



## Planning Commission

### Climate Change Briefing and Discussion

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**Title**

Climate Change Briefing and Discussion

**Report**

**Issue:**

Briefing and discussion on issues related to climate change and the anticipated impacts to Olympia.

**Staff Contact:**

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**Presenter(s):**

Stacey Ray, Associate Planner

Lara Whitely Binder, Climate Outreach and Adaptation Specialist, Climate Impacts Group, University of Washington

Mike Burnham, Associate Planner, Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC)

Andy Haub, Water Resources Director, Public Works, City of Olympia

Representative, Thurston Climate Action Team (TCAT)

**Background and Analysis:**

Climate change and some of its most widely recognized impacts, such as sea level rise, warmer temperatures, and more extreme weather events, are significant issues for Olympia. Scientific study continues to confirm that our climate is warming, and that it is strongly influenced by greenhouse gas emissions generated by human activities.

The most immediate impact to Olympia from climate change is sea level rise, in particular when combined with more intense rain events. Downtown is specifically at risk, as it is only one-half to three feet above the current highest tides. If no protection measures are taken, scientific models show that the anticipated rise in sea level of more than 9 inches by 2050 will cause extensive flooding during high tides. An expected rise in sea level to between 19 and 55-inches by 2100 will cause flooding throughout most of downtown during high tides.

Climate Change and Sea Level Rise in the Draft Comprehensive Plan

Goal GN9 and policies PN9.1-9.7 in the Natural Environment Chapter of the Draft Comprehensive Plan acknowledge that our community will be impacted by climate change, and that we will take an

active role in reducing our contribution to it by tracking and reducing the greenhouse gases we produce. In particular, the City will focus on measuring and reducing the carbon footprint created by its operations and maintenance responsibilities.

Goal GU11 and policies PU11.1-11.7 in the Utilities Chapter outline how we intend to evaluate and prepare for a future with sea level rise and its anticipated impacts on the infrastructure downtown. They also address the need for community involvement and participation in this effort.

Implementing the goals and policies, or making them become reality, can be accomplished many ways by both the City and our community. The City can lead efforts to plan for how to respond and adapt climate change and sea level rise, while focus on reducing emissions produced by its operations and maintenance activities. As a community, we can promote lifestyles and choices that reduce our carbon footprint, and monitor and set targets for reducing our sources of carbon dioxide and other emissions.

### The Planning Commission's Role in Addressing Climate Change

Tonight's agenda item on climate change is an opportunity for the Planning Commission and community members to learn about the anticipated impacts a warming climate will have on our region. Attachments to the staff report provide a collection of documents and online resources for learning about the range and depth of the challenges we can anticipate facing over the next 25 to 50 years.

Secondly, Planning Commissioners will hear what other jurisdictions are doing around the region, and how local government committees and commissions can participate in efforts to address climate change. This is to assist Commissioners in discussing how they can focus their strengths as a Commission and use their role in our community to have the greatest or most meaningful impact on this critical issue.

Four representatives from government and non-profit agencies addressing climate change will participate in a roundtable discussion, providing their local and regional perspectives to assist Commissioners in discussing these issues:

- Lara Whitely Binder - Climate Outreach and Adaptation Specialist, Climate Impacts Group, University of Washington
- Mike Burnham - Associate Planner, Thurston Regional Planning Council
- Andy Haub - Water Resources Director, Public Works, City of Olympia
- A representative from the Thurston Climate Action Team (TCAT)

Lastly, Commissioners will briefly discuss and determine potential 'next steps' on this issue. Some examples may include developing a 2015 work item to explore potential updates to the City's development regulations; identifying recommended City actions for the Action Plan; or developing recommendations for a future Comprehensive Plan amendment.

If Commissioners agree to pursuing one or more ways in which to participate in addressing climate change, any potential work items requiring staff support or other City resources will need to be put forward in the Commission's proposed annual work plan. Proposed work plans are reviewed and approved by City Council in the first quarter of each year.

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

Climate change has been an area of interest for community members citywide throughout the *Imagine Olympia* Comprehensive Plan Update process.

**Options:**

Following the discussion with panelists, Commissioners may choose to identify a potential future work item related to climate change.

**Financial Impact:**

Discussion of climate change and scoping a potential future work item is budgeted for the Planning Commission's 2014 work plan; however, any future work item recommended for 2015 would require a commitment of staff support.