



## Summary of 2014 Findings about Olympia's Neighborhood Centers



Despite the relevance of neighborhood centers to our local and regional goals, these areas have not developed as envisioned over the past 20 years. The Olympia Planning Commission has sought to analyze why, and help create a path to better implementation. In 2014, the Commission interviewed 13 business owners and 8 property owners who have operated a business, designed or developed a neighborhood center in Olympia in order to learn more about the barriers to neighborhood centers. They also launched an online questionnaire to gather input about the public's desires and concerns, to which they received 668 responses. A summary of findings from 2014 is included herein.

## BACKGROUND:

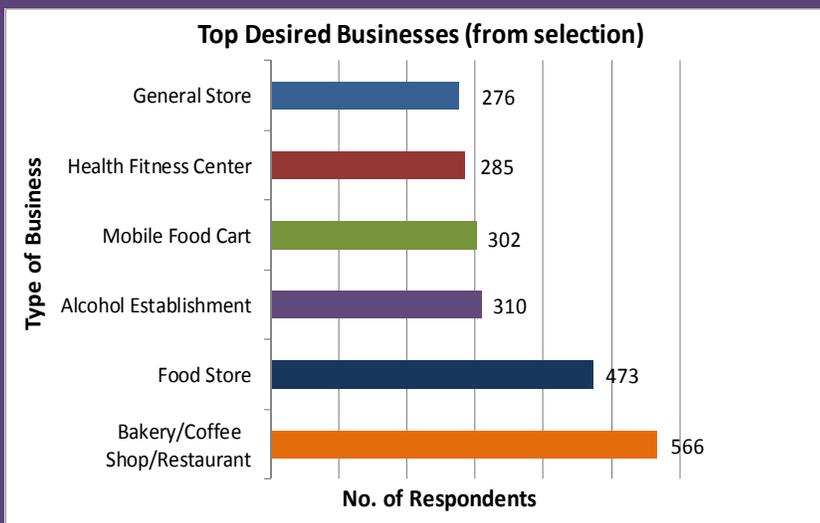
The City has had a policy of encouraging the development of neighborhood centers for over 20 years, however these have not developed as described in our Comprehensive Plan, with a few exceptions.

Neighborhood Centers are small walk and transit-friendly activity clusters within neighborhoods that serve the day-to-day retail and service needs of local residents and foster community interaction.

## CURRENT CONDITIONS:

Today, only about 35% of Olympia households are within 1/2 mile of a neighborhood center that has at least one operating business. While the Comprehensive Plan identifies 17 areas for neighborhood centers (see back page), only 9 of these have an operating business.

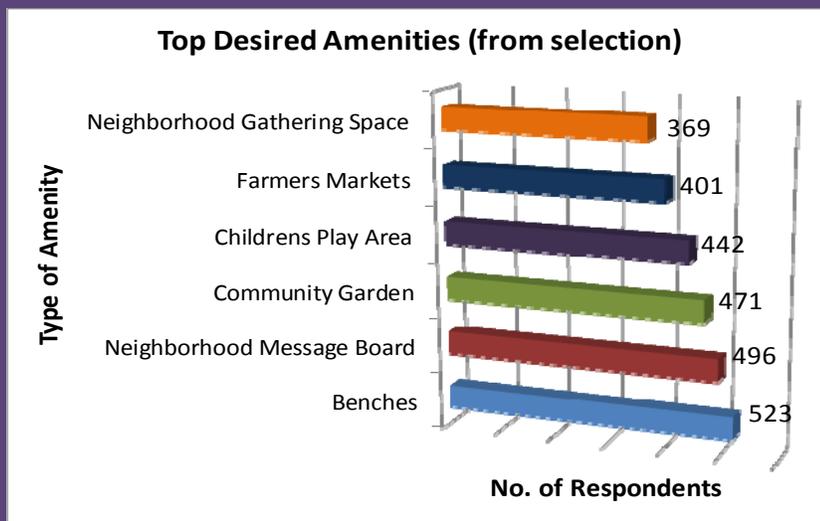
Neighborhood Centers are of high interest to Olympians, as evidenced by the 668 responses to our poll on OlySpeaks\*. The following were revealed as respondents' top desires for neighborhood centers:



## Anonymous Quotes:

*"Good design is key to their acceptance, more important than allowed uses."*

*"As someone who lived across the street from a westside NC, I loved it, but there were impacts from light and noise pollution, screening from garbage/recycling and customer on-street parking encroaching on our property."*



*"Not everyone wants to or can walk everywhere. We need more parking ..."*

*"Postal services!"*

*"Model innovative design practices. Follow principles of local sourcing and renewable, non-toxic energy & materials."*

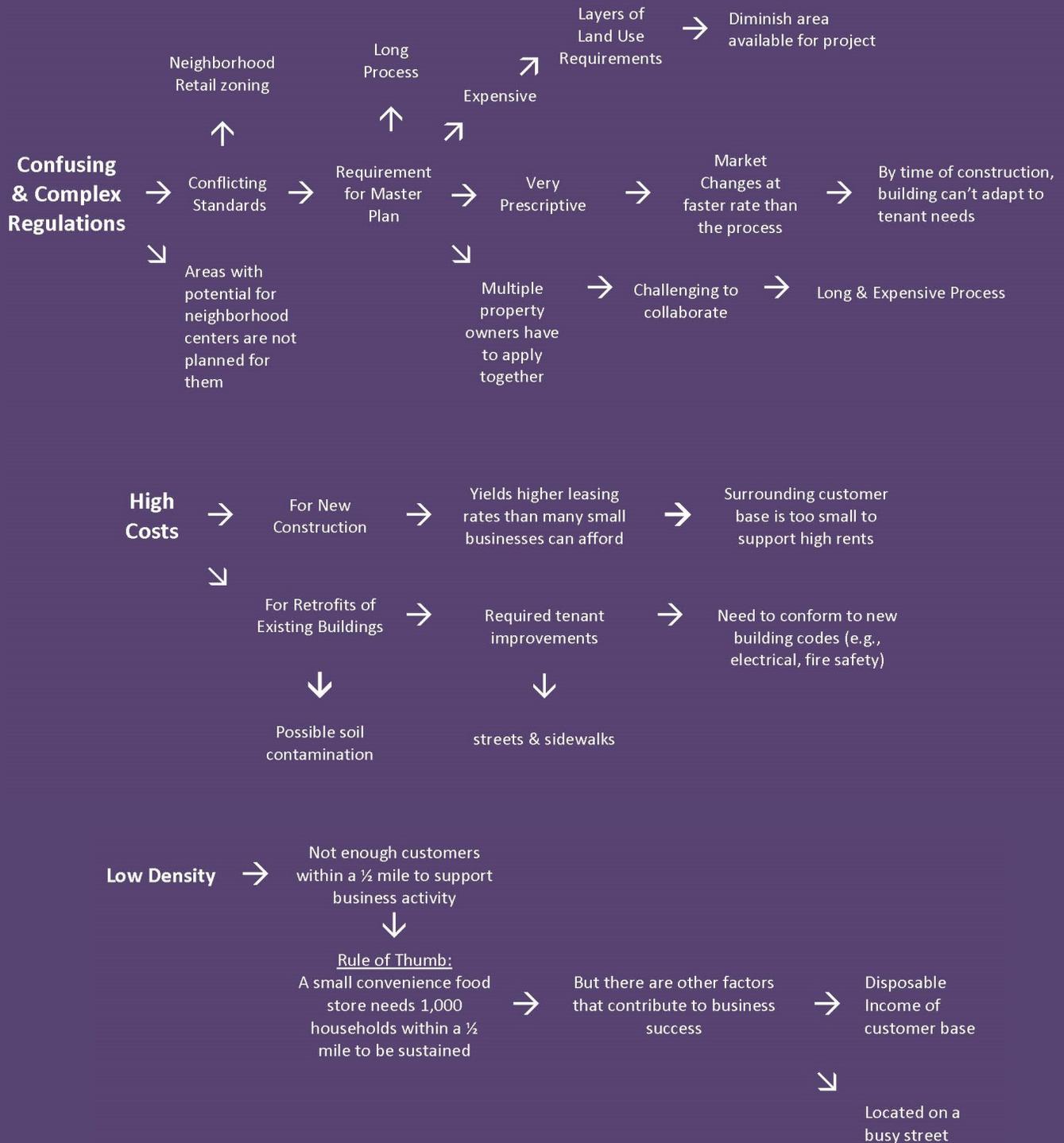
*"I don't actually favor this idea. Get people downtown."*

## TARGET:

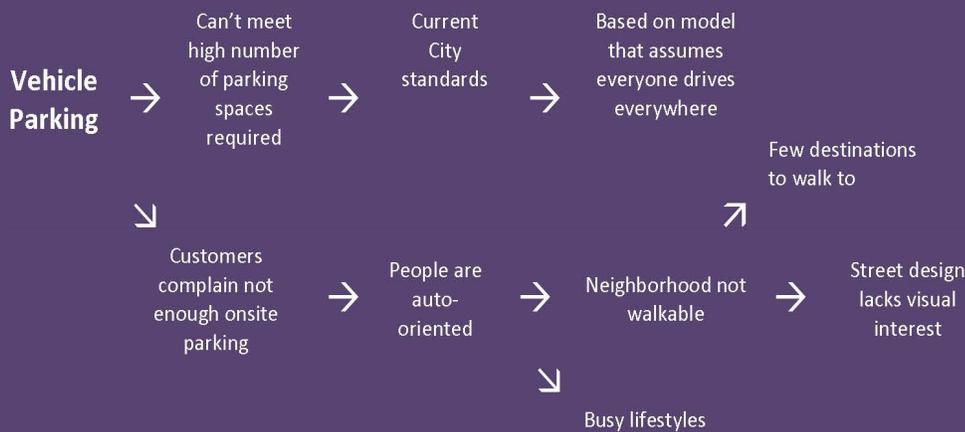
Within 20 years, at least 65% of Olympia households will be within 1/2 mile or a 20 minute walk from a neighborhood center with an operating business.

PRELIMINARY INPUT & ANALYSIS—Logic trees are based on City staff interviews with 21 business and property owners/developers of existing neighborhood centers, including some further analysis:

### WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER DEVELOPMENT?

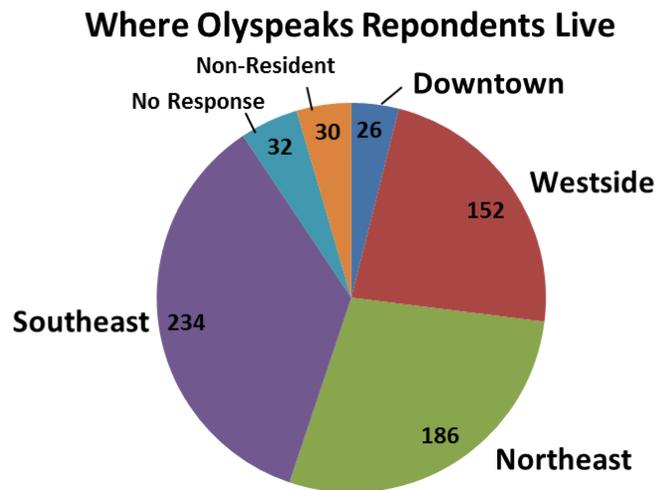


# WHAT ARE THE OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES FOR NEIGHBORHOOD CENTER BUSINESSES?



## Summary Report: Questionnaire on Olympia’s Neighborhood Centers

Olympia’s 20-Year Comprehensive Plan says neighborhood centers should develop in various locations throughout the city. In 2014, the Olympia Planning Commission gathered input to better understand community desires and feasibility for neighborhood center development. This included an online questionnaire which was posted to Olyspeaks.org October 13-28, 2014. A total of 668 people responded from all over Olympia. This input, along with other forms of input and analysis, will help to inform a Planning Commission recommendation to the City Council regarding actions the City can take to further the community’s neighborhood center goals.



## What Types of Businesses Belong in Neighborhood Centers?

We asked respondents to select desired businesses from a list we provided. We had two reasons for providing this specific selection:

- 1) To get a better idea about the community’s interest in neighborhood center business types, and
- 2) To rationalize two lists of allowed neighborhood-scale development in the code. Currently, there are two sections of the development code that relate to neighborhood-scale business development, with some differences in their allowed/prohibited uses.

As some respondents pointed out, the feasibility and impacts of these uses should be examined. Here is how the community responded in order of preference from most selected to least selected:

Responses	Types of Business
566	<b>Bakery/coffee shop/restaurant</b>
473	<b>Food store</b>
310	<b>Alcohol establishment</b>
302	<b>Mobile food cart</b>
285	<b>Health fitness center</b>
276	<b>General store</b>
183	<b>Art gallery</b>
163	<b>Bed &amp; breakfast: 2-5 guest rooms</b>
160	<b>Pharmacy or medical supply store</b>
150	<b>Bank</b>
146	<b>Child care center</b>
134	<b>Personal services such as hair or nail salon</b>
130	<b>Bed &amp; breakfast: 1 guest room</b>
117	<b>Medical offices such as dentist or doctor</b>
100	<b>Gas station</b>
97	<b>Veterinary clinic</b>
92	<b>Clothing stores</b>
91	<b>Laundry services</b>
65	<b>Church*</b>
56	<b>Light manufacturing with retail component</b>
53	<b>Business offices such as tax preparation, lawyer, or real estate agency</b>
26	<b>Commercial printing shop</b>

*\* This should be re-titled "Place of worship"*

### What Other Uses Belong in Neighborhood Centers?

We asked respondents to select from a list of non-commercial uses they think belong in a neighborhood center. Below is a compilation of how the community responded with selections ranked from most selected to least selected:

Responses	Types of Business
523	Benches
496	Neighborhood message board
471	Community garden
442	Children play area
401	Farmers markets
369	Neighborhood gathering space
320	Residences above commercial uses
310	Entertainment events
296	Shared recycling/waste bin area for businesses
295	Membership organization facility
279	Library
276	Free standing ornamental structure
251	Mobile sidewalk vendors
240	Electric vehicle power station
190	Interpretive signs
176	Apartments (up to 5 units)
147	Duplexes
137	Quarters for a night watch person
125	Museum
105	Apartments (6 or more units)
93	Parking lot sales
47	Wholesale sales combined with retail component

## **Open-Ended Responses**

The survey included three open-ended sections where respondents were asked to write in their own ideas. A number of common themes surfaced in these comments.

### **Desired Characteristics for Neighborhood Centers:**

- Family-Friendly, Local, Organic, Small-Scale, Affordable, Quaint, Convenient, Easy Transportation Options, Bike-Friendly, Variety of Housing
- Wildwood & San Francisco Bakery are good models

### **Concerns about Neighborhood Centers:**

- Impacts of vagrancy and crime (increased break-ins, drug-needle debris)
- Impacts of noise (need set hours of operation)
- Site of garbage (needs to be screened)
- Availability and design of parking
- ADA Accessibility to and within centers

The following pages provide a compilation of the public's responses to the open-ended prompts.

Other Business Options - Write-in Comments\*



\* Font size reflects the relative number of suggestions for each item, with the smallest font indicating 1 comment and the largest indicating 17.



Other Housing Options - Write-in Comments\*



\*Font size reflects the relative number of suggestions for each item, with the smallest font indicating 1 comment and the largest indicating 6.

## Other Findings:

Most of the comments were positive in regard to neighborhood centers, such as ***“Love it!”*** and ***“I think this is one of the most progressive initiatives the City has offered citizens in many years.”***

A few of the comments were not positive, expressing sentiment such as, ***“no thanks”*** or ***“...we don’t want businesses in our neighborhood, pure and simple.”***

Many people expressed concern along these lines, ***“... allow the centers to not be “trashed” with homeless, drug dealers and young people hanging out like we have done to our downtown.”***

Many people also expressed concern for Olympia’s homeless population. For example, one person wrote, ***“The homeless-ness in our community has increased so much that services to assist homeless should be present in each center.”***

Several people made comments about desire for ***“locally focused”*** businesses. One person gave a reason, stating, ***“I would be very disappointed if my neighborhood had any national chain business as they don’t have the same kind of investment in building relationships with neighbors or investing in local activities.”*** A few comments expressed this idea: ***“do not want profit zones in my neighborhood.”***

There were also several comments along these lines, ***“allow flexibility depending on size of land and location,”*** and ***“Central planning isn’t what government should be all about”*** and, ***“make it easier for people to build a small business without all the red tape the City has.”***

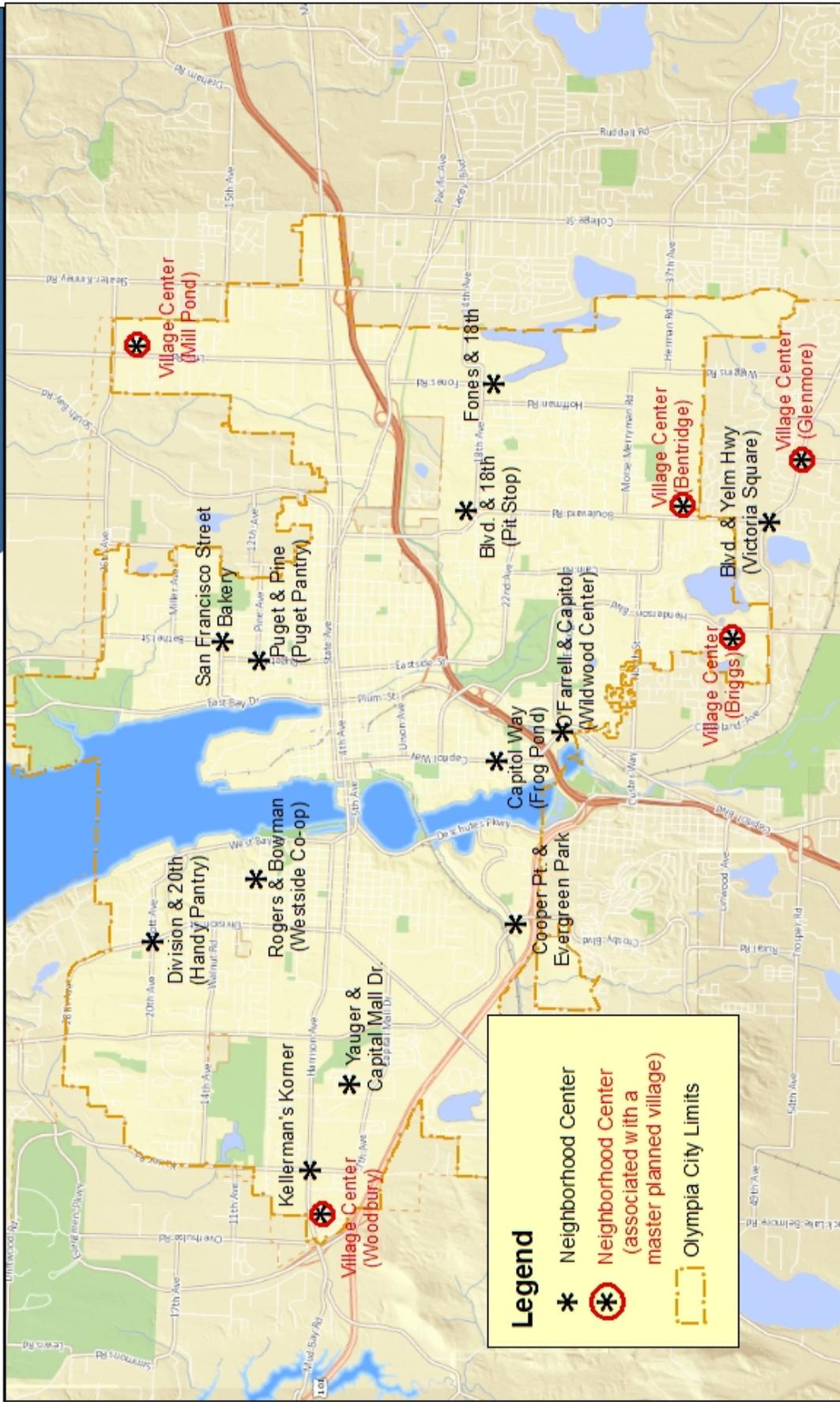
In regard to our survey, we received sentiments such as:

- ***“Thank you for involving the community with this survey! It is a HUGE step in the right direction asking citizens what they want to see in their neighborhoods.”***
- ***“The city does not have prescriptive authority over what WILL go in NC’s, so this survey is a bit odd. Perhaps its purpose is to determine if allowed uses are on-target with community needs?”***
- ***“... survey doesn’t capture important distinctions ...”***
- ***“I was confused by the survey question on where I should indicate I live.”***
- ***“I really appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback!”***
- ***“I worry the city is leading people on with false hopes instead of using this as a learning moment about the economics of growth and realities of density.”***

## SUMMARY SCOPE OF ACTIONS:

CAUSE:	PROPOSAL:	EXPECTED OUTCOME:
<p>The Master Plan process is too onerous.</p> <p>Certain development regulations may be outdated.</p> <p>There are neighborhood concerns about design, primarily about the mass and scale of buildings.</p>	<p><u>Consider</u> code amendments to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remove the master plan process for neighborhood centers, and update neighborhood retail zoning regulations as the alternative process. (update allowed uses and other development standards)</li> <li>• Decrease the number of required vehicle parking stalls for neighborhood center businesses.</li> <li>• Update the sign code to allow businesses to have more visibility, while also balance this with public concerns about sign clutter.</li> <li>• Expand design review to all neighborhood center developments. Consider adoption of standards that provide more certainty, yet maintain flexibility for variety of tenants. Incorporate Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) standards.</li> </ul>	<p>The process and regulations around neighborhood centers will be easier to understand, apply for and administer.</p>
<p>In some areas, surrounding population densities are too low to support neighborhood center businesses.</p>	<p>As part of the neighborhood subarea planning process, provide a data profile of planned neighborhood center locations within the subarea. (e.g., current &amp; projected number and income of households within 1/2 mile, nearest park, transit route, other commercial area, etc.)</p> <p>As an option for the subarea planning process, facilitate a visioning, followed by a feasibility analysis to determine whether higher densities or other characteristics are likely needed to support the subarea's vision for its neighborhood center.</p>	<p>Subarea stakeholders explore options for feasibility, including increased population around centers, or may rethink vision for these locations.</p>
<p>Costs are prohibitive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Construction of new mixed-use buildings</li> <li>• Rehabilitation of existing, underused sites</li> </ul>	<p>Explore possible partnerships between the City, neighborhoods, business and property owner/developers to reduce costs associated with neighborhood center development or improvement (e.g., assistance with addressing contamination, constructing improvements, and place-making.)</p> <p>Provide info about tax incentives associated with upgrading older buildings. See also #1, #2 and #4</p>	<p>Provide a 'tool-kit' of potential partnerships &amp; other incentives to help overcome financial hurdles to developing or operating a center business.</p>
<p>There is not enough land onsite to stage garbage, recycling and compost bins.</p>	<p>Consider allowing shared space among neighborhood businesses for staging garbage, recycling and compost.</p> <p>Continue to explore the City's options for picking up commercial recycling through the City's Zero Waste Plan, and consider prioritization of centers.</p>	<p>There is adequate collection &amp; space to manage waste and recycling.</p>
<p>Inadequate pedestrian infrastructure</p>	<p>Prioritize improvement of pedestrian infrastructure and amenities in neighborhood center areas as they develop.</p>	<p>Improve pedestrian safety and walkability.</p>

**Neighborhood Center Areas**  
From Olympia's Comprehensive Plan Future Land Use Map



This map is intended for 8.5x11" landscape printing.

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Victoria Square & Glenmore are currently in the jurisdiction of Thurston County, but are planned to be annexed into the City of Olympia within the 20 year planning period.

1 inch = 5,000 feet

0 0.5 1 Miles

Map printed 11/9/2014  
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