



Planning Commission

Special Presentation: Visualizing Density

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Special Presentation: Visualizing Density

Issue:

This visual presentation will explore what various land use densities may look like, and how design and other factors can influence the ‘look and feel’ of our community. A panel discussion will follow, with representatives from the planning and development sectors along with citizen representatives from the Planning Commission.

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Presenter/Panel(s):

Bob Bengford, MAKERS Architecture (Presenting)
Walker John, local developer (Panelist)
Fred Evander, Planner with Thurston Regional Planning (Panelist)

Background and Analysis:

Since the 1970s, the population and economy of the Puget Sound region has been growing. According to the [Thurston County Profile](http://www.trpc.org/data/Pages/profile.aspx) <<http://www.trpc.org/data/Pages/profile.aspx>>, the county’s population more than doubled between 1980 and 2010. Forecasters expect Olympia’s population and employment will continue to increase over the next 20 years. In 2010, the estimated population of Olympia and its Urban Growth Area was 58,310 residents. Forecasters expect our population will increase to 84,400 by 2035, a rate of approximately 2% per year.

In the early 1990s, the Washington State [Growth Management Act](http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A) <<http://apps.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A>> was passed in response to rapid and sprawling growth in many parts of the state that was causing a decrease in quality of life, negative effects on the environment, and increased costs for municipal infrastructure and maintenance. Under the Act, urban areas (like Olympia) are to absorb more of the state’s population growth than rural areas, thereby preserving forests, animal habitat, farms, and other important lands. Focusing growth in urban areas also reduces traffic, pollution, and the costs of providing city services that protect the health, safety and quality of life of citizens.

Olympia’s long-range Comprehensive Plan and regulations establish various minimum and maximum densities within various zones throughout the city. As the density of development begins to increase, we

will see the addition of multi-story buildings, infill of vacant parcels and more compact development in many parts of the city. With proper planning, including public participation, this increased density can provide an advantage.

Increasing residential and job density provides an opportunity to create vibrant, commercial areas within walking distance of neighborhoods. It can lead to a higher mix of uses with more people to support desired services and amenities, and opportunities to redesign old or under-used sites. Density is one of several important factors in supporting a wider range of transportation options - such as transit, walkable neighborhoods and bicycle lanes.

This visual presentation will explore what various land use densities may look like, and how design factors such as street layout, built form, building materials, open space and landscaping, can help make higher density compatible within our existing community.

What is 'Density,' and how is it measured?

Residential Density is generally defined as the amount of residential development permitted on a given parcel of land. Although communities may measure density in various ways, in Olympia, residential density is measured by calculating the number of residential units per 'buildable acre' - with buildable acreage being the lot or parcel (less any environmentally sensitive areas) plus half of the adjacent street frontage.

Although this presentation will focus more heavily on residential, commercial density is also an important factor in creating attributes such as vibrant spaces and transportation options.

Commercial Density can be described as the total square feet of commercial floor area per 'buildable area.' For retail, the general assumption is that there is 1 job per 400 sq. ft. of floor area. Warehouse and industrial jobs average about 1/2 of this density. These numbers provide important market information for determining if there are enough customers in a given area to support a potential business.

In '*Mixed-Use*' buildings - containing both housing and commercial space - residential and commercial density are combined.

For those unable to attend:

This presentation will be aired live September 9, between 6:30-8:00 p.m., on Thurston Community Television, Channel 3. It can also be viewed live via the City of Olympia's website. Go to: <http://olympia.legistar.com/Calendar.aspx>, and select "Media" in the subject line for the Planning Commission meeting dated September 9, 2013.

After September 10, the video will be available for replay at the same place on the City's website. It will also be replayed on Thurston Community Television, Channel 3 on the following dates:

- Wednesday, September 11 at 2:00 p.m.
- Friday, September 13 at 3:30 p.m.
- Saturday, September 14 at 8:30 p.m.

This event is the first in a series of special Planning Commission briefings intended to provide background for the community about important long-range planning matters. Save the date for these future presentations:

- October 7 - Trends in Small Housing and Accessory Dwelling Units
- December 9 - Preserving and Enhancing Urban Green Space

Options:

Information only; review the staff report and attachments. Following the presentation, Commissioners will

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have an opportunity to discuss and ask questions of the presenter, panelists and staff.

Financial Impact:

N/A