

**TUMWATER PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF HYBRID MEETING
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CONVENE: 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT: Chair Elizabeth Robbins and Commissioners Nelida Daniel, Grace Edwards, Gina Kotek, and Sandra Nelson.

Excused: Commissioners Terry Kirkpatrick and Brandon Staff.

Staff: Community Development Department Director Michael Matlock, Deputy Director Brad Medrud, and Associate Planner Dana Bowers.

CHANGES TO AGENDA: A farewell address from Director Michael Matlock was added to the agenda.

FAREWELL ADDRESS: Director Matlock acknowledged and thanked Commissioners for their work and support to the City and to the community. He extended his thanks for the opportunity to work closely with the Commission during his tenure with the City and is looking forward to his upcoming retirement.

Commissioners wished Director Matlock well during his retirement.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

**TUMWATER PLANNING
COMMISSION MINUTES
AUGUST 13, 2024:**

MOTION: **Commissioner Edwards moved, seconded by Commissioner Kotek, to approve the minutes of August 13, 2024 as presented. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.**

COMMISSIONER'S REPORTS: Chair Robbins encouraged Commissioners to sign up and participate in the upcoming July 4 Tumwater Parade.

DEPUTY DIRECTOR'S REPORT: Deputy Director Medrud reported on the status of the draft of the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). Internal review of the draft will be pursued with comments provided to the consultant for any final revisions. The revised draft will be forwarded to the Department of Fish and Wildlife Service for review. The schedule anticipates releasing the draft to the public by end of summer/early fall. Once issued for public review, staff will initiate the environmental review for both state and federal required reviews (SEPA & NEPA). Stakeholder meetings will support the environmental review process, as well as several community conversations.

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The Regional Housing Council (RHC) scheduled a half-day retreat. The RHC is responsible for affordable housing and homelessness services and funding across the region. The retreat will provide a good opportunity for members to calibrate the status of goals and discuss ways to improve working together to achieve desired outcomes.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There were no public comments.

2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PERIODIC UPDATE – CONSERVATION: Planner Bowers presented the draft Conservation Element of the Tumwater Comprehensive Plan.

The format of the element includes Part 1 covering Goals, Policies, and Actions in four chapters and Appendix A, and Part 2 covering technical information in 3 chapters and two appendices.

Chapter 1 is an introduction section identifying the legal framework and the importance of the element. Chapter 2 focuses on Growth Management Act (GMA) goals and relevant element goals supporting GMA goals. Chapter 3 includes the County-wide Planning Policies. Chapter 4 includes element goals and policies in a table format. Appendix A serves as the draft of implementation actions. Each action is tied to a policy or policies.

Part 2 of the element includes technical information. Chapter 1 is the introduction section. Chapter 2 includes information on natural resources, and Chapter 3 covers critical areas.

The Natural Resources chapter includes three classifications of urban agriculture, forest lands, and mineral resources. The City has only 7% of soils classified as prime farmland. Other lands are classified as prime farmland soils if drained and irrigated. Those two classifications comprise 70% of all City soils. However, the amount is not aligned with other water and soil conservation priorities. Draining of wet soils was not included as part of the calculation for prime farmland in the assessment because it would not be a viable, long-term resource for farming.

Because one of the GMA goals is increasing density within the City and utilizing land for housing, economic growth, commercial development and industrial uses, the amount of sprawl can be limited within the county where more agricultural resources and larger parcels are more conducive to sustainable agriculture. Current uses for agriculture in the City include urban agriculture (smaller plot sizes), farm stands, corn mazes, and animals and livestock. As agriculture uses can be limited by water resources and the amount of land available, those resources within the City are often used for other uses.

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Forest lands in the City fall under the Open Space Taxation Act for parcels classified as forest land. An incentive program offers a reduced tax rate to enroll in the program if the property owner of five acres or more preserves forest land, although harvesting is allowed. Replanting is required. The City has approximately 371 acres of land categorized as forest land to include the City's urban growth area (UGA). The largest parcel is 120 acres.

Chair Robbins asked whether the current acreage of forest land is viable for the City. Planner Bowers replied that the lands are owned by larger timber companies with multiple forested acres. It is likely the forested lands would remain intact until the market changes. Additionally, if a property owner sells forested land, the property owner must pay back seven years of taxes under the Open Space Taxation program. Additionally, the City's tree preservation code includes regulations for tree removal and retainage based on different factors. Some factors are in the Urban Forestry Management Plan in terms of the types of trees the City prioritizes, the location, and the type of tree for the right space.

Deputy Director Medrud shared that as part of the update of the tree preservation and landscaping ordinances, staff is considering a balance of tree species to avoid any great loss of trees because of particular diseases. It speaks to a need for a variety of trees species as well as native varieties when possible.

Planner Bowers added that other topics addressed in the Urban Forestry Management Plan are pruning, invasive removal, replanting, and the right tree in the right place.

The chapter on Mineral Resource lands includes an introduction, classification, identification of resources, and protection of resources. The Department of Natural Resources created maps of mineral resource locations in the county. Data is obtained from Thurston County on mineral resource areas in the City. Protection of mineral resources is a two-fold process of protecting nearby uses and the mineral resource to ensure the City has a local source. The City's only zone district allowing mining is the Heavy Industrial zone district.

The Conservation Element supports and aligns with the City's Urban Forestry Management Plan, Hazard Mitigation Plan, and the City's development codes. The City's Development Code implements the plans and the Conservation Element.

Critical areas are sensitive areas not necessarily conducive for development or are a conflict with other state or local priorities or obligations. Critical areas can include aquifer recharge areas, wetlands,

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frequently flooded areas, geological hazardous areas, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas.

Goals for wetlands include a short-term goal of no-net loss and long-term goal of enhancing and improving wetlands. Wetlands are classified as to how they function and the type of species present. Some wetlands can be improved and preserved despite a lower classification because of the presence of a rare species.

Chair Robbins emphasized the importance of connectivity or interplay between critical areas, which could be emphasized through the evaluation of the full value and function of a critical area(s).

Planner Bowers noted that buffers are one way of protecting wetlands. Considering the connectivity of critical areas is an important element as well. The City has many environmental policies pertaining to wetlands. They include the Clean Water Act, the state's Shoreline Management Act, state Hydraulic Code, state wetland rating system, and local protections that are included within the Development Code. Local protections for wetlands are included in Tumwater Municipal Code 16.28. The City's trees and vegetation code also protects wetlands.

Commissioner Daniel disconnected from the meeting.

Critical aquifer recharge areas protect drinking water. Criteria identify recharge areas that speak to the depth of groundwater, size of the aquifer, and type of soil, etc. Buffer distances of critical aquifer recharge areas are identified by years, as one drop of water can require one year of traveling to a well. Buffers areas are identified in six-month, one-year, five-year, and 10-year increments (time of travel).

Chair Robbins inquired as to whether the City is aware of the number of withdrawals of water from any of the City's aquifers. Planner Bowers advised that the City documents the number of water rights (withdrawals) within the Water System Report produced by the Water Resources and Sustainability Department.

The City's Wellhead Protection Plan supports the Conservation Element. The plan was adopted in 2016 and identifies risks to wellheads and ways to reduce and eliminate risks.

Planner Bowers reviewed the sections on Frequently Flooded Areas, Geologically Hazardous Areas, and Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas.

Planner Bowers reviewed element goals and requested feedback:

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- Goal C-1 – Recognize the significant role played by natural features and systems in determining the overall environmental quality and livability of Tumwater.

Highlights:

- *Natural systems make Tumwater livable*
- *Protect and enhance environment*
- *Use adopted plans*

Chair Robbins noted that in addition to natural systems and features being part of the living space within Tumwater, they are also a part of the City's economic system as clean air and water enable people to live and conduct business in the City.

- Goal C-2 – Promote conservation of natural resources and the protection of the environment in cooperation with residents, property owners, other jurisdictions, and others.

Highlights:

- *Support education programs*

Councilmember Nelson suggested including working with businesses as well.

- Goal C-3 – Support urban agriculture for access to local food production.

Highlights:

- *Work with partners to ensure agricultural viability*
- *Support local food production*

Chair Robbins noted that the goal could also expand beyond local food production but to wider economic interests outside the region as well.

- Goal C-5 – Support urban forestry.

Highlights:

- *Canopy retention*
- *Conversions compatible with surrounding development pattern*

Chair Robbins recommended inclusion of language that references the importance of many of the climate goals, such as carbon sequestration and other benefits of forest lands.

- Goal C-6 – Protect mineral resource lands.

Highlights:

- *Allow extraction where it will not cause degradation*
- *Protect sites from incompatible uses*
- *Restoration of extraction sites*

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- Goal C-7 – Protect and enhance water quality.

Highlights:

- *Enhance ecological functions*
- *Support restoration of stream channels and wetlands*
- *Allow public access for monitoring and education*
- *Balance habitat, water supply, recreation, and all other needs*

- Goal C-8 – Improve natural drainage systems.

Highlights:

- *Develop watershed management plans and fish conservation measures*
- *Improve drainage systems for water quality*
- *Use best management practices to control erosion through construction and redevelopment*

Chair Robbins questioned whether improving drainage systems for water quality include measures such as improving fish passage. Planner Bowers advised that fish passage is emphasized as part of habitat conservation under the section on Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation.

Deputy Director Medrud added that a major change in the goal for conservation was to include ‘enhance’ in addition to protection. It speaks to what is required to enhance or improve water quality that could include improving naturalized systems.

- Goal C-9 – Improve air quality.

Highlights:

- *Support and entrust state programs*
- *Require appropriate vegetation retention*
- *Reduce vehicle miles traveled*

- Goal C-10 – Protect and enhance rivers, streams, and lakes.

Highlights:

- *Protect, enhance and restore water channels*
- *Require mitigation for alterations*

- Goal C-11 – Protect and enhance wetlands.

Highlights:

- *Protect wetlands where possible*
- *Use buffers to preserve functions*
- *Allow reasonable use*
- *Maintain stormwater treatment facilities and flow control*

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Commissioner Nelson asked about the reason for the number of new policies included in the Conservation Element. Planner Bowers explained that many of the new policies were prompted from new state laws and mandates on health and enhancements.

Deputy Director Medrud added that the Climate Element also plays a large role in the number of new policies because the Conservation Element supports many of the policies and goals within the Climate Element.

Commissioner Nelson questioned the number of goals required under the GMA and goals pertinent to the City and its residents. Deputy Director Medrud explained that the structure of the element follows the state-required format, such as natural resource lands, critical areas, Goals and policies important to the City include urban agriculture and other areas of greater interest to the City, such as forested lands or trees.

Commissioner Nelson commented that the distinction is important as all residents are part of the City and the goals and policies that make the City unique are important but are often lost in a comprehensive document required by the state.

Deputy Director Medrud responded that the City is required to develop plans and documents each year. However, the intent is focusing and pursuing implementation actions contained in the appendices to assist the Council in strategically planning and developing the City's annual work programs that support goals and initiatives important to the City.

Discussion ensued on ways to emphasize the City's goals and achievements within the Comprehensive Plan elements in addition to meeting the requirements of the state.

- Goal C-12 – Protect groundwater.

Highlights:

- *Protect aquifers, recharge areas, and wellheads*
- *Protect waterways*

- Goal C-13 – Protect geologically hazardous areas.

Highlights:

- *Regulate development intensity, site coverage, and vegetation*
- *Minimize soil disturbance*
- *Require erosion control throughout construction*

- Goal C-14 – Preserve floodplains and floodways

Highlights:

- *Minimize changes that impact flow*
- *Require mitigation for engineered flood control measures*

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- *Emphasize non-structure flood control*
 - *Allow low-impact development only*
- Goal C-15 – Protect and enhance wildlife habitat.

Highlights:

- *Minimize fragmentation*
- *Protect habitat for listed species*
- *Encourage vegetated buffer areas*
- *Control invasive species*

Planner Bowers reviewed next steps. The next review by the Council is a meeting with the General Government Committee on June 7, 2025 followed by a release of the draft plan for public review. Some chapters will be subject to different audiences. The timeline includes adoption of the Comprehensive Plan in fall 2025. She encouraged Commissioners to send questions and comments to the periodic update email at compplan@ci.tumwater.wa.us.

**2025 COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN PERIODIC
UPDATE – HOUSING:**

Deputy Director Medrud asked for feedback on the draft Housing Element surrounding any initial concerns or questions.

Chair Robbins said the draft represents much work and is on the right track; however, one area of importance is the percentage of people that are affected by the Housing Element.

Deputy Director Medrud explained that the focus and the expectation of the plan speaks to more than half of the City's population with an income of less than 80% of the annual median income for the county. The plan speaks to ways to best provide for that population.

Commissioner Nelson noted that plan also emphasizes the preservation of existing housing, which was surprising as it is likely not possible for the City to have the ability to preserve housing.

Deputy Director Medrud cited the state requirements for the plan to reduce displacement to the extent possible. Preserving housing is an element of that goal as existing housing is often more affordable. The City is also required to ensure the availability of housing for specific income groups and expansion of overall housing in the community.

Chair Robbins commented that including goals to ensure housing is provided is largely dependent upon market forces and any incentives the City may offer. However, if housing is lacking in the City, people will move to other places or become homeless. If the City desires a different outcome, it is important to address ways the City can address the issues to avoid that scenario.

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Deputy Director Medrud pointed out that the Housing Element is comprehensive, and it is difficult to portray the issues within the technical information. The technical conclusions, however, do speak to the inability of the City to control the situation because the private market builds the majority of housing. The City's ability to support that achievement is important. However, the City does not have resources to build housing without the support of state and federal funding. The goals and policies speak to the need to build the relationships with private and public builders, assist them in their respective needs, as well as pursuing a regional focus for different sources of funding. The element not only identifies the need for housing, but also wraparound services required to ensure people remain housed by obtaining the skills to avoid becoming homeless.

Deputy Director Medrud shared information on the City's contributions to increase housing and reduce homelessness through its participation in the federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program. The City participates with Thurston County and receives funding once every three years to contribute to housing projects. The City has explored an option to pursue participation in the CDBG program independently by receiving a reduced amount annually rather than a larger lump sum once every three years. The amount the City would receive annually is based on population and the availability of federal funds. The City also contributes Home funding to the RHC to fund local projects at approximately \$100,000 annually. He agreed the element should emphasize that housing is a larger issue than cannot be solved independently by the City.

Discussion ensued on the importance of home ownership in terms of promoting generational wealth. Chair Robbins recommended exploring other similar-sized jurisdictions with similar resources for future discussions on creating a guaranteed income program. She suggested the option should be part of the discussion surrounding the issue of affordability issues experienced by many in the City.

Commissioners commented on the many different complicating factors and difficulty of housing issues and the limited City's capability and its role.

Based on scheduling issues, the Commission agreed to continue discussion on the Housing Element during the June 10, 2025 meeting.

NEXT MEETING DATE: The next meeting is scheduled on June 10, 2025.

ADJOURNMENT: With there being no further business, Chair Robbins adjourned the meeting at 8:40 p.m.

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