



Community Renewal Area FAQs

Olympia's City Council has started the process to consider the creation of a Community Renewal Area (CRA) within Olympia. The City Council feels that a CRA may be one of the tools to help to encourage high quality redevelopment in our downtown.

About Community Renewal

Q: *What is a Community Renewal Area (CRA)? How is it established?*

A: Washington law (RCW 35.81) allows cities to establish a Community Renewal Area through the designation of a geographic area that contains blight and the creation of a Community Renewal Plan for addressing blight in that area. Many Washington cities have used CRA to develop and implement redevelopment plans, including Vancouver, Shoreline, Everett, Bremerton, and Anacortes.

Q: *How is blight defined and how does this relate to downtown Olympia?*

A: Revised Code of Washington 35.81.015 defines blight as:

1. Substantial physical dilapidation, deterioration, defective construction, material, and arrangement and/or age or obsolescence of buildings or improvements, whether residential or nonresidential,
2. Inadequate provision for ventilation, light, proper sanitary facilities, or open spaces;
3. Inappropriate uses of land or buildings;
4. Existence of overcrowding of buildings or structures;
5. Defective or inadequate street layout;
6. Faulty lot layout in relation to size, adequacy, accessibility or usefulness;
7. Excessive land coverage; insanitary or unsafe conditions; deterioration of site;
8. Existence of hazardous soils, substances, or materials;
9. Diversity of ownership;
10. Tax or special assessment delinquency exceeding the fair value of the land;
11. Defective or unusual conditions of title;
12. Improper subdivision or obsolete platting;
13. Existence of persistent and high levels of unemployment or poverty within the area; or
14. The existence of conditions that endanger life or property by fire or other causes, or any combination of such factors, is conducive to ill health, transmission of disease, infant mortality, juvenile delinquency or crime; substantially impairs or arrests the sound growth of the municipality or its environs, or retards the provision of housing accommodations; constitutes an economic or social liability; and/or is detrimental, or constitutes a menace, to the public health, safety, welfare, or morals in its present condition and use.

Several of these conditions exist in downtown Olympia including, but not limited to, the existence of buildings that are dilapidated, deteriorated and obsolete and the presence of hazardous soils. Council will need to determine if these conditions constitute a condition of blight. Not all buildings within a CRA need to be blighted, as the impacts of blight extend well beyond the property lines of the blighted property negatively affecting adjoining properties and entire neighborhoods.

Q: *What special powers does community renewal provide?*

A: Once a CRA is established, the city gains a variety of tools designed to help it facilitate renewal. For example, while Washington law typically limits cities from working with private enterprise, under the CRA law, cities are encouraged to partner with private enterprise to rejuvenate the CRA.

Make improvements	Acquire/sell property	Use financial tools
<p>Execute contracts or other instruments</p> <p>Install, construct, reconstruct parks, streets, roads, public utilities, or other facilities</p> <p>Contract with any public or private person for the purpose of carrying out the activities identified in the workable plan</p> <p>Select a developer either before or after land acquisition to pinpoint property acquisition and avoid assembling more parcels than necessary</p>	<p>Buy, lease, or acquire property through the eminent domain process;</p> <p>Sell, lease, or transfer the acquired property, or amount that is not less than its fair value</p>	<p>Borrow/accept financial assistance from the federal government, the state, county, or other public body, or from any public or private source (including fed block grant-backed loans)</p> <p>Make loans or grants for job creation or retention.</p> <p>Form local improvement districts to finance improvements</p> <p>Relocate persons or provide assistance to property owners/tenants affected by the CRP</p> <p>Issue tax exempt, nonrecourse revenue bonds that are backed by the revenues generated by the development to pay for the cost of public improvements in the blighted areas. These bonds are not subjects to the statutory or constitutional debt limits of the municipality.</p>

Q: What process is the City using to evaluate community renewal in downtown Olympia?

A: The City has prepared an Investment Strategy report and a Community Renewal Area Feasibility Study to assess the technical feasibility of community renewal in downtown. These studies provide information on findings of blight within downtown, as well as a recommendation for the Council on whether to establish a community renewal plan, and what boundary and governance structure the community renewal area should have. Council will consider these recommendations and should they decide to move forward with a CRA will hold a public hearing after publishing a notice in the newspaper and giving written notice to all property owners.

Q: Does the CRA change zoning or heights of buildings?

A: The CRA itself does not change regulations, but provides a set of tools for a city to use for the very limited purpose of bringing about renewal. However, the consulting team assisting in the development of the CRA plan will assess whether the existing development regulations, such as building heights and setbacks, create barriers to the redevelopment of certain blighted properties in Downtown. Should changes be recommended they would be considered through the City's normal planning process.

Q: Will my property taxes or values increase or decrease as a result of community renewal?

A: Creating a CRA will not affect property assessments positively or negatively, as it does not guarantee improvement, increase potential, or devalue property. Property taxes and property values will only be affected when and if the area experiences significant improvement through investment or increased tenant activity.

Q: Are there property rights objections to CRAs?

A: Two common property rights objections often surface when cities consider using CRAs: the dislocation of residents and the use of condemnation or eminent domain for economic development. At this point in the process, it appears unlikely that the CRA would displace existing residents and City Council has discussed using eminent domain under some limited circumstances, but has not taken a formal position on the use of eminent domain.

Community Renewal in the Olympia Context

Q: Will the City have a plan for Downtown renewal?

A. Yes, part of the process of creating a Community Renewal Area is the creation of a Community Renewal plan. The Revised Code of Washington 35.81.015 defines a CRA plan as:

- (a) shall be consistent with the comprehensive plan or parts thereof for the municipality as a whole;

- (b) shall be sufficiently complete to indicate such land acquisition, demolition, and removal of structures, redevelopment, improvements, and rehabilitation as may be proposed to be carried out in the community renewal area; zoning and planning changes, if any, which may include, among other things, changes related to land uses, densities, and building requirements; and the plan's relationship to definite local objectives respecting appropriate land uses, improved traffic, public transportation, public utilities, recreational and community facilities, and other public improvements;
- (c) shall address the need for replacement housing, within the municipality, where existing housing is lost as a result of the community renewal project undertaken by the municipality under this chapter; and
- (d) may include a plan to address any persistent high levels of unemployment or poverty in the community renewal area.

Q: How does this project relate to past, current, and future planning efforts for Downtown?

The existing and proposed Comprehensive Plan envisions downtown Olympia as a cultural hub and a retail center with a vibrant street-life, a great place to live with a growing and diverse residential population, a great place to visit with access to and views of the shoreline, the Capitol, Capital Lake, the Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains. With its waterfront, historic buildings, cultural amenities and new City Hall, Hands On Children's Museum, East Bay Plaza and rebuilt Percival Landing Olympia is poised for redevelopment.

As part of the Comprehensive Plan update, the Planning Commission has identified the need for a Downtown Plan. This plan has not yet been scoped or fully defined, however, it may address the broader issues related to downtown such as transportation, urban design, sea level rise, social service provision and other issues beyond the scope of the CRA's objective of the elimination of blight on specific properties. Much of the information developed by the consulting team related to downtown redevelopment characteristics will be foundational to any future planning efforts related to downtown.

Q: What role might the City of Olympia play in the redevelopment of Downtown Olympia?

A: The City can play a greater role in stimulating and targeting high quality growth. Examples may include:

1. Providing consistent guidance and planning for new development in Downtown, through the Downtown Planning Process
2. Designating and funding parks, plazas, and other public open spaces
3. Acquiring private property, razing blighted buildings, developing plans and soliciting redevelopment proposals for private property

4. Planning for and financing major infrastructure improvements
5. Assessing hazardous and contaminated soils and facilitating site cleanup
6. Considering “planned actions” and the creation of special zoning districts.

Q: *Does the City intend to acquire property?*

A: Should the City find it necessary to acquire additional property in downtown as a result of the CRA process, the City would act in the public interest as a typical buyer, using a negotiated purchase agreement wherever possible. The Community Renewal Area Plan would detail what property the city would be interested in acquiring and how the City would repurpose that property. In addition, RCW 35.81 prescribes that cities that acquire property for economic renewal in CRAs need to do so with the intention of returning the property to the private sector as soon as is reasonable.

Next Steps

Q: *Where can I learn more about Community Renewal Areas?*

A: The Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington maintains a webpage with examples of CRA ordinances from Anacortes, Bremerton, Shoreline and Vancouver. It also includes a link to the text of RCW 35.81. [Community Renewal Law \(Formerly Urban Renewal\)](#). Questions can also be directed to Keith Stahley, Community Planning & Development Director at either 360.753.8227 or kstahley@ci.olympia.wa.us.

Q: *Can I follow the progress of the CRA?*

A: On the City of Olympia internet website, updates on the work of the Citizens Advisory Committee are available at [CRA Process Information](#).

Q: *How can I comment on the CRA’s proposal for Downtown Olympia?*

A: The City Council values community input and looks forward to hearing from you on the CRA proposal at scheduled open house meetings, Community and Economic Revitalization Committee Community Renewal Area Meetings, City Council Meetings and public hearings. City staff and elected officials are available to attend meetings and explain the role of the CRA as it relates to the future of our downtown.