

Comprehensive Plan Draft Edits to Improve Readability

In June, 2010, the City Council approved a Scope for the Comprehensive Plan Update. Included in the scope was direction to “Improve public access to the [Comprehensive] Plan by eliminating redundancy, editing for readability and reorganizing the document to improve accessibility and ensure that it is adapted to internet searching and display.”

Plaintalk

Several steps have been taken throughout the *Imagine Olympia* update process to ensure the final adopted Comprehensive Plan (Plan) is clear, concise, simple to navigate, and easy to read. The most significant of these was to use a style of writing called ‘Plaintalk.’

The term ‘Plaintalk’ was created by Ms. Dana Botka, Plainpoint Communications, and is a set of principles for writing and presenting information in an easy-to-understand and concise manner. Widely used by the State of Washington, Plaintalk transforms complex and confusing documents so they may be easily understood by a diverse audience. Plaintalk has been used by multiple state agencies to revise applications, online material, instructional guides, and informational handouts.

Plaintalk has been proven as successful when used by state agencies; performance measures and testing have demonstrated increases in form submittals, forms completed correctly and without assistance, and positive feedback received from focus group participants.

Plaintalk Training

City staff members responsible for drafting the Plan first attended Plaintalk trainings hosted by the State of Washington Department of Personnel to learn how to write using the Plaintalk guidelines. As a supplement to the trainings, staff also met with Ms. Botka, who provided a personalized work session tailored to writing a Comprehensive Plan.

Based on what staff had learned from both the training and workshop, several members of the group developed a Comprehensive Plan Style Guide to help all writers follow the same writing principals and formatting during the drafting process.

Plaintalk Review

After the Olympia Planning Commission (OPC) completed their recommendations in March of 2013, staff requested Council approval to hire a third-party consultant to review the Plan for adherence to Plaintalk principles and to ensure that the Plan maintained a consistent style and writing 'voice' across chapters.

Staff contracted with Ms. Botka to review the December 2013 Planning Commission Recommendation Draft, with emphasis on the following Plaintalk principles:

- Establish an obvious and consistent structure;
- Keep the Plan's content as concise as possible out of respect for the reader's time and practical purposes; and
- Choose terms that should be understandable to the layperson.

Recommended Plaintalk Edits

Ms. Botka submitted general Plaintalk revisions that apply to the whole plan and detailed Plaintalk edits specific to each chapter. The detailed edits were provided in a 'track changes' format, so staff could easily compare them to the original draft.

Ms. Botka also provided staff with a summary of the most common Plaintalk edits she identified and corrected in the Plan:

- Replace words that are 'jargon' or provide a definition;
- Eliminate redundancy;
- Eliminate words that aren't needed to express a concept;
- Ensure one written 'voice' throughout the document;
- Maintain a consistent tense; and
- Replace, remove, or add headings to help a reader navigate within the Plan.

A small percentage of the Plaintalk edits were identified by staff as needing to be rejected. Often it was because the edit would change the substantive meaning of a goal or policy or require an extensive re-write of a goal or policy. Staff also decided to continue to leave goals written as 'end states,' rather than revising them as active sentences, which would include in order a subject, verb, and object.

Examples of Plaintalk Edits

The Plaintalk edits vary in complexity and intent, from replacing a term with one that is better understood to eliminating extensive text that is repetitive. Edits also apply to both introductory text and goal and policy language. Highlighted below are several examples of Plaintalk edits:

1. Replace words that are jargon and eliminate words that aren't needed to express a concept:

PN2.4 Preserve and restore native plants communities by incorporating including restoration efforts and volunteer partnerships ~~into~~ all city land management.

2. Replace words and jargon with clearer language:

PS3.3 ~~Make adequate provisions~~ Take steps to ensure for projected housing will be available needs for to all income levels, based on projected community needs.

3. Eliminate redundancy, replace words that aren't needed to express a concept, and ensure one written 'voice' throughout the document:

~~When we care deeply about an issue it is important for us to have a forum where we can express our thoughts and help influence the outcome.~~ Active participation in civic affairs is an important part of life in Olympia, ~~and essential to our democracy. We all have a role in fostering a vibrant and diverse civic atmosphere. The~~ and the City has a long history of providing a forum for citizens get involved. Our ~~can set the stage by having open government policies and inviting all members of the public to get involved.~~ Regularly encourage are essential to ensure residents, business owners, employees and other community members are able to effectively can make a difference by participating to participate in any number of issues.

Please see Appendix A for a more extensive sample of Plaintalk edits.

Appendix A: Sample of Plaintalk Edits

City-Owned Utilities Working Together



City-owned and operated utilities provide the community with essential services and can help shape Olympia's future in meaningful ways. ~~A-We~~ take a ~~coordinated,~~ cost-effective approach to managing our utility-utilities ~~management ensures that we are being more cost-effective and are~~ fully consider ing the economic, social and environmental implications of all our actions.

[Photo here](#)

City Utilities provide clean drinking water.

~~Four City departments – Public Works, Finance, Executive, and Community Planning and Development – play key roles in City utility operations, and including have establishing level level of of service standards, which are for each City utility in the Capital Facilities Plan [a](#).~~

~~Public Works oversees planning, programs, operations and capital facility management. Finance manages accounting, utility billing, and human resources. The Executive office provides legal and communication services, as well as overall policy support for work with the City Council and Citizen Advisory Committees. The Community Planning and Development Department supports utility services through their review and permitting of private development and construction projects. Do you need this paragraph?~~

Citizen engagement and involvement is an important component of City utility management. Customers and users help in-with environmental restoration projects, and efforts to reduce pollution ~~prevention, and~~ waste. They also reduction, and can participate in utility management and rate setting. A Utility Advisory Committee (UAC) appointed by City Council reviews programs, policies and rates.

The four City-owned and operated utilities include:

- **Drinking Water.** This ~~Utility's-utility's~~ mission is to provide and protect healthy drinking water for ~~a-the healthy~~ community. This involves protecting groundwater and promoting water conservation, as well as ensuring that our drinking water meets federal Safe Drinking Water Act standards.
- **Wastewater.** This ~~Utility's-utility mission is to~~ collects and

conveys wastewater to treatment facilities ~~in order~~ to protect public and environmental health. ~~In addition, the utility~~ It also works to reduce the number of ~~onsite sewage-septic~~ systems in the City.

- **Storm and Surface Water.** The mission of this utility is to ~~provide services that~~ minimize flooding, improve water quality, and protect or enhance aquatic habitat
- **Waste ReSources.** ~~This utility's mission is to lead and inspire our community toward a waste-free future. This utility is directly responsible for providing~~ Provides collection services for residential and commercial garbage, residential recyclables and residential organics (yard debris, food waste and soiled paper), and also encourages waste reduction through educational programs. Its mission is to lead our community toward a waste-free future.

[Photo here](#)

City Utilities collect commercial organics for composting.

Over the next 20 years, there will be a growing need for us to manage our utility resources efficiently. ~~Our with the future~~ challenges ~~of~~ will include:

- **Funding Repairing and Replacement** ~~replacing aging systems~~. Operation and maintenance needs will continue to expand, ~~especially~~ as the pipes, pumps, valves, treatment facilities, reservoirs and wells that make up our utility system ~~are aging~~ age. These needs must be met while keeping rates affordable.
- **Protecting the** ~~Natural Environment~~ natural environment. Water quality deterioration and habitat loss will continue to be a concerns as development and utilities expand to new areas.
- **Preparing for** ~~Seasea-Level-Level Rise~~ rise. In addition to the ~~flooding threat-obvious flooding problems~~, the City's underground utilities in the downtown area will be jeopardized.

~~Utility-Our utility staff programs~~ will need to ~~collaborate in finding~~ find partnerships and outside resources to ~~find~~ help the City face these ~~is new innovative solutions to these~~ challenges.

Goals and Policies

+ SHARE

Change:

Utility and land use plans are coordinated so that utility services can be provided and maintained for proposed **future** land uses.

+ SHARE

PU1.1 Require **annexation** of all properties for which new City wastewater or drinking water services are requested if the property is outside the City, but inside the **Urban Growth Area**. Or, require property owners to sign a Binding Agreement to Annex when requested by the City.


PU1.2 Require new developments to construct **drinking** water, wastewater and storm-water utilities ~~in a way that will achieve their ways that meet the~~ community development, environmental protection, and resource-protection goals of this Plan, and that are consistent with adopted utility plans and extension policies.

PU1.3 Evaluate ~~land-land-~~use plans and utility goals periodically to **ensure help guide** growth ~~is guided by to the most appropriate areas, based on our~~ knowledge of current environmental constraints and ~~currently the latest~~ available utility technology.

PU1.4 Make necessary improvements to utility facilities that do not **currently** meet minimum standards. Prioritize capital improvements to existing systems based on age, condition, risk of failure, and capacity.

Change:

PU1.5 Ensure that public utility and ~~transportation-transportation-~~related facilities constructed in Olympia and its Growth Area meet **appropriate City** standards for safety, constructability, durability and maintainability. ~~(See through City of Olympia's Engineering Development and Design Standards, which are regularly updated.)~~

PU1.6 ~~Update-Annually update~~ the utility portions of the [Capital Facilities Plan](#)  to ~~address-reevaluate~~ infrastructure priorities, ~~on an annual basis~~.

Reliable **utility** service is provided at the lowest reasonable cost, consistent with the City's aims of

environmental stewardship, social equity, economic development and the protection of public health.

+ SHARE

PU2.1 Ensure that new development projects pay for their own utility infrastructure; ~~needs~~ based on their expected needs for the next 20a twenty years horizon and a Also require them to contribute to their portion of existing infrastructure. Routinely review ~~new-new~~ development charges (e.g., ~~such as~~ general facility charges) ~~as part of~~ when updating utility master plans ~~updates,~~ or more frequently as needed.

PU2.2 Ensure that utility fees, such as ~~(e.g., rates, and~~ general facility charges) ~~,~~ are structured so that they to reasonably reflect the actual cost of providing services to each customer class. Fees must also -and encourage customers to conserve water ~~conservation and the reduction~~ reduce of their demand on our wastewater treatment ~~demands~~ system.

PU2.3 Provide special rates for low-income senior and low-income, disabled utility customers.

PU2.4 Ensure that adequate funds are generated by the City's utilities to maintain ~~urban~~ utility services and capital improvement programs.

PU2.5 Use fiscally responsible management practices in order to maintain favorable bond ratings for the City's utilities.

PU2.6 Provide service to existing and new customers consistent with the legal obligation of City utilities to provide service. (as legally required?)

PU2.7 ~~Encourage~~ Use pricing to encourage utility customers to reduce waste ~~reduction, recycling~~ recycle, conserve water, ~~conservation and~~ help protect our surface water quality ~~protection through pricing policies~~.

PU2.8 Use debt financing responsibly to support needed capital facility investments and "smooth" rate impacts.

PU2.9 ~~Use~~ Developer Reimbursement Agreements with that include "latecomer fees" and similar tools to enable property owners to recover some of the initial costs of extending infrastructure to serve their developments, when others connect to such extensions at a later date.

PU2.10 Consider the social, economic and environmental impacts of utility repairs, replacements and upgrades.