

36. Green Space

Proposal

Supplement the Natural Environment and Parks and Open Space goals and policies of the Plan with a Land Use goal and related policies as set forth below. These policies are generally more specific and call for more open space than the provisions in other chapters.

Background

Olympia's Comprehensive Plan and implementing practices and regulations address open space by a variety of means. (Note: The terms 'open space' and 'green space' have no specific definitions. As used here they are roughly interchangeable and refer to land not occupied by buildings, storage areas or parking lots. However, 'green space' may include a greater emphasis on public use of open space.) Among these are establishing building setback and separation requirements, requiring open space buffers adjacent to streams, wetlands and other environmentally sensitive areas, requiring creation of permanent tree tracts and stormwater facilities, acquiring public open space and parks, incorporating planted areas into public rights, and requiring that private development includes landscaped open spaces. Although the specific acreages and types of areas set aside have varied over time and by location and development project, so far these activities and regulations have resulted in nearly 4,000 acres, almost 25% of the Olympia urban area, being permanently set aside as parks, tree tracts and other forms of open space.

Options

Option 1. Adopt Land Use Goal 7 and related policies as recommended by the Planning Commission:

- *GL7 Urban green space is available to the public and located throughout the community and incorporates natural environments into the urban setting, which are easily accessible and viewable so that people can experience nature daily and nearby.*
- *PL7.1 Provide urban green spaces in which to spend time. Include such elements as trees, garden spaces, variety of vegetation, water features, green walls and roofs and seating.*
- *PL7.2 Provide urban green spaces that are in people's immediate vicinity and can be enjoyed or viewed from a variety of perspectives.*
- *PL7.3 Establish a maximum distance to urban green space for all community members.*
- *PL7.4 Increase the area per capita of urban green space and the tree canopy- to- area ratio within each neighborhood.*

- *PL7.5 Establish urban green space between transportation corridors and adjacent areas.*

Option 2. No action: Do not add the above provisions to Comprehensive Plan; instead continue the open space approaches set forth elsewhere in the Plan.

Analysis

The goal and in particular the related policies set forth above would establish a new focus on open space as part of the urban landscape of Olympia. It could differ from current policies and practices in four respects:

- Providing urban green space in the “immediate” vicinity of people would be a shorter distance than the City’s ‘one mile of all residences’ policy for neighborhood parks. If a maximum distance of less than one mile were established, new actions would be needed to provide a more dispersed distribution of urban green spaces.
- Increasing the acreage of urban green space per capita – if taken literally, is probably not viable as it would require reducing the existing acreage of buildings and parking lots as the population grows. But, if interpreted as providing for more urban green space associated with development than in the past, it would imply either requiring more open space in association with development (possibly including landscaped rooftops) or acquiring such open space. If overall development densities are not to be reduced, these approaches would require increasing the development density of the built portion of each or most sites.
- Increasing the tree canopy within each neighborhood would also require new actions. In general the City has sought to ensure that as development occurs about 10% of the community is planted with trees. Today over 30% of the urban growth area is canopied with trees. Increasing the canopy would require planting of open spaces that now lack trees.
- Establishing urban green spaces between transportation corridors and adjacent areas could require a change in either the City’s street standards or building setbacks. Although planter strips and street trees are standard features of many streets and landscaped building setbacks are required in most locations, in the more intensively used area such as downtown and along commercial arterials only street trees are generally required. Commercial land users may object to further separation of commercial land uses from streets if it would reduce the visibility of business from the ‘stream of traffic.’

Original Staff Proposal

No Recommendation.

Planning Commission Recommendation

Option 1. As described above.