

Land Use and Urban Design



A blending of old and new land uses.

What Olympia Values:

Olympians value neighborhoods with distinct identities; historic buildings and places; a walkable and comfortable downtown; increased urban green space; locally produced food; and public spaces for citizens-community members in neighborhoods, downtown, and along our shorelines.



Our Vision for the Future:

A walkable, accessible, vibrant city.

Read more in the Community Values and Vision chapter

Introduction

How we choose to live within, and how we alter, our landscape is critical to our quality of life, and to whether that quality of life can be sustained and improved.

The State's 1990 [Growth Management Act](#)  called for Olympia to establish land use designations and densities sufficient for at least 20 years. The [County-Wide Planning Policies](#)  adopted by Thurston County and its seven cities in 1993 describe a common goal of concentrating growth in the urban areas "in ways that ensure livability, preservation of environmental quality and open space, varied and affordable housing, high quality urban services at least cost, and orderly transition of land from

County to City.” We can choose to isolate land uses and neighborhoods, or blend them into a single vital community. We can create spaces separated by long travel distances, or provide for a variety of experiences in each part of the city. We can choose to use land efficiently for recreation, housing, and business while setting aside selected areas for open space and communing with nature, or we can create homogenous subdivisions and isolated commercial areas. We can employ architecture and landscaping reflecting Olympia’s unique and historic character, or we can build places with little regard to the local landscape and climate. These choices will determine Olympia’s form for many generations.

Our community seeks to:

- Encourage development in urban areas where public services and facilities are already present.
- Phase urban development and facility extension outward from the downtown area.
- Establish land use patterns that ensure residential densities sufficient to accommodate 20-years of population growth.
- Focus higher residential densities downtown, along urban corridors, and near neighborhood centers.
- Employ innovative development techniques that create a better community.



A new pair of townhomes reflects Olympia's historic character.

Neighborhood character is an amalgam of various elements that give a neighborhood its distinct "identity." Neighborhood characteristics are not stagnant and will change over time. Consideration of neighborhood character will vary by the unique features of a neighborhood and includes its physical attributes that contribute to its sense of place and identity. These elements may include, but are not limited to, a neighborhood's land use, urban design, visual resources, and/or historic resources. This includes design elements of buildings (mass, scale, materials, setting, and setbacks), parks and open space, provision of City utilities, street grids and connections, and street trees.

Our community considers it essential that all neighborhoods become accessible, sustainable, and culturally inclusive.

- Accessible: Includes ADA compliancy, multimodal mobility, and housing affordability.
- Sustainable: Promotes a healthy environment, a diverse and resilient local economy, and historic preservation, including, reuse, and adaptability of existing buildings.
- Culturally inclusive: Recognizes, supports and promotes diverse housing types, strong arts and historic preservation, and the various contributions of diverse Olympians, past and present.

Neighborhood character will be balanced with other plan goals and policies, such as increasing the variety of housing types and providing pedestrian oriented streets, and implemented through the City's development regulations.

Olympia's "[Urban Design Vision and Strategy](#)," appreciation of the area's history and sustainable community philosophy all provide additional direction for this chapter. In particular, the sustainability policies call for us to consider the long-range implications of our land use decisions and to provide for a pattern of development that can be sustained and enjoyed by future generations.

For example, mixed-use 'villages' and opportunities for residential development in commercial areas provide for increasing residential densities by blending land uses. By enabling less reliance on automobiles, by providing for compact development that requires less land, by efficiently providing streets, utilities, and services, and by establishing development densities and site designs that protect environmentally sensitive areas and reflect the capacity of natural systems, we can provide a quality community for coming generations.

We envision:

- Spaces that are safe and pedestrian-friendly
- Development that minimizes harm to the environment
- Densities and land use types consistent with many types of transportation
- Places for quiet residential uses, and places where economic activity is emphasized
- Walkable and accessible neighborhoods with unique centers and identities
- Development that complements the historic character of the community
- Recognition of the importance of lands near water
- A process for exploring the unique possibilities of each area with special attention given to Downtown, the Westside core area, the eleven planning 'subareas,' and other special geographic areas within the community

The focus here is on 'built' land uses such as housing and commercial structures and development patterns. Complementary parks, open spaces