

Natural Environment



Two young girls skipping on the rocks at Yauger Park

Opportunities to experience and take part in the stewardship of the natural environment abound in Olympia. Olympians plant trees, remove invasive plants, raise chickens, count salmon, recycle, drive hybrid-electric cars, and walk to their neighborhood store. Our parks and natural areas are home to rare birds, salmon, and the tallest of native evergreen trees. Connecting with the environment and protecting that opportunity for future generations is a strongly held value for Olympians. Our community recognizes our role as stewards of the land, and our need to protect water quality and clean air. We value our interactions with nature, and the benefits we gain from those experiences.

For over 20 years, Olympia has embraced its role as a leader in creating a sustainable community dedicated to the conservation, protection, and restoration of the natural environment and its valuable resources. The City will continue to be a leader in addressing emerging environmental challenges through leadership, education, and planning.

Our community recognizes that natural resources are precious and limited, and that our growing population will test those limits. There are several key challenges that will define the coming decades in terms of our ability to manage our natural environment. These include:

- A growing population will put more pressure on these resources; to remove trees, to replace natural land surfaces with roads, buildings, and parking lots, and to encroach on sensitive areas
- Climate change is likely to bring sea-level rise, unpredictable rainfall, increased stormwater runoff, changes in food supply, and increased stress on habitats and wildlife
- Opportunities to enjoy the natural world will be less common and less interactive
- The products we purchase and use may have negative environmental impacts due to artificial ingredients, toxins, or waste that is generated

All of the above challenges have the potential to impact the quality of our natural water resources; there will be increased stormwater, reduced natural land surfaces to absorb water and pollutants, increased pollutants, and possibly fewer people who have experienced natural environments and are invested in their protection and management.

Our community vision defines a path toward addressing these key challenges and integrating the environment more deeply into our collective daily life so what was once extraordinary environmentalism is a way of life for future generations.

Using Our Land Wisely

Olympia is a growing community that will continue to welcome new residents and strive to reach a careful balance between planning for growth and maintaining the natural systems and functions of the land. The

natural environment together with the human element make up an urban ecosystem, and both are vital for Olympia to remain a vibrant and healthy place to call home.



A young tree planter in Kettle Park.

Our community recognizes and accepts our role of stewards of the land on an individual, neighborhood, and regional level. The City's role is to encourage and regulate new development to minimize negative impacts on the natural environment. One way in which this is achieved through GMA is by requiring cities to plan for and accept population growth and denser development, preserving larger expanses of natural area in the rural area.

The impacts of development are also minimized through the encouragement and use of low impact development and green building methods. The techniques and materials that define low impact development and green building are constantly evolving. In general, they include using renewal or recycled materials, minimizing the impacts of the new project on the existing soil and site conditions, treating any newly generated stormwater run-off on-site, and using building materials that require less energy. In Olympia, there are a number of public and private groups that are working closely with the City to explore and try new methods; some of which are already being widely used voluntarily as they've proven to be reliable, effective, and sustainable.



Kettle Park bike rider.

The City also ensures that within the community, public land is preserved and cared for with respect for the plants, wildlife, and community members who share the space. Lastly, the City is the primary caretaker of our community's urban forest, a diverse mix of native and ornamental trees that line our streets, shade our homes, and populate our natural areas.

[View Map - Open Space and Critical Areas in Olympia](#)

Goals and Policies

GN1

Natural resources and processes are conserved and protected by Olympia's planning, regulatory, and management activities.

PN1.1 Administer development regulations which protect critical areas, drainage basins, and wellhead areas.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN1.2 Coordinate critical areas ordinances and stormwater management requirements regionally based on best available science.

PN1.3 Limit development in areas that are environmentally sensitive, such as steep slopes and wetlands; direct development and redevelopment to less sensitive areas.

CHANGE:

Original policy scope expanded beyond just water systems.

PN1.4 Conserve and restore natural systems, such as wetlands or stands of mature trees, to contribute to

solving environmental issues.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN1.5 Preserve the existing topography on a portion of new development sites; integrate the existing site contours into the project design and minimize the use of grading and other large scale land disturbance.

PN1.6 Establish regulations, and design standards that minimize the impact new development has on storm runoff, critical areas, wildlife habitat, and trees.

PN1.7 Limit the negative impacts of development on public lands and environmental resources, and require restoration when impacts are unavoidable.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN1.8 Foster partnerships among public, private, and non-profit agencies and community groups to identify and evaluate new and innovative approaches to low impact development and green building.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN1.9 Increase the use of low impact and green building development methods through a combination of education efforts, technical assistance, incentives, regulations, and grant funding opportunities.

PN1.10 Support new development projects that promote energy conservation and renewable energy sources.

PN1.11 Design, build, and retrofit public projects to incorporate sustainable design and green building methods, require minimal maintenance, and fit naturally into the surrounding environment.

CHANGE:

Additional focus on land management.

GN2

Land is preserved and sustainably managed.

CHANGE:

New emphasis on preserving land by a yet to be developed set of community environmental priorities.

PN2.1 Prioritize acquiring and preserving land by a set of priorities that considers the environmental benefits of the land, such as stormwater management, wildlife habitat, and access to recreation opportunities.

CHANGE:

Scope of original policy expanded beyond just tree canopy connections.

PN2.2 Preserve land where there are opportunities for making connections between healthy systems; for

example, land located along a stream corridor.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN2.3 Identify, remove, and prevent the use and spread of invasive plants and wildlife.

CHANGE:

New emphasis on volunteer engagement and restoration as a necessary component of land management.

PN2.4 Preserve and restore native plant communities by incorporating restoration efforts and volunteer partnerships into all land management.

CHANGE:

New emphasis on reducing long-term maintenance.

PN2.5 Design improvements to public land with existing and new vegetation that is attractive, adapted to our climate, supports a variety of wildlife, and requires minimal long-term maintenance.

CHANGE:

Preserving wildlife habitat in a series of land “islands,” as demonstrated most effective in a 1994 Olympia Wildlife Study.

PN2.6 Conserve and restore habitat for wildlife in a series of separate pieces of land, in addition to existing corridors.

PN2.7 Practice sustainable maintenance and operations that reduce the City’s environmental impact.

PN2.8 Evaluate, monitor, and measure environmental conditions, and use the findings to develop short- and long-term management strategies.

GN3

A healthy and diverse urban forest is protected, expanded through planting new trees, and valued for its contribution to the environment and community residents.

PN3.1 Manage the urban forest to professional standards, and establish program goals and practices based on the best available science.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN3.2 Measure the tree canopy and set a city-wide target for increasing it.

PN3.3 Preserve existing mature, healthy, and safe trees first to meet site design requirements on new development, redevelopment and city improvement projects.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN3.4 Evaluate the environmental benefits of the urban forest.

CHANGE:

Added emphasis on providing the space and soil conditions needed for mature trees to grow in an urban environment.

PN3.5 Provide new trees with the necessary soil, water, space, and nutrients to grow to maturity, and plant the right size tree where there are conflicts, such as overhead utility wires or sidewalks.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN3.6 Protect the natural structure and growing condition of trees to minimize necessary maintenance and preserve the long-term health and safety of the urban forest.



Cherry trees in bloom in the parking lot of the Briggs YMCA.

Shoreline Master Program

CHANGE:

The goals and policies of the Shoreline Master Program—currently undergoing a periodic update, will be located in the Environment Chapter.

The goals and policies of the Shoreline Master Program will be inserted here after Department of Ecology approval.



Priest Point Park shoreline.

Protecting Our Water Resources

Our community is fortunate to be surrounded by water and rich in the benefits of abundant water resources. We kayak the waters of Budd Inlet, hop over rain puddles on the way to school, and cross Ellis Creek on a hike through Priest Point Park. Deep underground aquifers also provide our necessary drinking water, and the many protected stream corridors and wetlands are undisturbed refuges for native wildlife.



Moxlie Creek flowing through Watershed Park.

There are nine major streams within the 24 square miles of the City of Olympia, as well as four lakes, four large wetlands, and six miles of marine shoreline. As water moves from the uplands of Olympia to one of the three nearby inlets of South Sound, it filters into the ground and through a number of separate drainage basins or watersheds.

[View Map - Olympia Drainage Basins](#)

Protecting water resources is a necessary and core value of our community. We recognize that many of our water resources are damaged and that the natural processes that would normally protect these resources, such as undeveloped land and wetlands to filter pollutants from stormwater and reduce runoff amounts need to be protected and restored. Reducing storm runoff, protecting wetlands, and restoring the natural processes of Budd Inlet will help to ensure that clean water and abundant aquatic life are available to meet the needs and enhance the quality of life for future Olympians.



A new wetland constructed in Yaeger Park.

Goals and Policies

GN4

The waters and natural processes of Budd Inlet and other marine waters are protected from degrading impacts and significantly improved through upland and shoreline preservation and restoration.

PN4.1 Plan for the health and recovery of Budd Inlet on a regional scale and in collaboration with local tribes and all potentially affected agencies and stakeholders.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN4.2 Prioritize and implement restoration efforts based on best available science to restore natural processes and improve the health and condition of Budd Inlet and its tributaries.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN4.3 Support the process for determining a balanced and sustainable approach to the management of Capitol Lake; participate when the opportunity is available as a party of significant interest in the outcome.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN4.4 Protect Olympia from the potential impacts of sea-level rise.

GN5 Ground and surface water are protected from land uses and activities that negatively affect water quality and quantity.

PN5.1 Reduce the rate of expansion of impervious surface in the community.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN5.2 Increase the use of permeable materials in construction projects and the quantity of environmentally-beneficial vegetative cover.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN5.3 Retrofit existing infrastructure for stormwater treatment in areas with little or no treatment.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN5.4 Require prevention and treatment practices for businesses and land uses with the potential to contaminate stormwater

PN5.5 Improve programs and management strategies designed to prevent and reduce contamination of street runoff and other sources of stormwater.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN5.6 Limit or prohibit uses and require restoration in Drinking Water (Wellhead) protection areas based on best available science and the level of risk to drinking water supplies.

CHANGE:

Strong emphasis on inspection and maintenance as a preventative measure.

PN5.7 Encourage more active inspection and maintenance programs for septic systems.

PN5.8 Encourage existing septic systems to connect to sewer, and limit the number of new septic systems.

GN6 Healthy aquatic habitat is protected and restored.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN6.1 Restore and manage vegetation next to streams, with emphasis on native vegetation to greatly improve or provide new fish and wildlife habitat.

PN6.2 Maintain or improve healthy stream flows that support a diverse population of aquatic life.

PN6.3 Establish and monitor water quality and aquatic habitat health indicators based on best available science

PN6.4 Use regulations and other means to achieve no overall net loss in the functions and values of remaining wetlands, while striving to increase the quantity and quality of wetlands over the long-term.

CHANGE:

Change in policy to reflect current practice and regulations.

PN6.5 Retain and restore floodways in a natural condition to the extent necessary for flood insurance.

PN6.6 Preserve and restore the aquatic habitat of Budd Inlet and other local marine waters.

PN6.7 Partner with other regional agencies and community groups on aquatic habitat restoration planning, funding, and implementation.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN6.8 Evaluate expanding low impact development approaches citywide, such as those used in the Green Cove Basin City-wide.



A healthy stream.

Clean Air and Cool Climate

Overall, Olympia has good air quality that is often better than the federal standards. We rarely experience days in which older residents and those with health issues are told to stay indoors due to polluted or smoggy air. A multitude of stars are still visible in our night sky.

However, if we do not reign in carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions or address other contributors to smog and climate change, we will jeopardize the quality of this invisible but critical resource.

As a community, we can commit to developing and adopting new and renewable solutions to heating our homes, powering our economy, lighting our streets, sidewalks, and businesses, and fueling our vehicles.



Solar panels on a commercial building in downtown Olympia.

Goals and Policies

GN7

Local air quality exceeds all state and federal standards.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN7.1 Partner with other state and local agencies to monitor, reduce or eliminate sources of air pollution that can be replaced with more efficient or clean methods and technologies.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN7.2 Partner with other state and local agencies to offset anticipated negative impacts to local air

quality through additional measures that reduce air pollution, such as commute reduction programming or tree planting.

CHANGE:

New goal.

GN8

Community sources of emissions of carbon dioxide and other climate-changing greenhouse gases are identified, monitored, and reduced.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN 8.1 Coordinate with local and state partners to identify and monitor sources of greenhouse gas emissions using best available science; identify reduction targets and actions.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN8.2 Monitor the greenhouse gas emissions from city operations, and implement new technologies and alternative energy sources to reach established reduction goals.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN8.3 Reduce the use of fossil fuels and creation of greenhouse gases through education, conservation, and development and implementation of renewable sources of energy.

PN8.4 Encourage the conservation and reuse of existing natural resources and building materials.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN8.5 Plan to adapt; mitigate, and maintain resiliency for changing environmental conditions due to climate change, such as longer periods of drought and increased flooding.

CHANGE:

New goal.

GN9

Artificial sources of nighttime light are minimized so as to protect wildlife and vegetation, and preserve views of the night sky.

CHANGE:

Expanded scope of original policy beyond just energy conservation as a cost reduction measure.

PN9.1 Design nighttime lighting that is safe and efficient by directing it only to the areas where it is needed. Allow and encourage reduction or elimination of nighttime light sources where safety is not impacted.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN9.2 Eliminate or reduce lighting in proximity to streams, lakes, wetlands, and shorelines so as not to disrupt the natural development and life processes of wildlife.



Residential light post.

Connect with the Natural World

Planting trees, observing birds in a nest, or laying on a patch of grass on a sunny afternoon are all ways in which to quiet the busyness of our lives and take time to recharge and reconnect with the natural world. Researchers are exploring the value of human connections to the natural world, and are learning that having nature in our lives isn't just a luxury, but is a necessity for a healthy, safe, and engaged community.



A little girl with a balloon explores Kettle Park.

There are immense benefits to interacting with the natural world through a variety of ways: eating healthy and safe food, biking to school and work, learning a new outdoor activity, joining a softball team, or stopping to chat with a neighbor under the shade of a street tree. These kinds of activities all make for a stronger and more connected place to live, enhance community pride and stewardship, which in turn fosters an appreciation for the natural environment. Greater appreciation can lead to a better understanding of how our activities impact the world around us, and encourage a commitment to minimizing those impacts.

Thoughtful planning, design, and leadership in how the City purchases and uses materials, regulates new development, preserves land, and develops transportation options, can provide improved access to nature and significantly reduce the use and disposal of chemicals.

Goals and Policies

CHANGE:

New goal.

GN10

Risk to human health and damage to wildlife and wildlife habitat due to harmful toxins, pollution, or other emerging threats is tracked by appropriate agencies and significantly reduced or eliminated.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN10.1 Minimize the City's purchase and use of products that contribute to toxic chemical pollution through their creation, use, or disposal.

CHANGE: New policy.

PN10.2 Identify products that should be phased out by the community, and provide education on their negative impacts and the best available alternatives.

CHANGE:

New policy.

PN10.3 Maintain City land and properties using non-chemical methods whenever possible; utilize Integrated Pest Management and other accepted natural approaches to vegetation and pest management.

GN11

All members of the community can experience the natural environment through meaningful volunteer experiences, active recreation, and interactive learning opportunities.

PN11.1 Ensure that all members of the community have nearby access to a natural space with opportunities to see, touch, and connect with the natural environment.

PN11.2 Provide opportunities for all members of the community to experience, appreciate, and participate in volunteer stewardship of the natural environment.

PN11.3 Provide environmental education programs, classes, and tours that teach outdoor recreation skills and foster an understanding and appreciation for the natural environment.

PN11.4 Provide education and support to local community groups and neighborhoods engaged in monitoring and caring for a local park or natural area.

CHANGE:


New policy.

PN11.5 Foster a sense of place and community pride through the stewardship of trees, plants, and wildlife that are unique and defining of a Puget Sound community.



A trail leads into Priest Point Park

For More Information

- [Shoreline Master Program](#)
- [Master Street Tree Plan](#)
- [Thurston Regional Trails Plan](#) 
- [Parks, Arts, and Recreation Plan](#)
- [Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report \(2005\)](#)
- [Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report \(2008\)](#)
- [1991 Climate Action Plan](#)
- [2011 City of Olympia Engineered Sea-level Rise](#)
- [2012 Community Update on Sea-level Rise](#)

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The City of Olympia is committed to the non-discriminatory treatment of all persons in employment and the delivery of services and resources.

Open Space & Critical Areas

-  Paved Trail
-  Possible Future Trail
-  Wildlife Habitat
-  Wetland Indicators
-  Steep Slopes
-  Parks
-  Dedicated Open Space
-  Olympia City Property
-  Colleges & Universities
-  Open Space Corridors*
-  100 Year Flood Plains
-  Urban Growth Area
-  City Limits

*As defined by RCW 36.70A.160



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Miles

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Drainage Basins

-  Budd Inlet
-  Capitol
-  Chambers
-  Deschutes
-  East Bay
-  Eld Inlet
-  Ellis
-  Green Cove
-  Indian
-  LOTT
-  Mission
-  Moxlie
-  Percival
-  Schneider
-  Ward Lake
-  West Bay
-  Woodard
-  Woodland
-  Urban Growth Area
-  City Limits



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