

Olympia 2045: Climate Element Phase 2 Public Comment Summary

February 2025 – March 2025

Introduction

In 2023, the Washington State Legislature passed HB1118, 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 published on February 18, 2025. The public comment period lasted for one month, from February 18, 2025 to March 19, 2025.

Community Engagement Process

We gathered public comment on the initial draft through an online Engage Olympia survey, direct email, community events and tabling.

Engage Olympia Survey

The Engage Olympia survey was posted on February 18, the date that the goals and policies were posted, and was closed on March 19. We received 20 total responses during this period. The survey asked four questions:

1. Do you disagree or agree with the general direction of these draft goals and policies?
2. Why did you answer the way you did?
3. Would you like to see any changes to these draft goals and policies?
4. What changes would you like to see?

Of the 20 respondents, 85% either agree or strongly agree with the general direction of the goals and policies. Many responded this way due to the comprehensiveness of the proposed goals and policies. However, some respondents expressed a desire for more details and a commitment to implementation. The remaining 15% of respondents were either “not sure” or disagreed with the general direction of the proposed goals and policies. These respondents cited concerns about the number of goals and policies listed within the chapter, potential impacts to housing affordability, and ecological impacts of waterfront development. No respondents strongly disagreed with the chapter. Additionally, 75% of the respondents would like to see changes to the goals and policies. These requested changes are summarized and discussed in the “Summary of Feedback” section below.

Direct Emails

We received direct emails with comments from five people and organizations during the public comment period. These comments and requested changes are summarized and discussed in the “Summary of Feedback” section below.

Community Events

We hosted and attended four community events to gather additional feedback on the Climate Element. As our first event during Phase 2 of the public comment period, we hosted a workshop at the Timberland Regional Library on February 25, 2025, where we provided a brief presentation about the Climate Element and facilitated a Q&A session. Fifteen people attended the event. We also tabled at the Olympia Center and Olympia City Hall on March 12, 2025, and at the Billy Frank Jr. Legacy event on March 19, 2025. At the Billy Frank Jr. Legacy event, representatives from the City’s Climate Team and Parks Department Team spoke with over 170 attendees. We gathered feedback at these events through a short, easy engagement activity. For this activity, we printed out the draft goals and policies and cut them into individual pieces of paper, and asked participants to pick out a slip and write their thoughts on the back. These comments are included in the summary section below.

Summary of Feedback

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

Affordability and Unintended Impacts of Regulation

Respondents expressed concern over the potential regulatory burden of climate goals and policies. Their concerns focused on the overall cost of doing business and housing affordability in Olympia. Comments requested a cost benefit analysis to be developed before regulations are in place.

Staff Response: The City enumerates the cost, benefits, and potential unintended consequences of all proposed policies during the policy development process. The process includes technical assessments as well as opportunities for public comment on the specific policies. The goals and policies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan guide the vision for future land use and policy development in Olympia. A cost-benefit assessment will be included as the first step to develop and implement any of the identified policies.

We included additional language in the narrative about the connection between housing affordability and climate action and resilience. We also added new policies to more directly address concerns about climate policies impacting housing affordability.

Urban Forests

Many respondents emphasized the value of Olympia’s trees and forests. They expressed that protecting and enhancing trees should be a key priority for the City.

Staff Response: Through the Climate Risk and Vulnerability Assessment, we found that urban forests are at high risk of being impacted by extreme heat, drought, and rising temperatures over the next 20 years. The Climate Policy Advisory Team recommended that the City take future action in preserving and enhancing our urban forests. We included specific urban forestry goals from the Natural Environment chapter into the Climate Element to mitigate these risks and to guide City action. Additional resources will be necessary for maintenance and care to mitigate future climate conditions and their impact on forests. This City priority aligns with community feedback as well as the existing Climate Element goals and policies proposed.

Density and Development

The process and impact of urban infill and development was another reoccurring theme in the public comments. Respondents recommended including policies guiding limits to impervious surface cover in new development, planting native plants, and installing green stormwater infrastructure.

Overall, respondents expressed satisfaction with developing more walkable and accessible neighborhoods. They agreed that more walkable communities dually benefit climate mitigation and leading more healthy lifestyles.

Staff Response: There were existing goals and policies related to green stormwater infrastructure in the Public Utilities and Transportation sections of the Climate Element. The existing Land Use and Urban Design and Natural Environment sections of the Climate Element focus on planting native plants and promoting alternatives to lawn. We included an additional policy about promoting de-paving practices because of the public comments.

Respondents recognized the dual benefits that urban density provides: 1) Reducing vehicle miles traveled, and 2) reducing urban sprawl to preserve carbon sequestration of natural working lands. They recommended making the multiple benefits to climate mitigation benefits more explicit within the chapter. Moreover, some respondents requested a stronger emphasis on the interconnectedness and need for a system's approach to climate action.

Staff Repose: We have added a few overarching climate goals and descriptive narrative that will more clearly state the connections between climate mitigation, adaptation, and community sectors. The narrative also lays out the intended mitigation and resilience benefits of the policies.

Tribal Leadership and Involvement

A few respondents noted their desire for more tribal involvement and leadership in the Climate Element.

Staff Response: At the beginning of the Olympia2045 Comprehensive Plan update, the Squaxin Island Tribe identified the Climate Element as a chapter of interest. This means that they will be providing additional comments and feedback on the Element. A staff member from the Squaxin Island Tribe is a part of the Climate Policy Advisory Team developing the goals and policies for the Climate Element. We are including their recommendations in developing the Element and following their lead in the role they would like to play in future climate action with the City.

Shoreline Development and Enhancement

Respondents during the public comment noted the need for soft shoreline barriers, shoreline restoration and ecosystems, and decreased development along the shoreline.

Staff Response: Shoreline development and ecosystems are governed by the Shoreline Master Program (SMP). The policies of the SMP are found within the Natural Environment Chapter. The Shoreline Master Program dictates permitted shoreline use and development and is adopted as part of the municipal code. The Olympia Sea Level Rise Response Plan guides future adaptation efforts for the City to mitigate the risk of sea level rise to downtown Olympia and is well represented within the proposed Climate Element. These existing plans address the concerns around shoreline development presented during public comment.

Prioritizing, Monitoring, and Evaluating Climate Initiatives

Respondents mentioned the need for prioritization, focus, and urgency of climate actions. One respondent suggested we reduce the number of goals and policies to more clearly prioritize work. Other respondents noted the urgency in climate action and recommended prioritizing projects based on their greenhouse gas reduction capacity.

Staff Response: The City recognizes the urgency in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and has committed to net-zero emissions by 2040. The goals and policies provided in the Element align with high-impact strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions across sectors. In response to the prioritization process, there are many factors that are considered when investing in programs and projects. Through the City's rollout of priority-based budgeting, we will have a more transparent view of how much of our budget is put toward greenhouse gas reduction and climate resiliency. We have also included an overarching climate goal to continually monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of our programs to achieving our goals.

Implementation and Capacity

Generally, respondents expressed concern about the ability of the City to accomplish the proposed goals and policies.

Staff Response: With proper staffing and dedicated resources, the City will be able to implement the work proposed in the Element. We have included additional language about sustaining and committing resources to implementing the vision presented in the Element. The forthcoming Implementation Plan for the Climate Element will also provide more specific actions, timelines, and responsibilities for implementing Climate Element policies.

Incorporating the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan

Respondents expressed the importance of incorporating all the actions identified in the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan (TCMP) in the Climate Element. Respondents identified 15 TCMP actions that were not included in the Olympia Comprehensive Plan Climate Element.

Staff Response: In 2021, the City of Olympia accepted the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan (TCMP) as a regional framework to reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions. To assess

these emissions, the City completed a [Greenhouse Gas Inventory](#) along with a [Carbon Wedge Analysis](#) in 2023, which outlines priority strategies necessary for Olympia to achieve net-zero emissions by 2040. While nearly all of the TCMP actions have been incorporated as goals and policies in Climate Element, some items have been excluded for the following reasons:

- The action has already been operationalized by the City, and therefore is not included in the Comprehensive Plan;
- The action is too specific for the Comprehensive Plan and is being considered as an implementation action to one of the policies in the Climate Element;
- The action falls outside of the scope of the City to address and is better addressed by other entities, such as Thurston County, Intercity Transit or LOTT;
- The action does not align with priorities identified in the City's Carbon Wedge Analysis.

More details about how the 15 TCMP actions identified during the Phase 2 public comment period have been addressed in the Climate Element can be found in the Action Details for Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan section below.

Emergency Preparedness and Response

Respondents supported emergency preparedness efforts represented in the Climate Element. Some respondents recommended hosting community emergency preparedness trainings and education within neighborhoods. They suggested working closely with County partners.

Staff Response: The existing Public Safety goals and policies cross-listed in the Climate Element already address the responders' feedback. We will incorporate more specific strategies and suggestions provided into the Implementation Plan for the Climate Element.

Respondents also encouraged considering the mental health impacts of climate-exacerbated events.

Staff Response: To address this, we have added a policy that ensures emergency response and allied professionals are trained in trauma-informed care.

Wildfire Smoke and Extreme Heat Health Impacts

Respondents expressed a need for greater emphasis on wildfire smoke and extreme heat response and illness prevention.

Staff Response: The existing Public Safety goals and policies cross-listed in the Climate Element already address the responders' feedback. We will incorporate more specific strategies and suggestions provided into the Implementation Plan for the Climate Element.

Transportation

We received a few comments about improving micromobility and public transportation to achieve our targets in reducing vehicle miles traveled.

Staff Response: We have included additional language exploring options for micromobility in Olympia's transportation system. We also have goals and policies related to collaborating directly with Intercity Transit to improve ridership and awareness of the public transportation system.

Connection to Nature and Education

Respondents mentioned the need for further environmental education to foster a connection to the natural world. Comments suggested that education and outreach would lead to a more fundamental values shift in future generations.

Staff Response: The existing cross-listed Climate goals and policies from Parks, Arts & Recreation and Natural Environment chapters capture this sentiment.

Energy Sources and Distribution

One respondent suggested recognizing the potential for passive geothermal energy and networked energy distribution in Olympia.

Staff Response: We added language to this effect within the updated goals and policies.

Outside of Scope and Forwarded Comments

Several comments were outside the scope of the climate element. When appropriate, we forwarded these comments to the corresponding chapter leads. A summary of these comments is provided below.

People being priced out of neighborhoods. Anti-displacement goals and policies are addressed in the Housing chapter. The comments related to this were forwarded to the Housing chapter staff.

Housing affordability. Ensuring a stable, affordable housing base for Olympians of all income levels is the foundation of the Housing chapter. We considered all comments related to housing affordability, included additional narrative, goals and policies to the Climate Element, and forwarded them to the Housing chapter staff.

Home ownership. We forwarded comments related to supporting home ownership in Olympia to the Housing chapter staff.

Homelessness response. We forwarded comments related to social services and homelessness response to the Housing chapter and Public Safety chapter staff.

Park planning. We received comments related to funding Olympia's parks and having more sustained community engagement during in park planning and design. We forwarded these comments to the Parks, Arts, & Recreation chapter staff.

Microplastics. We received comments about removing microplastics from our natural environment. We forwarded these comments to the Natural Environment and Utilities chapter staff.

West Bay Yards Development. We received a few comments about specific waterfront development. We forwarded these comments to the current planners and permitting officials working on the specific projects. Comments related to ongoing projects are outside the scope of the Comprehensive Plan.

Environmental impact statements. Related to the West Bay Yards Development, we received comments about requiring an environmental impact statement for shoreline development. The City complies with Washington State's State Environment Policy Act (SEPA) requirements and the City's Shoreline Master Program, which governs all development along the shoreline.

Action Details for Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan

More details about how the 15 TCMP actions identified during the Phase 2 Public Comment Period have been addressed in the Climate Element can be found below.

The following action has been addressed by an existing policy in the Climate Element:

- Municipal energy efficiency. Conduct efficiency improvements to municipal water and sewage treatment systems. Prioritize components that consume the most energy and have high GHG emissions.
 - Addressed by the following policy: Reduce energy use and phase out natural gas use in existing city-owned facilities and public infrastructure. Require new city-owned and funded facilities to be built all-electric.

The following actions have already been operationalized by the City, and therefore are not included in the Comprehensive Plan:

- LED lighting. Install LED lighting in public-sector buildings and infrastructure (e.g., street lights, traffic signals).
- Teleworking/flex work. Government agencies increase opportunities for employee teleworking options and staggering work days to reduce employees driving during peak traffic times.

Some actions in the TCMP are more appropriate to address as implementation actions to goals and policies in the Climate Element and will be considered during the development of Implementation Plan for the Climate Element, including:

- Cool roofs. Create an incentive program for the installation of reflective roofs on commercial buildings to reduce building energy consumption and the urban heat island effect.
 - Addressed by the following policy: Encourage and sometimes require buildings and site designs that result in energy efficiency, passive survivability, and/or use of solar and other renewable energy. This includes street and lot orientation at the time property is subdivided or developed.

- EV education. Partner with environmental and other agencies to increase consumer awareness about EV options and incentives for use and purchase.
 - Addressed by the following policy: Seek ways to encourage people to replace gas-powered vehicles with electric vehicles.
- EV mass purchase discounts. Create a group purchase program for residents to get deep discounts on EVs, other fuel efficient and alternative fuel vehicles.
 - Addressed by the following policy: Seek ways to encourage people to replace gas-powered vehicles with electric vehicles.
- EV purchase incentives. Partner with car sale and lease dealerships to provide incentives for purchase of electric vehicles by Thurston County residents. Pilot with those neighborhoods, individuals with greatest VMT potential.
 - Addressed by the following policy: Seek ways to encourage people to replace gas-powered vehicles with electric vehicles.
- Supply chain. Provide free technical assistance to local businesses in reducing the carbon intensity of their supply chains.
 - Addressed by the following policy: Collaborate with regional economic development partners and business leaders to support a circular economy that increases demand for reused and recycled materials, reduces solid waste generation, and reduces demand for extraction of new raw materials.

Other actions in the TCMP fall outside of the scope of the City to address and are better addressed by other entities, such as Thurston County, Intercity Transit or LOTT, including:

- Increase transit. Increase local public transit routes/frequency with a focus on expanding transit service before and after traditional business hours and on weekends.
- Rider education/benefits. Maintain and expand a regional online page that lists all the mode shift education efforts and employer benefits opportunities (Thurston Here-To-There). Include a comments section for suggestions to further transit education and ridership.
- Promote transit benefits. Work with employers and transit agencies to develop ways to incentivize employee ridership (ex. rebates for employees who give up use of employer parking facilities).
- Nutrient management. Provide education and incentives (e.g., grants, loans, technical assistance) reduce nitrous oxide emissions when managing fertilizer.
- Nitrous oxide capture. Research and implement nitrous oxide mitigation strategies and strategies to avoid or reduce nitrous oxide emissions. Present findings and cost vs benefits analysis to policy makers to determine what changes should be made.

The remaining actions from the TCMP that are not included in the Climate Element have been excluded for the following reasons:

- Congestion mitigation. Develop congestion mitigation programs to increase transportation efficiency, reduce delay, and reduce emissions such as signalization coordination improvements along with application of speed harmonization techniques (ex. reevaluate speed limits, roundabouts vs signalized intersection, street connectivity). Added benefits are decrease idling time (pollution) and improve fuel efficiency (cost savings to driver).

- Goals and policies to reduce congestion in Olympia are included throughout the Transportation chapter. Actions that support a reduction in VMT and the adoption of zero-emission vehicles have been prioritized in the Climate Element.
- Vehicle efficiency outreach. Develop educational campaigns about benefits (reduced GHG emission, increase fuel efficiency, safety) of properly inflated tires, including signage at gas stations and local businesses and partnering with schools.
 - While this action may reduce GHG emissions from vehicles, actions that support a reduction in VMT and the adoption of zero-emission vehicles have been prioritized in the Climate Element.