

Olympia 2045: Climate Element Phase 1 Community Engagement Summary

July 2024 – February 2025

Introduction

In 2023, the Washington State Legislature passed HB118, which added a climate goal to the Growth Management Act (GMA) and established a requirement for local jurisdictions to include a Climate Element within their comprehensive plans starting in 2025. The climate element must address both climate mitigation (the reduction of greenhouse gases) and resilience (the ability to prepare for, recover from, and adapt to climate change impacts).

The first draft of the Climate Element goals and policies was informed by previous work, including the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan (2020), Olympia Sea Level Rise Response Plan (2019), the Olympia Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment (2025), as well as additional community outreach and engagement conducted between July 2024 and February 2025. This report summarizes the outreach and feedback received during this time, and prior to the publication of the first draft of the Climate Element Goals and Policies for public comment.

Community Engagement Process

Before developing the first draft of Climate Element goals and policies, staff conducted community engagement to learn more about community concerns and priorities related to climate action in Olympia. The community engagement process during this phase used both online and in-person engagement. We created an online “ideas board” on our Engage Olympia page, where community members were invited to respond to the following prompts:

- What actions would you like to see the City take to prepare for and respond to climate-related hazards?
- What actions would you like to see the City take to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2040.

We also hosted several open houses, which were open to all community members, as well as smaller group conversations with community stakeholders. The targeted group conversations allowed for more in-depth feedback and opportunities to build relationships with current and future partners that are necessary for effective implementation of the vision put forward in the Climate Element.

We developed presentations, flyers, and one-pagers introducing participants to the Comprehensive Plan, how climate change impacts the community, and the City’s ongoing work to address climate change. The one-pager materials were available printed and online and were available in both English and Spanish.

See Figure 1 for a summary of all events and engagement conducted as part of this stage of the Climate Element development process.

Figure 1. Summary of community engagement and outreach activities

Engagement Type	Date	Stakeholder	Format
Comprehensive Plan Open House	07/31/2024	General Public	In-person (City Hall)
Online “Ideas Board”	10/17/2024 – 02/17/2025	General Public	Online
Climate Element Open House	10/16/2024	General Public	In-person (Olympia Center)
City Commission	12/2/2024	Social Justice and Equity Commission	In-person
Community Conversation	12/4/2024	CACLMT	In-person
Community Conversation	12/9/2024	Council of Neighborhood Associations	Online
Community Conversation	12/9/2024	Physicians for Social Responsibility	Online
Community Conversation	12/12/2024	Experience Olympia	In-person
Community Event	12/14/2024	CIELO Las Posadas	In-person
Public Agency Conversation	12/17/2024	Thurston Conservation District	In-person
Community Conversation	12/17/2024	PACMTN	In-person
Community Conversation	1/9/2025	YWCA	In-person
Public Agency Conversation	1/13/2025	InterCity Transit	In-person
Community Conversation	1/15/2025	Olympia Downtown Alliance	In-person
Community Conversation	1/17/2025	Thurston County Chamber of Commerce	In-person
Service Provider Conversation	1/23/2025	Puget Sound Energy (PSE)	In-person
Community Conversation	1/23/2025	Olympia Master Builders	In-person
Community Conversation	1/24/2025	Olympia For All	In-person

Open House	1/24/2025	General Public	In-person (Timberland Regional Library)
Community Conversation	2/13/2025	South Puget Sound Community College	In-person
Thurston Climate Action Team Community Assembly	2/19/2025	8 Community Organizations: • Deschutes Estuary Restoration Team • InterFaith Works • Thurston Conservation District • Evergreen College • Oly Ecosystems • CACLMT • Puget Sound Partnership • Lewis, Mason, Thurston Area Agency on Aging	In-person
Open House	2/25/2025	General Public	In-person (Timberland Regional Library)

We received over 300 comments from the open houses, online surveys, community conversations, and events.

The feedback provided included both climate mitigation (reducing greenhouse gas emissions) and climate resilience (preparing for and adapting to climate hazards). The feedback focused on climate action within the following sectors, which generally align with chapters within the Comprehensive Plan:

- Natural Environment
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Public Utilities – Waste and Water Resources
- Buildings and Built Environment
- Community, Culture, and Social Infrastructure
- Economic Development

The comments and ideas informed the development of the first draft of goals and policies (published on February 18, 2025) within the Climate Element of the Comprehensive Plan as well as the forthcoming implementation strategy.

Summary of Feedback

The following sections summarize the key feedback and points that we received, organized by topic area and general theme.

General

Policy and Implementation

Community feedback from the Engage Olympia page and Open Houses suggested alignment with state and regional plans for future grant competitiveness. Community-based organizations emphasized the importance of flexibility in grant language and City policies to address unforeseen challenges, align with proposed objectives and intent, and ensure successful implementation.

Outreach

Community feedback highlighted the importance of expanding educational outreach for families, youth, and underrepresented communities. Community members also recommended fostering partnerships with landowners to encourage environmental stewardship practices. Many participants stressed the importance of promoting and communicating individual actions to mitigate anxiety about climate change.

Community comments emphasized the importance of frequently communicating the City's climate actions in an accessible way. Community-based organizations specifically were interested in partnering and promoting programmatic initiatives and focusing on relatable co-benefits.

Equity and Environmental Justice

Community members emphasized the need to elevate the voices of the most vulnerable in all climate actions. Community feedback urged further definition, identification, and measurement of climate justice. Community feedback emphasized the need to work collaboratively and often with the Squaxin Island Tribe.

Housing and Built Environment

Affordability

Housing affordability was a critical component of many of the community conversations and was a clear community concern and high priority. Affordability concerns and connections are described in the following sections.

Weatherization

The community strongly supported the City's Energize Olympia program and advocated for expanding weatherization and heat pump programs. Community input emphasizes a need for a phased approach to retrofitting homes and buildings, with a focus on making these upgrades financially accessible and finding innovative ways to offset the financial burden. Suggestions for City-led weatherization initiatives included: technical assistance for retrofits, maintenance resources and checklists, incentive programs for retrofits, and free energy assessments. Community-based organizations highlighted the importance of emphasizing cost-savings from utility bills when discussing energy efficiency programs and building insulation upgrades. Furthermore, the community stressed the importance of creating accessible programs for renters without raising rent.

Additionally, the community advocated for increasing access to and distribution of air purifiers and air conditioning, particularly for vulnerable groups like the elderly and those with asthma. Public education, outreach, and awareness of energy efficiency strategies and weatherization benefits are seen as critical.

Density and Development

Community feedback emphasized the need for more walkable neighborhoods, increasing multifamily housing options, reducing urban sprawl into the urban growth area, and promoting urban cooling through urban design decisions. These suggestions recognized both the mitigation and resilience benefits of walkable neighborhoods. Conversations around density were often paired with the need for fast, reliable, multimodal transportation options. There were concerns from some community groups about the impacts to housing affordability from development regulations.

Many community members and community-based organizations share concerns about potential conflicts between development and preservation of tree canopy. Community members specifically

voiced concerns about deforestation and loss of valuable tree canopy due to development pressures. Suggestions included requiring set asides for open space and trees in new development, celebrating historic trees, and replacing mature trees that must be removed with larger plantings and with more trees.

Parks and Natural Environment

Community feedback showed strong support for restoring native ecosystems, protecting salmon habitats, and preserving wetlands to improve water quality and mitigate climate impacts. Suggestions included: incentivizing planting native species, installing low impact development techniques, removing invasive species, and incorporating biodiversity in urban landscapes. Many community members raised concerns about future wildfire risk and advocated for FireWise practices on residential and public lands. Community feedback showed strong support of and excitement for the Deschutes Estuary Restoration project.

The community adamantly voiced the need to protect and safeguard existing ecosystems and tree canopy. Restoration efforts and landscape choices should account for future climate conditions and respond with shifted species selections towards drought- and heat-tolerant plants and adaptive maintenance practices. Community feedback emphasized the importance of tree canopy in urban areas to mitigate heat and reduce the urban heat island effect. There was support for expanded tree canopy in public spaces, rights-of-ways, and street medians as well as green roofs. In addition to the cooling benefits of a strong urban tree canopy, community feedback highlighted equity considerations for shade and neighborhood greening.

Energy Generation

Community feedback emphasized the importance of transitioning to clean energy. There is a strong call to reduce reliance on natural gas and to incentivize solar adoption. Equity considerations, including making installations more affordable for working-class families, were frequently cited. Suggestions included expanding community solar programs, offering tax incentives, and exploring innovative technologies like microgrids for energy storage and grid stability. The community showed broad support for electrification incentives across transportation, heating systems, and commercial operations. Additional resources for understanding residential electrification needs would also be helpful in planning energy upgrades and transition.

Transportation

Community feedback emphasized the need to enhance bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure, making biking and walking more accessible and safer. Key suggestions include creating protected bike lanes, providing secure bike parking, and improving bike accessibility to downtown and key destinations. Community members and organizations noted public transportation priorities, including increased frequency of bus routes, fare-free buses, and expanded public transit routes.

Additional proposals include reducing speed limits in high-density areas and making downtown more pedestrian-friendly by creating car-free zones and providing more sidewalks. There is a call for increased access to e-bikes, bike repair stations, and traffic-slowing infrastructure. Community groups emphasized the opportunity for equity when implementing these actions.

Community input highlights strong support for promoting electric vehicles (EVs) as part of the city's mitigation efforts. To encourage EV adoption, the community advocates for benefits such as free or reduced parking fees for EV owners and installing more EV charging stations.

Public Utilities: Water and Waste Resources

Community feedback included reducing impervious surface areas, mandating stricter stormwater management requirements, and upgrading storm drainage and existing septic systems to protect water quality. Additionally, there was concern about harmful chemicals in wastewater treatment and impacts of sea level rise and future flooding on infrastructure and property.

Community input for waste resources emphasizes the need for waste reduction. Key suggestions include prioritizing reusable over recyclable materials, promoting composting, and adopting pay-as-you-throw programs. There is support for reusing building materials, reducing food waste, and developing new partnerships for waste management.

Emergency Management and Public Health

Community feedback recognized the cascading effects of climate-exacerbated hazards and social vulnerabilities. Providing expanded financial support for social and houselessness services is a key aspect of achieving climate resilience. Community-based organizations were particularly aware of their role as quasi-first responders for unsheltered individuals during extreme weather events. The organizations reiterated the need for coordinated communications with the City before and during an acute event, and for additional resources to be able to adequately prepare and respond to events.

Community input highlighted the need for better communication and preparedness for extreme heat and smoke events. Key suggestions include using alert systems to inform the public about hazardous events, working with local organizations to streamline information about emergency shelters, and ensuring that residents have access to cool spaces during heat events. Community feedback supported increased awareness and resources to smoke refuges and cooling shelters as well as ensuring that hospitals, elderly housing, and vulnerable sites have resource plans, backup power, and additional reserve capacity during extreme events. There is support for improving preparedness across neighborhoods, the community, and within all sectors.

Economic Development and Job Creation

The business community was most concerned about the future impacts of rising insurance costs from future climate-exacerbated hazards. They also voiced concern about increased regulations hindering business development, housing developments, and investment within Olympia. The business community encouraged an approach that mitigates the risk of climate-exacerbated hazards, rather than wholesale restrictions. Community feedback indicated strong support for green job creation, with a focus on vocational training, apprenticeships, and partnerships.

Community and Culture

Respondents emphasized the desire for further civic and social engagement by expanding festivals, community events, and utilizing vacant lots for community-driven initiatives. Community feedback indicated a desire for promoting mutual aid networks, resources, and neighborhood connections. Residents mentioned the need for organizing and connecting people that are not a part of formal neighborhood groups. Additionally, people advocated for increased emergency preparedness awareness at the neighborhood level and for the development of green spaces, sidewalks, community gardens, and places to sit and relax in the shade.