

Olympia Planning Commission Scope of Work Recommendations for the Comprehensive Plan Update

Introduction & Purpose

The Olympia Planning Commission presents this report to the City Council in order to help guide the decisions on scoping the Comprehensive Plan Update.

The Planning Commission has participated in pre-scoping work in various ways: by attending events (e.g. Update Kickoff and Neighborhood Workshops), and also through presentations from staff and consultants involved in other aspects of the outreach effort to date (e.g. Community Conversations, and the citizen survey, Imagine Olympia Website, etc.). In conjunction with the Council Land Use Committee, we received a briefing from planning staff regarding their update scoping recommendations. Furthermore, we have received direct public comment both in writing and in person at several of our meetings. Finally, we have met, both as a subcommittee and as a full commission numerous times in order to deliberate on our scoping recommendations.

Due to the nature and volume of information involved in the process to date, this report groups our feedback into the following sections:

- Criteria for Proposed Updates
- Recommendations on Scope
- Focus Areas
- Items Needing Additional Attention/Clarification
- Improvements to Public Engagement
- Next Steps
- Conclusion

Criteria for Proposed Updates

We appreciate the criteria that staff outlined in the scoping document we were presented with. They are sound measures by which to judge what to include in the update proper.

Communicating the methodology used in determining update scope is very important both in terms of public involvement as well as complying with Growth Management Act (GMA) requirements for the City to “show its homework.” The Commission recommends utilizing the following criteria to judge what to include in the update scope:

- Items/tasks required by GMA,
- Issues identified in the Planning Commission’s goal review as being both important and unrealized or needing modification,
- Improvements to the validity of existing Plan by bringing information up-to-date,
- Changes that increase accessibility and/or effectiveness of the Plan,
- Improvements that ensure implementation of the Plan,
- Changes that incorporate, implement or further work already in process,
- Changes that respond to emerging issues in a timely manner such as climate change, and new or changing energy technology,
- Issues that we heard expressed from a wide audience through multiple input modes,
- Issues within The City’s control, resource capacity and purview, and
- Issues directly relevant to the Plan as opposed to being better addressed separately or at a later date.

Recommendations on Scope

The Commission makes the following recommendations on the scope of the update:

1. Address GMA Requirements: Perform updates to the land use, housing, transportation, and other chapters to meet 20-year population projections.

To support this growth, a long-range Capital Facilities Plan (CFP) is needed to ensure adequate public facilities and services. This could improve the structure of our six-year CFP by including full program project lists as the Planning Commission has recommended since 2007 (not just projects for the next six years).

At the regional level, discuss requirements to coordinate with neighboring jurisdictions (i.e. what compliance actually constitutes — allocating forecasts of population growth, updating interlocal agreements, coordinating efforts to address Urban Corridors Task Force findings, etc.). The Commission will attempt to meet with commissions from neighboring jurisdictions as part of this effort.

Development Regulation updates must be adopted along with or soon after a Comprehensive Plan update is completed. If a “phased approach” were used, a schedule would help ensure regulation updates are addressed in a timely fashion. Specific actions by the City Council linking the Plan and Development Regulations updates may be needed, according to Washington State Department of Commerce staff. Development regulations are the vehicles through which much of the Comprehensive Plan vision is realized (or not); therefore we recommend minimizing the lag between respective adoptions.

Meet all other GMA requirements, including review of statutory changes made since the City’s last update.

2. Update the Plan Vision section early in the next phase of the update process. Where we have fallen short of the existing vision, examine why and strategize how to avoid repeating these mistakes (see “Implementation Strategy” below).
3. Update and improve the background information in the Plan. This task would include those updates and inventories required by GMA, review of the existing data and factual statements, and improvement of presentation of information – possibly by increasing use of tables, maps, graphics, etc.
4. Address Comprehensive Plan goals needing modification. Omit or revise completed goals or goals that are not relevant to the future.
5. Revise and reevaluate the entire Comprehensive Plan Public Involvement Chapter.
6. Update the Plan by incorporating other related City planning efforts. This task would infuse the Plan with key pieces of in-progress, recently adopted or other relevant planning documents.

7. Consult with City Advisory Committees and City staff from all Departments on the Plan update.
8. Increase accessibility of the Plan by making it user-friendly. Make readability a priority; remove redundant or conflicting text. Ensure that the document is suited to the Internet. Add color graphics and photographs.
9. Implementation Strategy: Identify specific strategies to implement Comprehensive Plan goals and policies. Select targets to measure accomplishment of this effort. Periodically assess performance and address any shortcomings as needed. This Strategy would be a new document to be adopted by Council either concurrently with the updated Plan, or soon after.
10. Hold a series of meetings to provide comment on specific Focus Areas (see next section).

Focus Areas

We are not just seeking an updated Plan, but *a Plan that has wide public support and is implemented in a coordinated fashion*. The Commission therefore recommends addressing the next phase of the Plan update by holding a series of meetings to inform and gather comments on specific Focus Areas. This approach:

1. Facilitates an integrated approach to addressing City issues;
2. Lends itself to holding a series of public meetings to gather ideas that inform specific amendments to the Comprehensive Plan;
3. Fosters citizen involvement by providing an intuitive format through which the public can identify their preferences, and
4. Creates a structure for the Implementation Strategy called for by Council's Guiding Principles for the Comprehensive Plan update.

Based on the public input we present the following recommended Focus Areas and possible topics (the Commission will refine the list of topics):

Downtown (including Capitol Campus and Port of Olympia):

- Growth: Housing, Infrastructure/CFP, Employment, Open Space
- Sea Level Rise (including integration with Shoreline Master Program update)
- Zoning heights
- Integration with the State of Washington
- Incorporation of downtown strategy plans
- Non-motorized mobility
- Transit strategies
- Barriers to private investment/creating public-private partnerships
- Local business
- Public safety (real and perceived)
- Livability: Public amenities for all age groups
- Artesian well public space

Neighborhoods

- Urban Growth Areas and City Limits
- Annexations
- Density/growth/Accessory Dwelling Unit code
- Housing Conditions
- Neighborhood association formation (for areas not currently represented)
- Neighborhood planning/involvement
- Neighborhood Retail spaces/review strategy for retail centers
- Neighborhood mobility: sidewalks & pathways
- Recreation programming in neighborhoods
- Emergency preparedness

- Traffic calming
- Antiquated plats
- South Capitol Neighborhood/State of Washington
- Historic preservation
- Code Enforcement
- Public Safety

Shoreline/Waterfront/Critical Areas (Integrated with the Shoreline Master Program Update Process)

- Sea Level Rise & Development Regulations
- Habitat restoration/shoreline water quality
- Zoning for view preservation
- Zoning for setbacks
- Protecting shoreline access with development
- Recreation opportunities
- Saltwater/freshwater intrusion area
- Port of Olympia
- CLAMP
- Urban waterfront/isthmus
- Steep slopes/geologic hazards
- Aquifer recharge
- Frequently flooded areas
- Wetlands
- Riparian habitat

High Density Corridors (HDC)

- HDC strategy/definition/designation
- Mobility/Community Transit Network Strategy
- Arterial network circulation/Level of Service/concurrency
- Transit Oriented Development
- Types of transit/transit strategies to employ
- Redevelopment strategy/zoning of “allowed uses”
- Mixed Use/Compact Development (e.g. within Capital Mall, commercial nodes/districts)
- Non-motorized mobility
- Livability amenities (pocket parks, trees, etc.)
- West Olympia Access Study

Environmental Stewardship

- Climate change
- City’s carbon footprint (role/responsibility in minimizing it)
- Energy efficiency
- Green building
- Urban gardens/local food production
- Waste management: composting/recycling and options for service
- Zero Waste policy
- Construction material/appliance salvage
- Water resources: conservation, quality, availability

- Storm water management
- Sustainable Action Map (SAM)
- Open Space plan
- Dark Skies/light pollution
- Urban forestry

Items Needing Additional Attention/Clarification

Integration with Shoreline Master Program Update

The Planning Commission is concurrently updating two key long-range policy documents for the City: the Comprehensive Plan and the Shoreline Master Program (SMP). In accordance with the Growth Management Act and Shoreline Management Act, these documents must be integrated and consistent with each other in areas such as shoreline policies and development regulations. Compliance will be challenging because adoption of the SMP update will occur well in advance of adoption of the Comprehensive Plan update (tentatively the fall of 2010 and late 2011, respectively).

Additionally, it is the Commission's intent to identify and address common issue areas for both documents, but to do so in a way that neither creates conflict in compliance (by creating inconsistencies between the two documents), nor confusion for the public (by having parallel processes dealing with shoreline issues). We will work with staff under the direction of Council to help ensure a clear process that conforms to State requirements.

Clarity about Prevailing Regulations and Jurisdictions

There is widespread confusion regarding when one regulation or code supersedes another or in what instance one jurisdiction has authority over another. A memo addressing such topics would be a helpful tool in clarifying these issues for the public as well as elected and appointed individuals.

Improvements to Public Engagement

Among the Guiding Principles the City Council provided for the update process were to generate widespread public involvement, and to engage a broad cross section of the public through a wide variety of means and at a variety of levels. We offer the following suggestions to improve public participation:

- Improve clarity about the remaining process: refine the process timeline and provide detailed information about what each remaining step entails.
- Continually update and publicize www.imagineolympia.com. Utilize additional social media communication technologies and conventional media to foster public involvement in the update.

- Strategize on how to reach communities that are historically less involved with civic affairs (e.g. English-language learners, youth, seniors, lower income individuals).
- Open every event remaining in the process with an explanation of context and how the public can participate during that event.

Next Steps

The Comprehensive Plan Vision Statement describes various aspects of Olympia in the future. It sets the tone for the Plan by providing an image of the preferred characteristics of for our community. The rest of the plan language as well as the efforts to implement it should serve this Vision. It is therefore of paramount importance that the Vision Statement be updated early in the next phase of the process.

If Council approves of the proposal for Focus Meetings, the task of defining the structure and content of the meetings should also be accomplished soon. We encourage the use of a third party facilitator, such as the Dispute Resolution Center, to foster discussion and help ensure that public input leads to increased clarity about needed Comp Plan amendment proposals. The City should identify and involve logical partners in Focus Meetings (e.g. Downtown Focus Meetings should involve the Downtown Neighborhood Association, Olympia Downtown Association, Parking & Business Improvement Area, etc.).

Contextual information should be prepared for the next phase of the process that includes both what specific things the Plan update is required to address as well as background data on issues such as zoning and density, land use and transportation planning, etc. This will help public input be more informed and grounded in the reality of both GMA requirements as well as what is practical (e.g. how much land is needed to accommodate a certain population with land zoned for a given density).

The Commission will work with staff to create a detailed timeline reflecting the remaining components of the update process and the scoping decisions made by the Council.

Conclusion

Updating our Comprehensive Plan is a very challenging and important task. We must emphasize that the City has enough time to do this well, and that the process should not be rushed at the expense of quality. Extending the timeframe of the Plan update might be appropriate and a

phased approach for adopting updated Development Regulations and an Implementation Plan are strategies the Council should consider when deliberating about the update scope.

The Commission would like to thank the public for being very involved from the start of this process. We also acknowledge the challenging task staff had in assimilating public input to date and preparing scoping materials for consideration. We hope that this document is useful to both staff and Council in considering how to shape the Update process. Additionally, if done well, the process will be as valuable as the product by engaging citizens, finding common ground and allowing Olympia to move forward as a community.

“The challenge for city planners is a familiar one: how to balance ... conflicting goals of stimulating economic activity while preventing growth from ruining the cherished community atmosphere.... The challenge for [the Comprehensive Plan update] will be to foster a discussion of these conflicting impulses in a way that allows for consensus to emerge.” (Elway citizen phone survey, p.11)