

# Olympia's Vision



View of the Capitol Building from Heritage Park Fountain

The City of Olympia's Comprehensive Plan describes our community's values and our vision for the future, including a set of goals and policies that aim to define how we will get there. It serves as the foundation upon which City regulations, programs and other plans are formed. As many as 20,000 additional people are expected to join our community over the next two decades. This Plan is our strategy for accommodating that growth while still creating a vibrant and sustainable city.

This Plan will guide community decisions and actions over the next 20 years. However, this is not just a plan for city government. Developed out of input from thousands of people in our community at different times over decades, it truly is the community's plan. Many of the goals and policies listed call for coordination and collaboration with citizens and other partners. As always, there will be challenges and change, but the intent is to build on the creativity and strength of our community to shape how we grow.

## How to Use this Document

This Plan is separated into nine chapters: Olympia's Vision; Public Participation and Partners; Natural Environment; Land Use and Urban Design; Transportation; Economy; Parks, Arts, Recreation and Historic Preservation; Utilities; and Services for the Public. There are many issues that overlap between these chapters. For example, policies related to trees exist in the Natural Environment chapter as well as under Land Use, Transportation, Utilities and even Economy. Likewise, policies related to walk-ability are included under both Land Use and Transportation. You may want to use the 'search' function to see all of the policies related to specific topics.

The goals in this Plan are the end states we hope to achieve as a community; some will take longer than others to realize. Policies describe how the City will act in a broad sense to achieve and balance these goals. At times, goals or policies may seem to be in conflict with each other; for example, goals toward increasing density may seem to be in conflict with goals toward protecting trees. The complex challenges and opportunities we face as a community often require us to strike a balance between different interests to provide the best outcome for the community as a whole. Thus, individual goals and policies should always be considered within the context of the entire Plan.

This Plan does not include specific actions or measurements. That is because the Comprehensive Plan is not a regulatory document; rather it is a visionary goal and policy document used to guide City budgets, master plans, development regulations and other community decisions. By law, development regulations must be coordinated and consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. However, there may be a period of time after the City Council adopts a Plan amendment or update before City staff, the public and policy makers are able to develop, review and adopt any new or revised regulations. The City will make every effort to quickly and reasonably conform development regulations to this Plan.

**CHANGE:**

Part of the City Council approved Scope of the Update is "add an action plan or implementation strategy with performance measures as an element of or supplement to the Comprehensive Plan." It has not yet been determined what this plan or strategy will be called.

A companion document to the Plan is an "action plan" or "implementation strategy" that includes specific timeframes and actions for implementing the Plan. This strategy will establish priorities, set responsibility and determine how we will measure progress toward our goals. It is also an important tool for communicating and tracking what the City and other partners are doing to help our community achieve its vision. There are many different types of actions that could be taken to implement this Plan, including updating development regulations, completing a special downtown project, determining a strategy to address sea-level rise, providing incentives that encourage walking and biking and much more. While the City will do some of these things, partnerships will help us effectively implement our vision and goals. The City looks for partners from all sectors of the community: residents, businesses, developers, the faith community, non-profits, schools, other governmental agencies and organizations. This allows the community to work together to realize our common vision.



Beautiful sunshine display at Procession of the Species.

## Our Growing Community

### CHANGE:

The population and employment forecasts below are based on data from the [2007 Thurston Regional Planning Council Buildable Lands Report](#). Forecasts based on the actual population for Olympia and its Urban Growth Area as determined by the 2010 Census will not be available until the end of 2012, at which time numbers will be updated here.


Since the 1970s, the population and economy of the Puget Sound region has been growing. According to the [Thurston County Profile](#), 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 60,700 residents. Forecasters expect our population will increase by more than 20,000 residents by 2030, or at a rate of approximately 2% per year. A majority of this increase will be due to in-migration. People are attracted to living here because we have a relatively stable economy, a beautiful environment, friendly and safe neighborhoods, good schools and lower living costs than our neighbors to the north.

These additional people will live and work within the current City limits and the unincorporated Urban Growth Area depicted on the following map:

#### Map of Olympia and its Urban Growth Boundaries



In 2012, Olympia's urban growth area was about 16,000 acres. This includes about 12,000 acres within City limits and 4,000 acres in the unincorporated area, which may eventually be annexed into the City. In cooperation with Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater, Thurston County has established and periodically reviews Urban Growth Areas. In these areas, high density, urban growth is encouraged; outside of them, rural densities and services will be maintained.

Much of the land in the City is already developed, but there is still adequate room to accommodate our expected population and employment growth. This land capacity analysis can be found in the Thurston County [Buildable Lands Report](#) .

## Olympia's Planning Legacy

Olympia has long understood the merits of planning for the future and had a Comprehensive Plan as early as 1959. In the early 1990s, the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) was passed in response to rapid and sprawling growth in many parts of the state that was causing a decrease in quality of life and negative effects on the environment. Revision of our Comprehensive Plan was a requirement for Olympia under GMA and Olympia adopted a Comprehensive Plan under the Act in 1994.

The Act requires most urban counties and cities in the state to prepare comprehensive plans to address how they will manage expected growth. It directs urban areas, like Olympia, to absorb more of the state's population growth than rural areas, thereby preserving forests, animal habitat, farmland, 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.

The Act defines [13 goals](#) , plus a [shoreline goal](#)  to guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans. These focus on "smart growth" principles that maximize use of land and existing utilities, protect historic and natural resources, and lower traffic and housing costs. Fortunately, Olympia has been taking this approach for a long time.

In many ways, our earlier plans created the community we have today. For example, during community outreach for the 1994 plan, citizens expressed a desire for Olympia to become a "City of Trees." In response, the community developed several goals and policies to guide a new Olympia Urban Forestry Program. Since then, we've planted thousands of street trees, and been consistently recognized by the National Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree City USA.





Community members planting trees at the 1000 Trees in One Day event on March 28, 2008.

## Preserving our Sense of Place

The City embraces our Comprehensive Plan as an opportunity to enhance the things Olympians care about. As we grow and face change, Olympians want to preserve the unique qualities and familiarity of our community. We draw a sense of place from the special features of our city: walk-able neighborhoods, historic buildings, views of the mountains, Capitol and Puget Sound, and our connected social fabric. These features help us identify with our community, enrich us, and make us want to invest here socially, economically and emotionally.

During development of this Plan, many people expressed a desire to maintain a “small town feel.” Olympians want to feel connected to each other and to our built and natural environment. We want to live in a friendly and safe community where we know our neighbors, shopkeepers, and run into friends along the sidewalk. We value harmony with nature, thriving small businesses, places to gather and celebrate, and an inclusive local government.

Olympians expressed that they are willing to accept growth as long as our sense of place is preserved. That means protecting the places and culture that we recognize as “Olympia,” even if those things are a little different for each of us. It also means focusing on our community values and vision as we grow.

## Olympia's Vision and Values

### CHANGE:

The 1994 Plan included a community vision statement derived from an extensive public process. In 2010, the City Council approved a scope for this Comprehensive Plan Update. This included, *Update the vision statement to reflect new concepts of sustainability, and to address climate change and other emerging issues, interests and priorities.* With direction from the Council, the Olympia Planning Commission drafted the following revised vision statement, which incorporates concepts from the existing vision with public input from the *Imagine Olympia* process. The Commission also changed the format to highlight community values.

Community members expressed their values and vision for Olympia's future throughout years of public

participation in the development and updating of Olympia's Comprehensive Plan:

Olympia Values and Vision Statements:

1. Olympians value community
  - We feel connected to each other and this place
  - We respect and support diversity of individuals and groups
  - We feel safe and secure anywhere within our community
  - Parks and public spaces offer opportunities for recreation, interaction and reflection
  - Our community encourages our physical, spiritual and mental health
  - Individuals, families, neighborhood associations and other groups are empowered to help make their communities better places to live
2. Olympians value our neighborhoods
  - Neighborhoods have distinct identities and we preserve their unique characteristics
  - Neighborhoods are easy to access
  - Citizens, developers, and the City work together to ensure when development is of a different scale, intensity or density that it is compatible with the existing neighborhood
3. Olympians value our built and natural environment
  - The design of new buildings adds to the comfort, visual interest, and function of the urban environment
  - We protect, enhance and restore our environmentally critical areas, open spaces, trees, habitats and shorelines
  - We take action as organizations and individuals to reduce our environmental impact
  - There is ample public access to our shorelines
4. Olympians value transportation options
  - Whenever possible, we walk, bike, carpool, or ride on public transit rather than driving alone
  - We integrate our transportation, land use and community design decisions
  - Our transportation systems allow us to conveniently move throughout the community
  - Walking is considered in all of our programming, planning and development decisions
5. Olympians value our local economy
  - Employers provide plentiful family wage jobs
  - As consumers, we support local businesses and strive to acquire goods and services from local sources
  - Our economy is energized by our highly educated workforce, entrepreneurial spirit and culture of innovation
  - Art projects, art events, and support for the arts are central to community life
6. Olympians value planning for our future
  - We accommodate our share of Thurston County's growth
  - New infrastructure can withstand growth and change and is cost-effective
  - Growth pays its share of the cost of providing public facilities
  - Housing for people of all income levels is available throughout the city
7. Olympians value innovation
  - We strive to become a model sustainable city
  - We anticipate and respond creatively to global and local challenges
  - New homes and other buildings are constructed and maintained to be energy efficient
  - After careful consideration of environmental, social and economic costs and benefits, we will take risks that bring us closer to meeting our vision and goals as a community
8. Olympians value our history
  - New building design complements existing buildings and reflects Olympia's architectural history
  - We preserve important historic resources such as buildings, spaces, trees and artifacts
  - Local organizations increase awareness, understanding and connection to our history

## A Few Key Challenges

Beyond laws, values and vision are other influences that will impact how we grow over the next 20 years. These influences will present both challenges and opportunities. A few key challenges that will influence

implementation of this Plan and which will require creative solutions include:

**Address Climate Change and Sea-Level Rise:** Sea-level could rise in Olympia by 50 inches over the next century due to warming of the oceans and settling land. This will put much of Olympia's downtown at risk of flooding since it lies only one, to three feet above the current highest high tides. Over the next 20 years, the City will continue to explore how to address sea-level rise impacts to protect Olympia and downtown.

**Fund a Long-term Vision:** The economy fluctuates and funding circumstances change. This affects our ability to carry-out planned actions over the years. Present resources are already stretched thin, and there is little ability to take on new programs without new revenue sources. We must identify funding strategies and develop partnerships to provide the diversity and flexibility to fund our vision.

**Meet the Needs of an Aging Population:** The portion of residents in Olympia over 65 years old is expected to climb to almost 25 percent by 2030. We need to support increasing numbers of aging residents through all our services, programs, projects and other public involvement efforts.

**Conserve and Protect Limited Natural Resources:** As we grow, Olympia will become a higher density city and our land and water supplies will need to support more people. We can take advantage of growth as a tool to reshape our community into a more sustainable form; to do so we must strike the right balance between growth and using our resources wisely.



Young Olympians working together to plant a tree.

## Sustainable Leadership and Decision-Making

A sustainable community is one that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. The Olympia community has a long-held vision of being a sustainable city. In the early 1990s, the Olympia City Council adopted this philosophy statement: *a sustainable community is one that persists over generations and is far seeing enough, flexible enough and wise enough to maintain its natural, economic, social and political support systems.* This is a guiding principle of our Comprehensive Plan, and one that requires leadership, balanced decision-making, and a



spirit of working together.

Over the years, the City has implemented a wide variety of programs that advance our community and region's sustainability by enriching us socially, environmentally and economically. These include Zero waste, community gardens, greening of the City fleet, building a City Hall that meets criteria for Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED), millions of dollars of investment in our downtown and much more.



An employee at a local grocery store throws spoiled vegetables into a compost bin.

Community members have emphasized the importance of the City organization's leadership role in helping Olympia become a model sustainable City. The City, along with the public, makes many decisions about how community resources will be used and managed and how both public and private development will occur. However, the need for leadership extends beyond the City. Individuals and other groups can provide needed leadership by modeling sustainable actions and encouraging others to do the same.

Sustainable action starts with balanced decision-making. Balanced decision-making is based on the understanding that every action we take has social, economic, and environmental consequences. For example, when we protect the quality of our air and water, we improve our health and attract long-term investment in our City. When we build a new museum, we spur economic development and improve our opportunities to learn, grow and make cultural connections. When we are active in the community, we tend to invest more in the protection and enhancement of our natural and built environment.

To make balanced decisions, the City explores options based on community goals and objectives, considers the long-term social, economic and environmental impacts of each option, and identifies the trade-offs. This can be especially challenging when goals or objectives are at odds, as they often are. For example, our goal to preserve mature trees for their social and environmental benefits may conflict with our goal to create more energy efficiency through the use of solar power. Looking ahead to plant the right tree in the right place may be one way to help us balance these goals.

The City Council and community often struggle with decisions where multiple objectives and goals are at

play. Good decisions are made possible by reasoning based on an understanding of these multiple objectives and the impacts and trade-offs inherent in choosing one option over the others. We also need to consider these impacts and how to balance them in a regional context. Community plans and programs often result from conscientious balancing among divergent interests based on the facts and context of a particular situation and on the entire set of Comprehensive Plan goals.

A commitment to making balanced decisions is one aspect of the City's leadership role. Leadership also means a willingness to break out of old paradigms and try new things. It means the City will work as part of the community to engage multiple stakeholders, measure for success and tell our story. Over the next 20 years, the City will strive to set a good example and encourage others to also make a difference through its many programs, incentives and regulations.



A family enjoys a nice day on the shores of Capitol Lake.

## Goals and Policies

### CHANGE:

GoalP1 is moved here from the Economy chapter, and updated from a concept about the City “setting a good example” to providing leadership to help Olympia become a “model sustainable city;” a concept often expressed by the public during the outreach process. PP1.1 is a new policy based on suggestions by the public and Utility Advisory Board during the update. The remaining policies are in the current plan, but have been edited, condensed and moved here to provide greater emphasis to this overarching theme of the 2012 Comp Plan.

### GO1

**Olympia is recognized as a model sustainable city through the leadership and action of the City and other partners.**

**PO1.1** Balance community goals and objectives, and consider environmental, economic and social factors when making decisions.

**PO1.2** Use energy-efficient designs and environmentally responsible materials and techniques in City facilities and construction projects.





**PO1.3** Use purchasing and service contracting to support sustainable business and manufacturing practices, including support for businesses that provide living wage jobs.

**PO1.4** Support local businesses by buying locally whenever possible.

**PO1.5** Encourage individuals and organizations to engage in sustainable practices by promoting awareness of the City's sustainable actions, and offering education, technical assistance and incentives that lead to sustainable actions and behavior change.

## For More Information



- The [Washington State Growth Management Act](#)  establishes rules to guide the development of comprehensive plans and development regulations that shape growth over a 20-year horizon
- The [Buildable Lands Report](#)  prepared for Thurston County by the staff of the Thurston Regional Planning Council helps Olympia to determine the quantity of land to provide for population and employment growth.
- The City of Olympia [Sustainability web pages](#) have information about what the City is doing to put sustainability into action.

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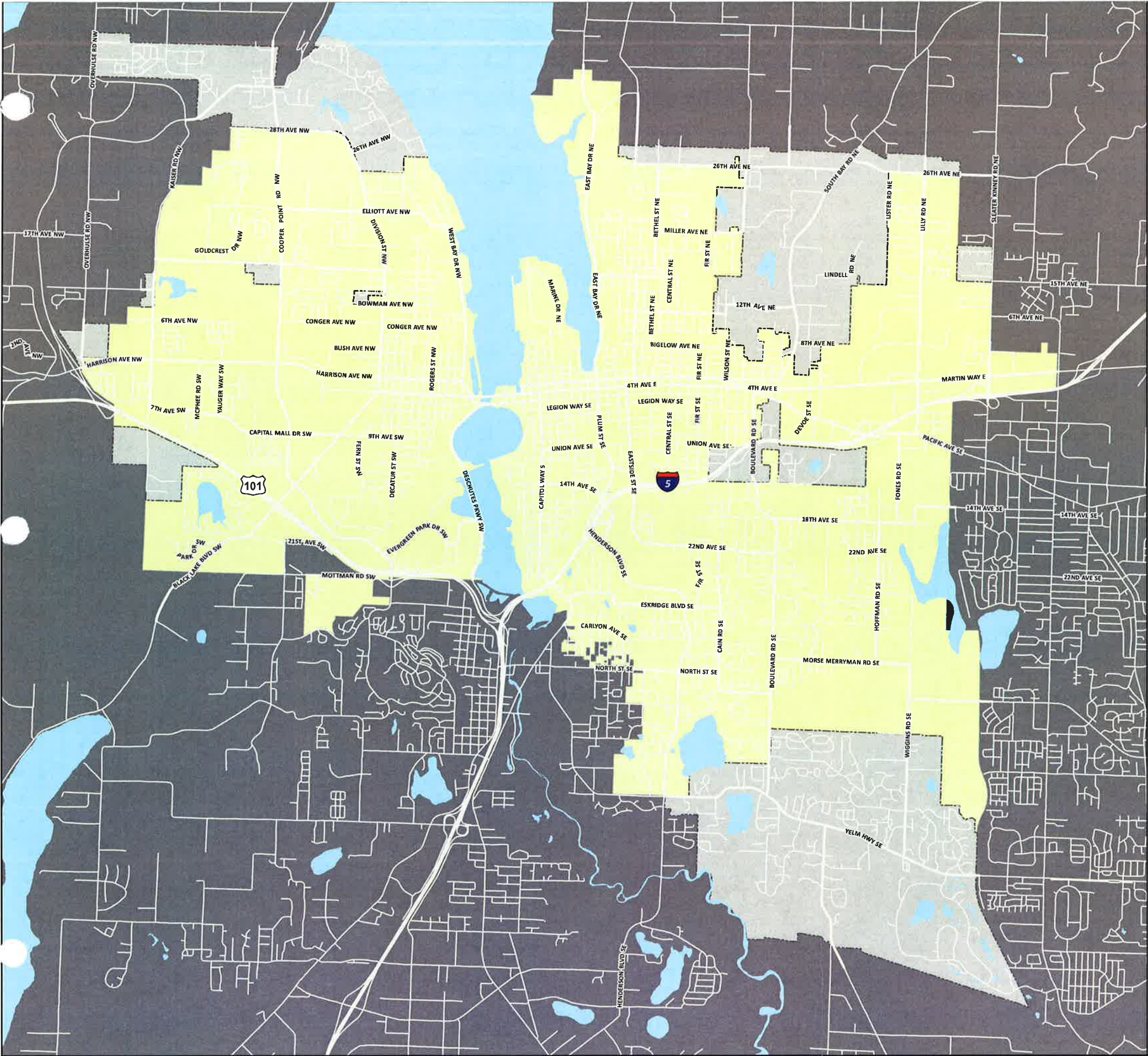


# City Limits and Urban Growth Area



Urban Growth Area

City Limits



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