

# Public Participation and Partners



Community members talk about their priorities at an Imagine Olympia event

We all have a role in shaping Olympia's future. No one person or organization can provide all of the things our community needs. Partnerships and public participation in the planning and decision-making that shape our community are essential to accomplishing Olympia's vision. Thus, the City strives to engage and partner with all sectors of the community: residents, businesses, neighborhood organizations, developers, the faith community, non-profits, schools, other governmental agencies and organizations.

Our community is shaped by ecological, economic and social systems which we depend upon for survival. How we interact with each other and our environment impacts these systems in ways that can either erode or enhance our community's capacity to meet future needs. The Olympia community is also connected to wider international, national, and regional systems. These affect our ability to supply what we need to survive and thrive into the future. That is why planning and working together is so crucial to sustaining a healthy, vibrant city for future generations.

Federal, state and local laws and policies shape how the City, citizens, governments and other partners work together to plan and make decisions. Following are a few key examples:

- Olympia has a Council-Manager form of government. [The Constitution and laws of Washington State](#) and the [Olympia Municipal Code](#) authorize the City Council to make decisions regarding City affairs. The City Council is elected by the public; the City Manager is appointed by the Council and is responsible for administration and staff.
- The Olympia City Council annually appoints representatives from the Council to serve on [intergovernmental boards and committees](#). These entities influence how local jurisdictions will share responsibility for important public services such as law enforcement, water treatment and economic development. Many were established by inter-local agreement.
- We recognize the sovereignty of federally recognized Indian tribes and pledge to work with them in a government-to-government relationship per the general principles outlined in the [Centennial Accord between the Federally Recognized Indian Tribes in Washington State and the State of Washington](#) and [Millenium Agreement](#).
- [County-Wide Planning Policies](#) establish a framework for how the City cooperates with Thurston County and the other nearby cities and towns to ensure we have enough land to accommodate growth in a way that enhances our lives and environment.
- State and local laws establish minimum requirements for public participation; such laws include but are not limited to, parts of the [Growth Management Act](#) (GMA) and [State Environmental Policy Act](#) (SEPA), the [Open Public Meetings Act](#), [Public Records Act](#), and Olympia's Comprehensive Plan and Municipal Code.

The City recognizes public participation and partnerships as more than just obligations. Effective participation and partnerships are vital to good government and for finding creative solutions to shared challenges. Likewise, effective relationships between and among citizens, policy makers, businesses and



other organizations are essential to achieving our collective vision and goals.



A young citizen enjoys a beautiful day in Olympia.

## Public Participation is Essential

When we care deeply about an issue it is important for us to have a forum where we can express our thoughts and help influence the outcome. Active participation in civic affairs is an important part of life in Olympia and essential to our democracy. We all have a role in fostering a vibrant and diverse civic atmosphere. The City can set the stage by having open government policies and inviting all members of the public to get involved. Residents, business owners, employees and other community members can make a difference by participating.





Young people having fun at a community event.

There are several ways to participate in local government planning and decision-making in Olympia:

- Run for [City Council](#) or vote in the election
- Serve on a [citizen advisory board](#). Olympia has over a dozen volunteer citizen advisory boards that study critical issues and provide careful advice to the City Council
- Testify at a public hearing, share your opinion in a letter, or participate in a community workshop or meeting. The City keeps a [calendar](#) of such events
- [Volunteer](#) in one of many City programs aimed at helping the community help itself, such as Stream Team, the Volunteers in Police Services and Volunteers in Parks
- Get involved with [neighborhood programs](#). The City provides early notification of certain zoning and land use applications, grants and other benefits to Recognized Neighborhood Associations (RNA)
- Partner with the City to help implement the Comprehensive Plan. The City looks for partners from all sectors of the community
- Participate in Sub-Area Planning. The Land Use and Urban Design chapter identifies eleven sub-area designations within the City, including downtown. How these different areas evolve will be shaped by a collaborative planning process between the City and stakeholders

While public involvement is vital to increase our creative problem solving abilities and opportunities for growth, it creates some challenges:

- Relying on limited resources to engage an increasingly diverse public
- Balancing the desire to be responsive to citizen's concerns and inputs against the constraints of laws, available resources and the overall public good
- Helping the community understand the land use development process and how to get involved

To address these challenges, the City strives to find creative ways to engage the community, including using new technologies and methods that invite a diversity of citizens to participate. Through implementation, the City aims to inspire partnerships that will enable the community to pool its resources to bring about desired change more quickly and efficiently. The sub-area planning process also aims to engage more people in a meaningful way by increasing community members' understanding and ability to shape how their neighborhoods grow and develop.



The land development process is often where neighborhood organizations and the community become aware of and engaged in community planning. There is often frustration because influence over the decision is somewhat limited at this stage. The intent of sub-area planning is to collaborate with community members early in the planning process to increase the public's understanding and level of impact in neighborhood planning. Many communities refer to this type of planning process as "neighborhood planning." To avoid confusion with Olympia's numerous Recognized Neighborhood Associations, the City refers to the process as "sub-area planning."

Through sub-area planning, the City will work with stakeholders to identify neighborhood assets, challenges and priorities for development. There is also an education component aimed at helping community members understand the plans and regulations that guide development in each area, as well as how land use decision-making processes work in accordance with federal, state and local laws. Although this process does not guarantee a neighborhood will get everything it wants, sub-area planning can help everyone communicate and define roles and responsibilities for needed projects. Like the Comprehensive Plan it may influence the direction of City policies and decisions.



A citizen discusses neighborhood issues with City staff at a public meeting.

## Goals and Policies

### CHANGE:

The Council approved scope of the Comprehensive Plan update includes, *Revise the public involvement chapter; especially with respect to use of new technology to inform and receive input from the public.* The public involvement section has been added to and reorganized. In many cases, policies related to public participation from other chapters in the plan have been consolidated here. The purpose is to reduce redundancy and clarify policies for the whole City organization. Also, the original public involvement goal and policies have been edited for readability. Goal P1 and Policy P1.1 were added to emphasize implementation through partnerships.

GP1

**The City, individual citizens, other agencies and organizations all have a role in helping accomplish the vision and goals of**



**the Comprehensive Plan.**

**PP1.1** Engage partners in development and regular updating of an implementation strategy to fulfill Comprehensive Plan goals. This strategy will include a monitoring and reporting process.

**PP1.2** Provide education, technical assistance, volunteer opportunities and other methods to help the community work toward shared goals and feel connected.

**CHANGE:**

GP2 and policies are new statements. These are consistent with current City policy but should be stated to emphasize their importance as we move forward.

**GP2****People of all ages, backgrounds and physical abilities can access public meetings and information.**

**PP2.1** Make information and outreach materials available through a variety of means.

**PP2.2** Use and consistently evaluate new technologies to improve ways for citizens to receive information and provide input.

**PP2.3** Evaluate and pursue creative methods to inform and engage community members and under-represented groups who may not ordinarily get involved in civic affairs.

**GP3****City decision processes are transparent and enable effective participation of the public.**

**PP3.1** Provide information about the structure of local government and decision processes to organizations and the general public.

**CHANGE:**

New policy statement.

**PP3.2** Provide opportunities for citizens, Neighborhood Associations, and other interested parties to get involved early in the land use decision-making processes.

**PP3.3** Create opportunities for people to learn more about issues, share their experiences and motivations, and discuss public issues in a structured, productive way.

**PP3.4** Develop public participation plans when amending or updating the Comprehensive Plan or master plans. Develop public participation or communication plans for other major projects.

**PP3.5** Amend the Comprehensive Plan annually to incorporate the updated Capital Facilities Element and act upon other proposed changes to the Plan. Adopt these amendments only after public notice and opportunity for public comment.

**PP3.6** Encourage community participation in utility facility siting decisions. Solicit community input, including responses from affected neighborhood groups prior to City or County approval of private and public utility facilities which may significantly impact the surrounding community.



## CHANGE:

Policy added for compliance with Growth Management Act.

**PP3.7** Adopt a moratorium or interim zoning control only in cases of an emergency as defined by State statute.

## CHANGE:

GP4 and policies are new. They were developed out of public input during the Focus Meeting Series.

**GP4**

**Sub-area planning is conducted through a collaborative effort by community members and the City and is used to shape how neighborhoods grow and develop.**

**PP4.1** Work with neighborhoods to identify the priorities, assets and challenges of the designated sub-area(s), as well as provide information to increase understanding of land-use decision-making processes and the existing plans and regulations affecting sub-areas.


**PP4.2** Encourage wide participation in the development and implementation of sub-area plans.


**PP4.3** Define the role that sub-area plans play in City decision-making and resource allocation.

**PP4.4** Allow initiation of sub-area planning by either neighborhoods or the City.

**PP4.5** Encourage collaboration between neighborhoods and City representatives.


## Inter-Jurisdictional Partnerships Help Our Region Thrive

We have strong inter-jurisdictional planning partnerships that help our region thrive. The Thurston Regional Planning Council  (TRPC) plays an important role in fostering this collaboration. TRPC consists of decision makers from several jurisdictions and organizations in Thurston County who meet regularly to discuss important regional issues. They prepare a variety of plans and studies in the areas of environmental quality, land use and transportation, as well as demographic and other information that provides a framework for local decision-making. You will see the influence of their work sprinkled throughout this Plan.

Recognizing our community is impacted by forces outside our jurisdictional borders, we regularly coordinate with Thurston County and the cities and towns within. To make sure our comprehensive plans are coordinated and consistent, we have adopted County-Wide Planning Policies . These policies express shared regional goals to:

- Improve livability
- Preserve the environment
- Preserve open spaces
- Offer varied and affordable housing
- Provide high quality urban services at least cost, and
- Transition land from the county to cities (from rural to urban) in an organized way

## CHANGE:

During 2012-2013, TRPC is facilitating Sustainable Thurston  a community-wide conversation with a goal to develop a vision for a vibrant, healthy and resilient future for the



Thurston region, and identify actions and responsibilities necessary to achieve that vision. The regional vision will be used as a basis for updating County-Wide Planning Policies during 2013. The City of Olympia is participating in this effort, and tracking what would be any potential updates to this Plan as a result. Once the regional sustainability work is complete, this Plan will be updated to incorporate any new policies or strategies as well as provide information about how Thurston County jurisdictions are linked through our regional vision.

County-Wide Planning Policies guide the development of each jurisdiction's comprehensive plan, as well as water system, transportation and capital improvement plans. Clearly, Olympia's Comprehensive Plan aims to realize a regional vision and goals along with Olympia's unique vision and goals.



Kids plant a tree sapling at a local park.

In cooperation with Thurston County, Olympia, Lacey and Tumwater have established and periodically review Urban Growth Areas. In these areas, high density, urban growth is encouraged; outside of them, rural densities and services will be maintained. Olympia's Urban Growth Area contains area within the City, as well as areas in the unincorporated County that may one day be annexed into the City.

When an annexation occurs, land use authority is transferred from the County to the City. To facilitate an orderly transition the City and County work together to establish common zoning and development regulations for these areas. That way, when these areas are annexed they will fit better into the City. The City encourages annexations of areas within the growth boundary, such as County islands contained within the City and areas that have urbanized. At the same time, the City seeks to avoid annexations that create illogical, sprawling boundaries because these lead to higher costs of providing City services. The City and County periodically review the Urban Growth Boundary to clarify an accurate picture of future urban development. Areas unlikely to urbanize should be removed from the Urban Growth Area.

Because this Plan applies, in part, to unincorporated Thurston County lands it also guides Thurston County governmental actions within the Urban Growth Area for Olympia. The parts of this Plan that apply to unincorporated Thurston County lands are often referred to as the "Joint Plan" for Olympia's Urban Growth Area, since both the City and the County have adopted these portions. Thus, the parts of this Plan



that apply within unincorporated Thurston County are also part of the Thurston County Comprehensive Plan.

The City also works closely with the State of Washington, Port of Olympia, Olympia School District and other jurisdictions in our region. Policy makers and staff from these jurisdictions share information and collaborate on projects in an effort to ensure public resources are used efficiently and effectively. The policies below relate primarily to inter-jurisdictional partnerships focused on growth management. You can find policies related to other inter-jurisdictional partnerships throughout this Plan.

## Goals and Policies

CHANGE:

The original Growth Management goals and policies have been reorganized and condensed. Details that reflect what is in County-wide Planning Policies were removed from policy language. The concept of "short-term" and "long-term" urban growth areas was removed from policy language because this 'two-tiered' approach was ultimately not included in the Joint Olympia-Thurston Comprehensive Plan.

GP5

**Olympia accommodates growth in a way consistent with the regional goals expressed in County-Wide Planning Policies.**

**PP5.1** Work in cooperation with Thurston County and the cities and towns within to ensure comprehensive plans are coordinated and consistent.

**PP5.2** Work in cooperation with Thurston County, and the cities of Lacey and Tumwater to maintain, review and adjust the Urban Growth Boundary consistent with the purpose, criteria and processes outlined in County-Wide Planning Policies.

**PP5.3** In cooperation with Thurston County, prepare land use designations for areas within the Urban Growth Boundary to provide that planned land uses are compatible with adopted City policies and development standards at time of annexation.

**PP5.4** Coordinate hearings and actions between Olympia and Thurston County planning commissions when proposed amendments to Olympia's Comprehensive Plan affect the unincorporated growth area.

**PP5.5** Participate in a County-wide transfer of development rights program in which some portion of the density range within low-density residential districts is achievable through purchase of transferred development rights. The objective of such a program being to support conservation of important natural and/or cultural resources (e.g., long-term agricultural lands, historic properties, and significant wildlife habitat).

**PP5.6** Cooperate with Thurston County to periodically compare housing densities to established density targets and updated population forecasts. Adjust zoning requirements and incentives as warranted.

GP6

**Logical boundaries and reasonable service areas are created when areas within the Urban Growth Area are annexed.**

CHANGE:

PP6.1 and PP6.2 were added.

**PP6.1** All property within the Urban Growth Boundary may be annexed into the City.



**PP6.2** Evaluate the Urban Growth Bounday and remove those properties not likely to develop at urban densities in the future.

**PP6.3** Prior to annexing areas, evaluate the City's capacity to provide services efficiently and effectively.

**PP6.4** Encourage and assist property owners in existing unincorporated "islands" to annex into the City. Avoid annexations that create "islands" of unincorporated land within city limits.

**PP6.5** Evaluate all annexations on the basis of their short- and long- term community impacts and benefits and how they adhere to goals and policies in the Comprehensive Plan. If the proposed annexation includes proposed development, analyze the short- and long-term impacts on the neighborhood and city in terms of all services required, including water, sewer, roads, schools, open spaces, police and fire protection, garbage collection and other services.

**PP6.6** Confer with affected special districts and other jurisdictions prior to any annexation to assess impacts. Resolve boundary issues with affected jurisdictions before taking any final action on a formal annexation petition.

**PP6.7** Use readily-identifiable boundaries, such as lakes, rivers, streams, railroads, and highways, for annexation boundaries wherever practical.

**PP6.8** Work with the County to ensure standards for utilities, roads, and services in the urban growth areas are compatible.

**PP6.9** Provide that applicants for annexation pay their fair share for any utility and service extension and development, as well as for capital facilities needed to provide these services.




**PP6.10** Require that all fees and charges be paid or payment arrangements be made prior to annexation. Property owners within an annexing area may be required to assume a share of the city's bonded indebtedness.

**PP6.11** Discourage annexations for the sole purpose of obtaining approval of uses not allowed by County regulations unless the proposal is consistent with an adopted joint plan and with City standards and policies.

**PP6.12** Decisions to require increases in the size of proposed annexations will be made by the City Council on a case-by-case basis. The City Council may expand the proposed boundaries if the Council concludes any of the following:

- The expanded annexation would create logical boundaries and service areas; or
- Without the proposed annexation, the area to be added would not likely be annexed within the foreseeable future; or
- The area to be added would eliminate or reduce an unincorporated County island

## 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
- [County-Wide Planning Policies](#)  establish how Thurston County and the cities and towns within will work together to achieve our regional goals
- [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 parts of this Plan that apply within unincorporated Thurston County are part of the [Thurston](#)



[County Comprehensive Plan](#)

- The City of Olympia [Advisory Committees web pages](#) have information about the role and work of citizen advisory committees
- The City of Olympia [Neighborhood Programs web pages](#) have information about how to form a Recognized Neighborhood Organization and how neighborhoods can get involved and make a difference
- The City of Olympia [Intergovernmental Boards and Committees web pages](#) have information about the City's partnerships with other jurisdictions
- The [Centennial Accord between the Federally Recognized Indian Tribes in Washington State and the State of Washington](#) and [Millenium Agreement](#) outline the City's government-to-government relationship with federally recognized Indian tribes.
- [Municipal Resource Services Center](#) (MSRC) provides information about issues and laws that shape local government.

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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.