



To: City of Olympia Mayor and City Council  
Cc: Olympia Planning Commission

November 20, 2024

Honorable Mayor Payne and City of Olympia Councilmembers,

As part of the Olympia 2045 update of the Comprehensive Plan, the City Council has provided the Social Justice and Equity Commission with an opportunity to weigh in on the draft chapters to offer social justice and equity-related recommendations. This letter is intended to share with you the Commission's feedback regarding the Public Safety chapter, on which the Commission received a briefing at our August 26<sup>th</sup>, 2024, meeting. The Commission discussed the following:

**1) A community risk assessment and risk reduction plan (PS1.7) should include outreach to marginalized communities.**

The Commission recommends including marginalized communities in public safety assessments and planning. It is important to keep in mind the needs of community members with disabilities and those who speak languages other than English. These communities have particular needs around communication and access, and the Commission encourages devoting attention to meeting those needs in any risk assessments or risk reduction plans.

Specific engagement should be conducted with the disability community. This should include staff meeting with disability leaders and community members with disabilities to spending time to understand their mobility and communication needs in various emergency situations. One commissioner encouraged Gemba walks (translated from the Japanese, Gemba means "actual place" and refers to the specific, observable experience of—in this case—people with disabilities) with community members with disabilities to better understand their needs in various emergency situations. These community members are often vulnerable in emergencies, and the Commission reinforces the importance of specific outreach to these and other vulnerable communities in all City emergency planning.

**2) It remains crucial that the Olympia Police Department builds relationships in the community outside of their law enforcement duties.**

The Commission recommends that the Public Safety Chapter highlight the importance of community outreach as a priority for the Police departments in order to build trust between the community and its law enforcement officers. This includes engaging with community members outside of emergencies and being present at community events.

Commissioners also asked about how the Department will close any funding gaps it might face. Staff stated that the Comprehensive Plan is not a funding document, and commissioners also understand that there is a trade-off between funds spent on law enforcement activities and outreach to the community. It is the Commission's hope

that outreach and engagement with the community remain a priority for the Olympia Police Department, as well as for the other departments working in public safety (the Olympia Fire Department and Code Enforcement).

**3) Public safety work in Olympia should remain focused on the individuals who interact with the Olympia Police Department, the Fire Department, and Code Enforcement most often.**

Particularly after learning about the City's law enforcement system throughout the Community Oversight of Law Enforcement project, there was a hope that the City would continue to work with community members who are most in contact with the City's emergency responders. Working with those community members will help to address issues with repeat offenders. Commissioners expressed hope that these people would be provided with assistance and guidance that sets them on the right path, and we encourage continued investment in City of Olympia programs (e.g., Familiar Faces and the Crisis Response Unit in the Olympia Police Department and OFD Cares in the Olympia Fire Department).

**4) Continue to do more crime analysis in order to prevent future emergencies.**

The Commission recommends a focus on crime prevention and using data to predict and prevent future crimes and emergencies. Commissioners asked Olympia Police Department staff about the goals of continued crime data analysis and staff responded that the goal is to continue to make police work more preventative rather than responsive. The Commission supports preventative crime approaches and feel that using data to predict and prevent future crimes and emergencies is an efficient and advisable approach.

With the Commission's insight into the City's public safety system gained through the Community Oversight of Law Enforcement project, commissioners appreciated an opportunity to review the draft chapter and thanks the City Council for that opportunity. It is our hope that our feedback is helpful to City staff and the City Council. We appreciate the work being done to advance public safety in the Olympia community everyday. Thank you!

Best Regards,



Mark Hodgson, Chair  
Social Justice & Equity Commission

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