



July 18, 2025

Olympia City Council
601 4th Avenue East
Olympia, WA 98507

RE: Olympia Youth Council Feedback on Housing Element – Comprehensive Plan Update

Dear Mayor, Mayor Pro Tem and Council members:

On behalf of the Olympia Youth Council, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to participate in the review and discussion of the Housing Element as part of the Olympia 2045 Comprehensive Plan update. We appreciate your commitment to engaging youth voices and incorporating our feedback into policies that shape Olympia's future.

We are grateful for the space to freely converse about priorities and concerns during our May 21, 2025, review of the Public Comment Draft and additional displacement analysis. In this letter, we would like to reflect on key areas where our feedback remains relevant and urge further action to strengthen the plan:

Lack of Tenant Protections and Voice

While GH5 gestures toward tenant stability, it falls short on committing to concrete protections. Left without any safeguards, many cost-burden Olympia renters are at risk of displacement or other shortcomings.

Policies such as **Just Cause eviction ordinances** and proper **rent stabilization** measures will harbor equal rights for both the landowner and renter. Additionally, affirming tenants' rights to fair housing through **formal tenant representation** in the housing policy process leaves no one behind. Through this, the city can proactively prevent displacement, reduce homelessness, and ensure housing stability for the most vulnerable—creating a community whose actions, not just aspirations, reflect inclusivity and equitability.

Inclusionary Zoning Must Be Backed by Equity Audits

Already expressed by the plan is support for affordable housing across Olympia (PH1.4, PH1.5), yet it avoids the necessary step of **requiring inclusionary zoning**. Without mandates tied to development, affordability goals will continue to be missed.

By conducting **equity audits of zoning patterns regularly** and **evaluating legal tools**, like inclusionary zoning requirements or affordability-linked density bonuses, will ensure that development creates housing access for all income levels. Planning for affordability must be paired with enforceable policies that create it.

Absent Public Transparency and Oversight

PH1.15 and PH7.8 both hint at data and assessment, but there is no requirement for **public accountability or independent oversight**. The community needs more than vague assurances—it needs visibility and voice.

I urge the Council to create a new Goal and Policy section focused on **public transparency and oversight**, including an independent **Housing Accountability Board** tasked with annual reporting on housing production, affordability benchmarks, tenant protection progress, and displacement trends. Without oversight, policy lacks credibility. With it, trust and effectiveness can grow.

No Public Land Strategy Limits Affordable Housing Potential

Olympia’s acknowledgment of public land as a tool (PH9.10) is appreciated, but a policy to “donate, lease, or sell” land is not a true strategy.

A **formal Public Land Disposition Strategy**—with an inventory, transparent selection criteria, and clear affordability goals—is essential to ensuring city-owned property is used to meet long-term housing needs, particularly for low-income and special-needs populations. Other cities in our region have taken this step — Olympia should lead by example.

Mobile Home Residents Deserve Equal Protections

Manufactured housing plays a vital part in providing affordable housing, yet the plan lacks the necessary language to provide equal protections.

Just as tenant protections are needed citywide, Olympia must commit to mobile home preservation, resident purchase opportunities, and anti-displacement safeguards in manufactured housing communities. These households face high risks of redevelopment and deserve the same housing security as renters in other settings.

Thank you for considering these updates as you refine the Housing Chapter. As young people living in this community, we value the city's commitment to progressive, equitable, and forward-thinking housing policies and actions. We understand that the Comprehensive Plan is not where prescriptive policies reside, but we hope that our feedback demonstrates the desire to see Olympia take decisive and immediate action on housing issues in our community.

We are proud to be part of this process and hope our continued participation can help shape and hold Olympia accountable to creating a City where all generations thrive without housing challenges.

Sincerely,

Nolan O'Connell

Nolan O'Connell (Jul 18, 2025 16:30 PDT)

Nolan O’Connell, Chair
Olympia Youth Council

cc: Jay Burney, City Manager
Casey Schaufler, Associate Planner
Christa Lenssen, Senior Program Specialist