenges and opportunities of growth from an economic, environmental, and social sustainability perspective. Just as important, these engaged residents



helped the Sustainable Thurston Task Force craft a regional vision of sustainable development that encompasses land use, housing, energy, transportation, food, health, and other interconnected issues.

Sustainable Thurston's flagship document — *Creating Places— Preserving Spaces: A Sustainable Development Plan for the Thurston Region* — is as comprehensive as it is ambitious. It aims, no less, to integrate sustainability into all regional decision-making to achieve a healthy economy, society, and environment.

The Plan begins by establishing a definition of sustainability and crafting a dozen foundational principles around six elements: Leadership & Participation, Community, Investment, Economy, Opportunities & Choices, and Environment.

A sustainable community will enhance quality of life, foster economic vitality, and protect the environment while balancing our needs today with those of future residents.

*Definition of Sustainability for the Thurston Region*

A bold vision statement establishes a clear direction for the region during the next quarter-century:






*In one generation — through innovation and leadership — the Thurston Region will become a model for sustainability and livability. We will consume less energy, water, and land, produce less waste, and achieve carbon neutrality. We will lead in doing more while consuming less. Through efficiency, coupled with strategic investments, we will support a robust economy. Our actions will enhance an excellent education system, cultivate a healthy environment, and foster an inclusive and equitable social environment that remains affordable and livable. We will view every decision at the local and regional level through the sustainability lens. We will think in generations, not years. The region will work together toward common goals, putting people in the center of our thinking, and inspire individual responsibility and leadership in our residents.*








Making the vision a reality will require tough decisions and significant time and resources over the long term. So why change? The Thurston Region is already a great place — innovative, inclusive, attractive, and affordable. The answer is that doing nothing still comes with costs. Current local land-use plans and trends would result in the following outcomes in 2035:

- Losing 32 percent of farmlands to urbanization — about 15,600 acres
- Losing 10 percent of forest lands to urbanization — about 19,300 acres
- Sending 13 percent of growth into the rural areas, contributing to the loss of forests, farmlands, and prairies
- Difficulty creating vibrant urban and town centers that attract innovative businesses and residents
- Difficulty conserving and protecting water to sustain people and the environment
- Difficulty meeting the state's vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas reduction targets

## A course correction

Business-as-usual puts us on an unsustainable trajectory. To change course and realize the vision, *Creating Places—Preserving Spaces* sets a dozen priority goals and targets and recommends roughly 300 discrete actions.

	Priority Goal	Target
	Create vibrant centers, corridors, and neighborhoods while accommodating growth.	By 2035, 72 percent of all (new and existing) households in our cities, towns, and unincorporated growth areas will be within a half-mile (comparable to a 20-minute walk) of an urban center, corridor, or neighborhood center with access to goods and services to meet some of their daily needs.
	Preserve environmentally sensitive lands, farmlands, forest lands, prairies, and rural lands and develop compact urban areas.	Between 2010 and 2035, no more than 5 percent of new housing will locate in the rural areas, and 95 percent will be within cities, towns, unincorporated growth areas, and tribal reservations. Rural areas are defined as outside of the cities, towns, unincorporated urban growth areas and tribal reservations.
	Protect and improve water quality, including groundwater, rivers, streams, and Puget Sound.	Protect small stream basins that are currently ranked as “Intact” or “Sensitive”. Improve and restore some “Impacted” strea basins.
	Plan and act toward zero waste in the region.	Reduce per capita landfill waste by 32 percent by 2035 to achieve no net increase in landfill waste compared to 2010 in Thurston County.
	Ensure that residents have the resources to meet their daily needs.	By 2035, less than 10 percent of total households in Thurston County will be cost-burdened; less than 5 percent will be severely cost-burdened.

	Priority Goal	Target
	Create a robust economy through sustainable practices.	The Economic Development Council will develop a Sustainable Economy Index. The “Index” will identify what to measure in order to track progress toward a robust sustainable economy. A target can be developed from the index after it is monitored for several years.
	Support a local food system to increase community resilience, health, and economic prosperity.	TBD after development of a local food systems plan.
	Ensure that the region’s water supply sustains people in perpetuity while protecting the environment.	Reduce per capita water use by 33 percent by 2035 to achieve no net increase in water use in Thurston County.
	Move toward a carbon-neutral community.	Become a carbon-neutral community by (a timeframe to be determined by the Task Force or after development of a climate action plan). Supporting target: Achieve a 25 percent reduction of 1990 green house gas emissions by 2015.
	Maintain air quality standards.	Continue to meet state and federal air quality standards. Highest annual readings for particulate matter (PM10) remain at or below the national standard of 150 micrograms per cubic meter.
	Provide opportunities for everyone in the Thurston Region to learn about and practice sustainability.	Integrate education on sustainability and sustainable practices into K-12 curricula, as well as planner’s short courses, workshops, professional training, and other educational opportunities.
	Make strategic decisions and investments to advance sustainability regionally.	Create and adopt sustainability checklists for use in all local decision making processes by 2016.

So what would we get? The Sustainable Thurston Task Force's Preferred Land-Use Scenario, which assumes we achieve the priority targets, would result in the following measureable outcomes in 2035:

- 95 percent of growth locating in areas designated for urban growth
- \$1.6 billion savings in road, water, sewer, and other related infrastructure costs to support residential development
- 16 percent reduction of 1990 levels of vehicle miles traveled based on land-use changes
- 43 percent of the population living within a quarter-mile of transit service
- 72 percent of urban households living within a half-mile of goods and services
- 33 percent reduction in land consumption
- 21 percent decrease in total residential water consumption
- 11 percent decrease in total residential energy consumption
- No net loss of forest lands
- No net loss of rural farmlands
- 34 percent reduction in new impervious area in protected stream basins
- 31 percent reduction in new impervious area in sensitive stream basins

- 38 percent reduction in carbon dioxide emissions per household, leading to a 10 percent reduction in total CO<sub>2</sub> from residential uses compared to 2010 (see priority goals for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from all sources)

## A shared future

The general goals and actions that conclude each of the six core chapters show us how to achieve our sustainability vision, who must be involved and when. What we would get is a more economically, environmentally, and socially sustainable future.



Actions that conclude the **Economy** chapter would coordinate economic development efforts, foster industry clusters, and diversify the region's employment base. Changing how we use land would be good for business, too.

Actions that conclude the **Community** chapter would create vital city and town centers that attract the artists, entrepreneurs, and other members of the creative class, as well as increase active transportation and affordable and accessible housing choices in close-in neighborhoods. Additional actions would transition auto-oriented transit corridors into a more walkable urban form and preserve rural lifestyles in the countryside.

Actions in the **Opportunities & Choices** chapter would create “complete” communities by tying together some of the aforementioned transportation, housing, and economic development issues with health and human services, local food systems, and access to schools. Such communities have efficient and equitable access to healthy food, quality schools, parks, and other opportunities.

Actions in the **Investment** chapter would maximize the use of existing public infrastructure and assets and prioritize and leverage future investments. Municipalities would deliver water, sewer, solid waste, public safety, transportation, and communications services in a more

cost-effective manner and champion energy efficiency and renewable energy strategies that bolster energy independence and economic stability. The **Environment** chapter builds upon these actions to improve local air and water quality and mitigate global climate change.

The **Leadership & Participation** chapter ties the core chapters together and underscores the maxim “think regionally — act locally.” The chapter lists the first action steps we must take to achieve our priority goals and hit our sustainability targets. Such steps include reinvesting in our communities, prioritizing and protecting farms, forests and other lands facing development pressure, as well as drafting comprehensive climate action, water, and food systems plans.

Success will require sustained and widespread commitment. At the household level, this means individuals integrating sustainability actions into their life and influencing neighbors. At the government level, it means municipalities integrating sustainability actions into their comprehensive plan and coordinating regionally to bring about greater change.

Want to learn more about access to housing, services, and other opportunities in the region? Read the companion *Fair Housing Equity Assessment and Regional Housing Plan* at [www.sustainablethurston.org](http://www.sustainablethurston.org).

