

# MEMORANDUM

Date: May 27, 2025

To: Planning Commission

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## 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update – Conservation Element

On a ten-year cycle, Tumwater is required to conduct a Growth Management Act periodic update of its Comprehensive Plan and related development regulations. For the current cycle, Tumwater is required to complete work on the periodic update by December 31, 2025.

The updated Comprehensive Plan will address diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the Plan and incorporate many of the State required changes addressing housing, climate change, and other topics.

The intent of the Planning Commission meeting on Tuesday, May 27, 2025, is to discuss the complete draft Conservation Element. The Element consist of two parts.

- **Part 1** contains the Conservation Element’s goals, policies, and draft implementation actions. The Planning Commission will be asked to consider whether the proposed goals, policies, and draft implementation actions are appropriate and whether the information in the Element is presented effectively.
- **Part 2** contains the Conservation Element’s technical information used to update the Element. The Planning Commission will be asked to consider whether the information in the Element is presented in an understandable format.

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## **1 – Growth Management Act – Conservation Goals**

The state Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A Revised Code of Washington (RCW)) requires that Tumwater demonstrate that each Element in its Comprehensive Plan meets the relevant fifteen planning goals contained within the Act. The fifteen goals guide the development and adoption of the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations.

The following is a summary of how the updated Conservation Element meets the two goals related to natural resource industries and environment.

8. ***Natural resource industries.*** *Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forestlands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.*

The Conservation Element has specific guidelines and policies that ensure the viability of natural resource industries and activities. Additionally, the Conservation Element ensures the viability of natural resource industries in Tumwater through the identification of such lands in the Conservation Element text and maps.

While Tumwater has limited natural resource lands as defined by the Growth Management Act, it does have limited lands that are used for mineral resources, forestry, and urban agriculture that will change uses as Tumwater develops as required by state law into an urban area. While it does not meet the state definitions of agricultural resource lands, Tumwater supports urban agriculture with the Conservation Element's goals and policies.

10. ***Environment.*** *Protect and enhance the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.*

The Conservation Element contains specific policies relating to air and water quality, water availability, and protection and preservation of critical areas and addresses how to enhance the environment. If conflict occurs in the implementation of urban growth policy and development regulations, protecting critical areas will be the priority.

## **2 – Conservation Element**

### **A – Background**

As required by the Growth Management Act, the Conservation Element addresses both natural resource lands and critical areas in Tumwater. Natural resources lands, such as agricultural, forestry and mineral resource lands, are typically designated outside of cities and urban growth areas as those types of uses are intended for rural areas under the Growth Management Act.

Critical areas include environmentally sensitive spaces such as wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, frequently flooded areas, geologically hazardous areas, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas.

Areas that are within Tumwater's urban growth area are addressed through the Tumwater and Thurston County Joint Plan in accordance with adopted County-Wide Planning Policies.

The Conservation Element is separated into two parts which are described below.

**Part 1** contains the Element's draft goals, policies, and draft implementation actions that will guide the implementation of the Element over the next 20 years. The goals, policies, and actions of the 2016 Conservation Element are found in Appendix B of this staff report.

**Part 2** contains an inventory of the natural resource lands and critical areas in Tumwater. Natural resource lands are identified based on state designation listed by the county assessor. Critical areas are identified based criteria provided at the state and federal levels. For example floodways are determined by FEMA and Washington State Department of Ecology provides guidance for wetland identification.

The Conservation Element's maps in Attachment F show where resource lands are designated and the general extent of critical areas in Tumwater. The actual boundaries of critical areas are determined on a project level as directed by the regulations in TMC Title 16 *Environment*.

## B – Link to Current Conservation Element

<https://www.ci.tumwater.wa.us/departments/community-development-department/tumwater-comprehensive-plan>

## 3 – Structure of the Part 1 of the Element

Part 1 – Goals, Policies, and Implementation Actions of the Element is structured similarly to the Part 1 of the Housing and Land Use Elements. The intent of separating the goals, policies, and draft implementation actions from the technical information for each Element is to make it easier for policymakers and the community to use the document.

### Chapter 1 Introduction

Chapter 1 provides a short background to the purpose of the Conservation Element and an explanation of how to read the Element.

### Chapter 2 Growth Management Act – Element Goals

Chapter 2 discusses the Element's connection to the conservation goals of the state Growth Management Act.

### Chapter 3 County-Wide Planning Policies

Chapter 3 discusses the Element's connection to the Thurston County-Wide Planning Policies.

## **Chapter 4 Element Goals and Policies**

Chapter 4 presents the Conservation Element's goals and policies in detail with an explanation the importance of each goal, what Tumwater department is responsible for implementation, and timeline for those actions. Comments are provided that discuss the source of each of the goals and policies.

The Conservation Element's goals and policies are the policy basis for the draft implementation actions in the Element and those future actions that will be developed over the next 20 years which will be the foundation for Tumwater's annual work programs to address natural resource lands and critical areas.

## **Appendix A Draft Implementation Actions**

Appendix A contains the draft implementation actions, which are intended to be a source of annual work program items that serve to implement the goals and policies of the Element.

The annual work programs will further refine the draft implementation actions prior to their being put into practice. It is expected that draft implementation actions will be further amended, added, or subtracted as needed over the course of the 20 year Comprehensive Plan as new opportunities arise to meet the intent of the Element's goals and policies.

## **4 – Structure of the Part 2 of the Element**

Part 2 – Technical Information of the Conservation Element consists of the following chapters.

### **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

Discusses the State requirements for the Element, how to read the Element, best available science, and how shoreline of the state are addressed in the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Chapter 2 – Natural Resources**

Provides a summary of urban agriculture, forestry and mineral resource lands and uses in Tumwater.

### **Chapter 3 – Critical Areas**

Provides an overview of all the Tumwater managed critical areas including wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, frequently flooded areas, geologically hazardous areas, and fish and wildlife habitat areas.

## **Appendix A – Foundational Documents**

Provides a list of the documents used to create the Conservation Element's Technical Summary.

## **Appendix B – Open Space Taxation Act Summary**

Provides basic information about the State criteria, benefits, and penalties associated with forest and agriculture designation.

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## Appendix C – Tumwater Soils Report

Provides a map, list, and detailed description of all of the soils within Tumwater.

## 5 – Goals, Policies, and Draft Implementation Actions Review

### A – Introduction

Goals and policies describe how Tumwater proposes to address identified needs. Goals are statements of desired outcomes or intended achievements. Policies are specific statements that guide actions and provide a framework for future decision-making. Actions are specific implementations of goals and policies.

Example from the draft Conservation Element:

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

**Policy**

C-1.2 Use adopted plans to inform critical area policies, regulations, and implementation actions.

**Draft Implementation Action**

C-1.2.1 Implement the actions identified in the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan.


How key terms are used in goals, policies, and actions:

- “Shall” means implementation of the policy is mandatory and imparts a higher degree of substantive direction than “should.”
- “Should” means implementation of the policy is expected but its completion is not mandatory.
- “May” means the actions described in the policy are either advisable or are allowed.
- “Ensure” means actions described in the policy are guaranteed.
- “Must” means implementation of the policy is an obligation.
- “Require” means implementation of the policy is compulsory.
- “Support” means to advocate for implementation of the policy.
- “Promote” means to help bring about implementation of the policy.
- “Encourage” means to foster or help implementation of the policy.
- “Consider” means to take into account.
- “Coordinate” means to bring into a common action, movement, or condition.
- “Implement” means to carry out or accomplish.

- “Integrate” means to form, coordinate, or blend into a functioning or unified whole.
- “Make” means to enact or establish.
- “Engage” means to do or take part in something.

## B – Policy Strength Continuum

When developing goals and policies, it is important to understand the policy strength continuum. The Puget Sound Regional Council developed the following example.

Passive	Policy Strength	Active 
<b>Statements of Inclination</b>  Conveys intent, but establishes no target or definition of success	<b>Statements of Principle</b>  Describes clear targets or conditions of success	<b>Statements of Impact</b>  Go further, describing specific situations where protecting critical areas is a priority
<b>Example</b>  Tumwater shall encourage the creation of a new City Center.	<b>Example</b>  Tumwater shall endeavor to designate 100-acres for a new City Center.	<b>Example</b>  Work with the development community and local agencies to create a new City Center based on framework established by Tumwater Center Plan.

For an example of how policies can be written to be more active and how implementation strategies can be established for policies, include identifying who will be responsible for implementing the policy and the timeframes to do so.

## **Appendix A – Guidance**

The State Department of Commerce has provided guidance specific to the periodic update on their Periodic Update webpage.

<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/periodic-update/>

[www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/growth-management-topics](https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/growth-management-topics)

In addition, the Puget Sound Regional Council is conducting a series of workshops on a variety of topics related to the periodic update.

[www.psrc.org/our-work/passport-2044-comprehensive-plan-workshop-series](https://www.psrc.org/our-work/passport-2044-comprehensive-plan-workshop-series)

The Municipal Research Services Center has a Comprehensive Planning webpage.

<https://mrsc.org/getdoc/d7964de5-4821-4c4d-8284-488ec30f8605/Comprehensive-Planning.aspx>

## **Appendix B – Current Conservation Element Goals, Policies, and Actions**

### **4.1 Conservation Goals, Policies, and Actions**

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

<b><u>Policy</u></b>	<b><u>Action</u></b>
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|-------|--|
| C-1.1 | Protect the ecological integrity of the natural environment while allowing for compatible growth and development   |
| C-1.2 | Promote conservation of natural resources and the environment in cooperation with residents, business owners, schools, affected jurisdictions, and tribes.   |
| C-1.3 | Encourage and support active measures to protect and enhance Tumwater's natural environment.   |
| C-1.4 | Implement the mitigation goals, objectives, and initiatives contained in the most recent version of the adopted Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan for Thurston County.   |
| C-1.5 | Maximize retention of a healthy tree cover and native vegetation and encourage restoration, replacement, and enhancement of unhealthy trees and disturbed vegetation.  |
| C-1.6 | Reduce communitywide greenhouse gas emissions 45 percent below 2015 levels by 2030 and 85 percent below 2015 levels by 2050 to ensure that local communities do their part to keep the global average temperature from rising more than 2°C. |
| C-1.7 | Implement the strategies contained in the most recent version of the accepted Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan   |

**Goal C-2 Designate and protect critical areas including wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, frequently flooded areas, geologically hazardous areas, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas in accordance with the Growth Management Act to protect the functions and values of these areas as well as to protect against threats to health, safety, and property.**

<b><u>Policy</u></b>	<b><u>Action</u></b>
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|-------|--|
| C.2.1 | Include best available science in developing policies and development regulations to protect the functions and values of critical areas and consider conservation or protection measures necessary to preserve or enhance anadromous fisheries, consistent with the Growth Management Act. |
| C.2.2 | Use incentive programs, acquisition, appropriate regulations, and other techniques to preserve critical areas as permanent open space where  |



development may pose hazards to health, property, or important ecological functions.

- C.2.3 Require that prior to any development, critical areas are identified and protected.
- C.2.4 Ensure the effectiveness of critical area mitigation by requiring adequate critical area studies and mitigation plans, the application of mitigation sequencing, financial assurances from developers to ensure mitigation success, and by improving City oversight of maintenance and monitoring of mitigation sites.
- C.2.5 Require and enforce mitigation to ensure no net loss of critical area functions.
- C.2.6 Support restoration of river and stream channels and associated wetland and riparian areas to enhance water quality, improve fish and wildlife habitat, and mitigate flooding and erosion.
- C.2.7 Allow public access to wetlands, streams, and lakes for scientific, educational, and recreational use, provided the public access is carefully sited, sensitive habitats and species are protected, and hydrologic continuity is maintained.
- C.2.8 Protect wetlands not as isolated units, but as ecosystems, and essential elements of watersheds.
- C.2.9 Protect the quality and quantity of groundwater used for public water supplies.
- C.2.10 Prevent land alterations that would increase potential flooding and minimize the alteration of natural surface water features that retain or carry floodwaters, such as wetlands, floodplains, rivers, streams, and lakes.
- C.2.11 Require mitigation for adverse environmental impacts from engineered flood control measures.
- C.2.12 Work cooperatively to meet regulatory standards for floodplain development as these standards are updated for consistency with relevant federal requirements including those related to the Endangered Species Act.
- C.2.13 Regulate development intensity, site coverage, and vegetation removal in geologically hazardous areas in order to minimize drainage problems, soil erosion, siltation, and landslides.
- C.2.14 Minimize soil disturbance and maximize retention and replacement of native vegetative cover for any land uses permitted in erosion and landslide hazard areas.
- C.2.15 Encourage special building design and construction measures in areas with severe seismic hazards to minimize the risk of structural damage, fire, and injury to occupants during a seismic event and to prevent post-seismic collapse.
- C.2.16 Protect and preserve habitats for species, which have been identified as endangered, threatened, or sensitive by the state or federal government, giving special consideration: to conservation or protection measures necessary to preserve or enhance anadromous fisheries.
- C.2.17 Maintain habitats that support the greatest diversity of fish and wildlife through

conservation and enhancement of critical areas.

C.2.18 Implement salmon habitat protection and restoration priorities in approved Water Resource Inventory Area 13 and 23 plans.

C.2.19 Coordinate with adjacent jurisdictions and tribes to identify, protect, and develop enhancement plans and actions for habitat networks and wetlands that cross-jurisdictional lines.

C.2.20 Promote the enhancement or restoration of streams, rivers, lakes, and wetlands as adjacent development activities occur.

C.2.21 Protect wildlife corridors to minimize habitat fragmentation, especially along existing linkages and in patches of native habitat by enhancing vegetation composition and structure, and incorporating indigenous plant species compatible with the site.

**Goal C-3 In accordance with the Growth Management Act, designate and protect natural resource lands including agricultural, forest, and mineral lands that have long-term significance to conserve and protect these areas.**

<b><u>Policy</u></b>	<b><u>Action</u></b>
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C-3.1	Recognize the importance of farmland conservation and local food production in maintaining the quality of life and long-term sustainability of Tumwater.
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C-3.2	Zone designated agricultural lands at very low densities to ensure the conservation of the resource for continued agricultural use.
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C-3.3	Limit non-agricultural development within designated agricultural areas to non-prime farmland soils where possible.
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C-3.4	Work with community groups to support the continued viability of agriculture and encourage community support for it.
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*C-3.4.1 Support the efforts of the Thurston Food System Council to develop a vibrant food system through access to healthy, local, affordable, culturally appropriate, sustainably produced food to assist the community in having reliable access to sufficient quantity of affordable nutritious food.*

C-3.5	Ensure that harvesting for conversion to other uses occurs in a manner compatible with land uses of the surrounding area and maintenance of water quality and environmentally critical areas.
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C-3.6	Allow mineral extraction industries to locate where prime natural resource deposits exist.
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C-3.7	Conserve designated mineral resource lands of long-term commercial significance for mineral extraction, and the use of adjacent lands should not interfere with the continued use of the designated mining sites that are being operated in accordance with applicable best management practices and other laws and regulations.
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- C-3.8      Restore mineral extraction sites as the site is being mined. The site should be restored for appropriate future use and it should blend with the adjacent landscape and contours.