



## Land Use & Environment Committee

### Comprehensive Plan Policies Regarding Scenic Views

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#### **Title**

Comprehensive Plan Policies Regarding Scenic Views

#### **Recommended Action**

##### **City Manager Recommendation:**

Recommend to City Council that the following replacement for Land Use and Urban Design policies 8.1 and 8.2 of the December 2013 Final Draft Comprehensive Plan be included in a Public Hearing Draft of the proposed Comprehensive Plan update:

*PL 8.1 Through a public process using appropriate methods, for example visual simulations, identify important landmark views and observation points and appropriate means of preserving and enhancing valued aspects of these public views.*

The Planning Commission's recommended policies 8.1 and 8.2 in the December 2013 Draft Comprehensive Plan currently read:

*PL8.1 Implement public processes, including the use of Olympia's digital simulation software, to identify important landmark views and observation points.*

*PL8.2 Use Olympia's digital simulation software to identify view planes and sightline heights between the landmark view and observation point.*

#### **Report**

##### **Issue:**

Should Olympia's revised scenic view policies specifically call for use of "Olympia's digital visual simulation software" and other specific techniques?

##### **Staff Contact:**

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##### **Presenter(s):**

Todd Stamm, Principal Planner, Community Planning and Development

##### **Background and Analysis:**

At its February 25, 2014, meeting, the City Council referred five issues in the Draft Olympia Comprehensive Plan to the Land Use and Environment Committee for a recommendation. Among these were two scenic view protection goals and policies as recommended by the Planning Commission.

### Current Comprehensive Plan

Olympia's current Comprehensive Plan includes a policy to "Protect, to the greatest extent practical, scenic views of the Capitol Dome, Budd Inlet, Mount Rainier, the Black Hills, Capitol Lake, and the Olympic Mountains from designated viewpoints and corridors." (Comprehensive Plan Land Use policy 2.2.) One result of this policy is design requirement 18.110.060(A) of the Olympia Municipal Code, which requires, "In order to protect the existing outstanding scenic views which significant numbers of the general public have from public rights-of-way, applicants for development must consider the impact their proposal will have on views of Mt. Rainier, the Olympic Mountains, Budd Inlet, the Black Hills, the Capitol Building, and Capitol Lake or its surrounding hillsides. All development must reserve a reasonable portion of such territorial and immediate views of these features for significant numbers of people from public rights-of-way, and shall provide lookouts, viewpoints, or view corridors so that visual access to existing outstanding scenic vistas is maintained."

A referenced 'scenic vista' map is used to implement this requirement. That map identifies certain views from certain street rights-of-way - but no lookouts or viewpoints - for protection. In addition, some waterward views from East and West Bay Drives are protected by height limits of the zoning code. The current Plan also provides that, "The zoning ordinance will establish height limits which protect views of the Capitol Dome." (Excerpted from Capitol Campus and Commercial - High Density land use description at page 76 of the Land Use and Urban Design Chapter.) This provision is implemented by the "State capitol height district" which limits building heights in much of downtown Olympia. (See OMC 18.10.060.)

### Draft Comprehensive Plan Update

The proposed update of the Comprehensive Plan addresses scenic views in a variety of places including Goal GL8 and its policies:

*Land Use and Urban Design Goal 8. Community views are protected, preserved, and enhanced.*

*PL8.1 Implement public processes, including the use of Olympia's digital simulation software, to identify important landmark views and observation points.*

*PL8.2 Use Olympia's digital simulation software to identify view planes and sightline heights between the landmark view and observation point.*

*PL8.3 Prevent blockage of landmark views by limiting the heights of buildings or structures on the west and east Olympia ridge lines.*

*PL8.4 Height bonuses and incentives shall not interfere with landmark views.*

*PL8.5 Set absolute maximum building heights to preserve views of landmarks from observation*

*points, such as those identified in the following matrix, as determined through public process:*

*Landmark Views (generally inclusive of the State Capitol Campus, surrounding mountain ranges, waterways, and hills):*

- *Olympia Mountains*
- *Puget Sound*
- *Mt. Rainier*
- *State Capitol Campus Promontory*
- *Olympia valley's forested hills and slopes*
- *Capitol Lake/Estuary*
- *Black Hills*

*Observation Points may be static or dynamic points-of-view from Puget Sound, State Capitol Campus, public parks, public rights-of-ways, the Olympia Waterfront Route (see 2010 Parks, Arts, and Recreation Plan), downtown Olympia, or the surrounding community):*

- *Puget Sound Marine Navigation Channel*
- *Capitol Campus Promontory*
- *Parks: West Bay Park, Priest Point Park, North Point Park, Sunrise Park, Madison Scenic Park, and Percival Landing*
- *Streets: State Avenue, 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Harrison Avenue, Deschutes Parkway, West Bay Drive, East Bay Drive, the 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue Bridge, Olympia Avenue, Boulevard Road, Pacific Avenue, Martin Avenue, Brawne Street, Foote Street, and Capital Way*
- *The waterfront walkway and bikeway referred to as the "Big W"*
- *Hands-on Children's Museum*
- *Olympia City Hall*
- *Olympia Lee Creighton Justice Center*

Proposed Land Use and Urban Design Goal 8 and its policies shift the focus of current Land Use and Urban Design policy 2.2 from views from street rights-of-way to views from public viewpoints. See the attached 'minutes summary' for examples of other Plan policies that address scenic views. The downtown skyline and view protection in general were also addressed in the attached 'white paper' presented to the Planning Commission early in the Plan update process. Section 24 of the Revised Final Environmental Impact Statement specifically addresses the potential environmental impacts of the proposed view protection amendments. However, the analysis in the Environmental Impact Statement was on the examples included in the 2012 draft, and did not examine the list above.

#### Methods for Evaluating and Protecting Views

In 2013, Mithun, Incorporated, used ESRI's CityEngine and architectural visualization software known as "Lumion" to analyze view protection scenarios in and around downtown. They also developed architectural visualizations of development alternatives for property along West Bay Drive and a CityEngine base map of downtown.

Substantial GIS and graphics expertise are required to utilize these tools and are City Staff does not

presently have this capacity. Over the past two years, Olympia's IT and CPD staff have been focused on updating the enterprise software system for the department. The conversion to the new software known as ONESolution has been a resource intensive process that has left little capacity to grow the staff's architectural visualization capacity. The completion of the ONESolution update will facilitate a more robust GIS interface and staff has been expanding its GIS capacity to take advantage of this new resource through a structured incremental training process. Architectural visualization is a rapidly evolving segment of the digital world with simpler and more user friendly tools such Sketchup that may prove to be a better fit for the City's needs. Architectural visualization will continue to be an important part of the decision making process and one that staff will continue to develop as time and resources allow.

There are numerous alternative means of conducting a public assessment or evaluation of scenic views. Some utilize computer-based visualization tools, while others do not. Each method has its advantages and disadvantages.

Although it is likely that some computer-based visualization tools would be used to conduct the 'public process' directed by proposed policy 8.1, it is staff's opinion that committing in the comprehensive plan to using one particular tool would reduce the City's flexibility to use the appropriate set of tools when conducting this process. The City Manager recommendation is proposed to provide for flexibility in choosing appropriate visual assessment tools.

**Neighborhood/Community Interests (if known):**

The Comprehensive Plan, including scenic view protection, is of great interest to the community.

**Options:**

1. Recommend that the Planning Commission's recommendation be retained in the public hearing draft Comprehensive Plan.
2. Recommend that the City Manager's recommendation be included in the public hearing draft of the Comprehensive Plan.
3. Draft a different recommendation to be included in the public hearing draft of the Comprehensive Plan.

**Financial Impact:**

NA