

**TUMWATER PLANNING COMMISSION
MINUTES OF HYBRID MEETING
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CONVENE: 7:01 p.m.

PRESENT: Chair Elizabeth Robbins and Commissioners Grace Edwards, Gina Kotek, Terry Kirkpatrick, Sandra Nelson, and Brandon Staff.

Excused: Commissioner Nelida Daniels.

Staff: Housing and Land Use Planner Erika Smith-Erickson and Associate Planner Dana Bowers.

CHANGES TO AGENDA: The Director's Report was changed to a Staff Report. Approval of minutes was removed from the agenda.

COMMISSIONER'S REPORTS: There were no reports or updates.

STAFF REPORT: Planner Bowers reported on the status of filling the Economic Development Coordinator position. Interviews are scheduled in early July. Interviews are also scheduled for the Deputy Director position within the Community Development Department in late July.

The Commission's August 12, 2025 meeting has been cancelled.

The July 22, 2025 meeting tentatively includes a briefing and discussion on the Land Use Element and the Housing Element.

Planner Bowers referred to a letter copied to the Commission from the Olympia Master Builders. The comments pertained to a prior draft of the Housing Element. Representatives are reviewing the current draft of the Housing Element and plan to submit recommendations for any changes. However, the organization believes its letter warrants discussion by the Commission.

Staff has communicated with Tom Schrader, who is preparing a proposal for a client to submit a proposed amendment. However, amendments were closed until the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan because of changes in the plan that might impact the proposed amendment. Tom Schrader is a local developer.

PUBLIC COMMENT: There were no public comments.

2025 COMPREHENSIVE PLAN PERIODIC UPDATE – LAND USE ELEMENT: Planner Bowers described the importance of the Land Use Element as it oversees all land use activities, especially conservation of lands. Additionally, transportation and housing are connected to the Land Use Element as all elements within the Comprehensive

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Plan are intertwined. Development is dependent upon environmental constraints, such as steep slopes, wetlands, or buffers, etc. Environmental constraints are supported by zoning through the development code. Current land use is another important consideration, as development of a heavy industrial use should not be placed adjacent to residential or public institution zones. The goal is to enable development with a right balance of uses. Market factors are a major component of what guides or leads new development. The City is not allowed to over regulate or over zone to limit economic capacity or create a ‘taking’. It is important City regulations acknowledge that land is economically viable for some type of use.

Chair Robbins asked whether the City considers the amount of tax revenue the City would receive based on the zoning. Planner Bowers advised that the City does not consider that specifically, but does envision a certain amount of economic development to support the community as well as supporting other goals of walkable neighborhoods and access to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) to meet daily needs.

The City is prioritizing urban growth within the City. Growth should be compact to enable the efficient use of existing systems, e.g. transportation and utility systems. Urban growth limits pressure on habitat and other areas the City desires to conserve while also increasing the walkability of neighborhoods.

The 2023 update of the Growth Management Act (GMA) directed communities to plan for housing for all income levels. The City’s zoning includes different density levels to ensure land capacity for future growth.

Planner Smith-Erickson noted that the City is changing some zones to increase density, which also creates more revenue for a developer. The City’s mixed use zoning requires development to include a mix of uses within the development to avoid previous experience of many high density multifamily developments within General Commercial zone districts. The City is proposing to change the code to protect that zoning because of the limitation of space for other commercial uses. The potential for economic development has subsequently improved while also ensuring the protection of critical areas and open spaces.

Planner Bowers advised of another mandate by the GMA to reduce VMT to increase physical activity and protect the environment. The City is identifying open space corridors to connect conservation areas to other rural and conservation sites. Another

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mandate is reviewing drainage to meet drainage guidelines as required by the Flood Chapter within the Conservation Element.

Commissioner Nelson commented on the lack of visioning in terms of what constitutes open space existing within a development. For example, a strip of grass is not usable for families or individuals. Planner Smith-Erickson explained that open space is a broad use category because it can be private space not available for public use or it could be unfenced backyard corridors serving as recreational areas that are undeveloped. The City has requirements for new development comprised of shared use tracts and tree retention as part of the development. The City also has zoning districts of open space, such as Pioneer Park and other City parks. Many of those areas are located in a floodplain that is incompatible to accommodate housing uses.

Planner Bowers reported the City is considering allowing organic material facilities. Typically, those types of facilities are located within the county, such as solid waste facilities. The new use category would be considered an Essential Public Services use.

The update also considers wildfires to ensure against wildfires affecting homes by avoiding the placement of homes in highly wooded areas. Staff continues to work on recommended language.

Planner Bowers referred to the City's lack of space to accommodate households with an area median income (AMI) of 80% or lower. Some strategies studied by Thurston Regional Planning Council include an analysis of three alternatives of (1) no change, (2) slight change to accommodate needed housing, and (3) more change. The analysis in the study provides the City with a pathway forward to increase densities to accommodate future housing needs. She offered to provide a copy of the data analysis to the Commission.

The neighborhood section documents existing development, identifies future needs, anticipates changes, and provides recommendations for zoning those areas.

Planner Bowers presented and reviewed a zoning map of the City with land densities identified by different colors. Commissioners and staff discussed potential zoning districts for undeveloped properties to accommodate future housing needs. Planner Bowers noted that the Airport Overlay at the Olympia Regional Airport limits housing development near the airport.

Discussion ensued on desired land uses along the City's major

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corridors, retail uses, recreational opportunities, and ensuring walkability to services. Desired development scenarios are supported by the City's Transportation Plan Element.

Several Commissioners recommended increasing targeted outreach to several neighborhood districts along the City's major corridors to receive feedback from those communities.

Commissioner Staff advocated for planning for both infrastructure and services supporting future autonomous cars and localized aerial transportation (electric helicopters and air transit) opportunities by supporting the construction of parking garages that can support both ground and aerial transportation alternatives.

Several Commissioners recommended considering ways to increase parking for residents of multi-storied apartment complexes to reduce parking issues residents often encounter because of the limited number of parking spaces. Staff pointed out that the City cannot require a specific amount of additional parking based on state requirements and that developers can add parking but that much is dependent upon available space, market costs, and infrastructure requirements, such as drainage and additional impervious surface created by more parking.

Due to meeting time constraints, Commissioners agreed to limit its review of goals to GOAL LU-2: Ensure development takes place in an orderly and cost-efficient manner in order to best utilize available land and public services, conserve natural resources, protect critical areas, preserve open space, and reduce sprawl. One policy in support of the goal is to consider revision of the City's development standards to encourage innovative land use management techniques.

Planner Smith-Erickson added that the City is required by the state to complete development reviews in a specific timeframe. The City has implemented new policies to meet the new requirement. The City submitted information to the state on the City's development processing timeframes. The City is required to report review timelines to the state.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick noted that timelines can also be affected by lack of staff resources. Planner Smith-Erickson replied that once the City implements a new permitting system, application processes will be easier to track. When revisions are required for an application, staff has the ability to pause the processing clock to forward a request for revisions to the developer. The process will improve transparency of the application review process, which will

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be easier to manage and track to meet the required timelines.

Planner Bowers reviewed another implementation action to “Prepare annual reports on the number, type, and review times for development permits and post them on Tumwater’s website.” She asked for feedback explaining that the table information in “orange” is draft language.

Commissioner Nelson noted the confusion of the different colored drafts as the information contained in the “blue” draft lacks implementation actions regardless of the title depicting *Policies and Implementation Actions*. Planner Bowers acknowledged the oversight and that it would be changed and improved for clarity.

Planner Bowers reviewed implementation action LU-2.2 Use innovative land use techniques, such as 15-minute neighborhoods, to create and maintain vibrant centers, corridors, and neighborhoods while accommodating growth, discouraging displacement, and protecting and enhancing critical areas. Specifically, the action promotes the permitting of duplexes, cottages, and townhouses, which is also included within the Housing Element. Increasing densities creates more options.

Planner Smith-Erickson added that staff is exploring changing land use and zoning designations to provide more options for different housing types. The intent of the proposed changes is ensuring language speaks more to density rather than the type of structure.

Planner Bowers reviewed a table of *Land Use Designation with Implementing Zone District & Minimum & Maximum Net Dwelling Units per Acre* reflecting minimum and maximum densities by zoning district.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick commented that it appears the plan, as presented, is to transform the City by 2040 to a place for people to live with jobs located elsewhere. He questioned whether that is the goal of being a neighborhood community. The plan is setting a goal to accommodate new growth by ensuring there are places to live rather than focusing on whether jobs are available in the community. Today, the City is high in terms of the number of state employees, which afford employees the ability to purchase housing. The biggest reduction between today and 2040 will be state employees because of the City’s anticipated forecasting as those state jobs would not be located in Tumwater. The City is not accounting for the additional population to have jobs in the City.

Planner Bowers acknowledged that much of new legislation

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focuses on housing and ways to account for more housing. New legislation has consumed many City resources and more focus, which speaks to whether current efforts are considering the repercussions tied to changes in zoning and how it might impact the economy of the City.

Planner Smith-Erickson added that the City is conducting interviews for the Economic Development Coordinator position. Some data surrounding jobs in the City were provided by a consultant who explored demographics and current and future trends. She asked for feedback on whether the proposed designations and land use are providing enough opportunity for creation of jobs.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick responded that his concern involves the Land Use Element as it speaks to changing the City to only a neighborhood community. The forecast speaks to a reduction in jobs between now and 2040 in the City and a doubling of the population. The projectory of the Land Use Element is toward a neighborhood community for the City of Tumwater.

Commissioner Staff agreed and added that it speaks to the discussion surrounding the zoning map as there is no sense of community where people can come together in a downtown area. It is possible to meet at Tumwater Falls Park (Brewery Park at Tumwater Falls), however, people visit Olympia for its waterfront, downtown, and other features creating different types of jobs supporting tourism and visitors. Without that foresight or thought, he agreed with the bedroom community concept, which he imagines Lacey served as for some time. However, Lacey is beginning to attract new businesses.

Chair Robbins spoke to the importance of the Economic Development Plan as it would address many of the concerns. It is important to identify the demographics and where the City anticipates people will find a job within their neighborhood. That is the purpose for development of an economic development plan. The plan will help address many of those questions. If the intent is to continue moving forward on the same path, it is important to recognize that change will be necessary if the goal is to change the outcome.

Discussion ensued on the amount of land in the City consumed by the airport. Planner Bowers noted that zoning maps versus future land use maps establishes the zoning with land uses following the zoning. Land use maps may not match current zoning, especially for mixed uses that allow both residential and commercial uses

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with uses split dependent upon the type of development. In some residential areas, some commercial uses are also allowed. A current land use map would be helpful as changes occur often and quickly.

Planner Smith-Erickson added that it is possible to identify land uses during the update of the development code as it will identify allowed uses by each zone district.

Commissioner Staff commented that the zoning map was beneficial as it sparked much conversation. Having a visual representation was helpful as it identifies residential uses within the City.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick noted that some of the information speaks to a reduction in the number of state employees. The state is the largest employer providing employees with affordable incomes. Other information speaks to a rise in ‘other services’. However, there is uncertainty as to the definition of ‘other services’.

Commissioner Edwards agreed it was important to step back and examine holistically the draft language and if it sufficiently addresses the City’s desired future outcome.

Commissioner Staff asked why the City has not pursued creating a Public Facilities District (PFD) (special taxing district) as previously created by Olympia and Lacey to fund the Lacey Regional Athletic Complex and the Olympia Hands On Children’s Museum. A PFD is a municipal corporation with independent taxing authority to fund larger projects.

**2025 COMPREHENSIVE
PLAN PERIODIC UPDATE –
DRAFT USER GUIDE:**

Planner Smith-Erickson presented a draft User Guide. The User Guide is intended to provide information on how to utilize and navigate the Comprehensive Plan. She requested feedback on the development of a document to provide guidance to the public on the purpose and components of the Comprehensive Plan. Each of the elements in Parts 1 and 2 include descriptive introductions on how to utilize both parts. Information is included guiding the public on how to read each Element of the Comprehensive Plan. The document could convey information to the public on how to navigate the Comprehensive Plan with a focus on graphics rather than by long sentences and paragraphs. The intended user of the User Guide is anyone as the intent of the guide is to provide instructions to anyone on how to read and understand the entire Comprehensive Plan.

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Commissioner Staff suggested consideration of an animated video. Animated videos are great tools to deliver information, visuals, and pictures.

Commissioner Nelson offered that people are often more inclined to watch something rather than read information. She agreed with the suggestion.

Other suggestions included seeking other examples from other jurisdictions and considering what the user guide should highlight and convey because, often, the public avoids reading detailed information.

Planner Smith-Erickson said it might also be possible to include the information within the introduction. She shared an example of another City's user guide that was incorporated within the introduction to the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioners discussed options of preparing a stand-alone introductory guide conveying to the public what information they need to know, e.g., how will the plan affect them, when will it affect them, and what they can expect? Commissioner Edwards recommended incorporating the user guide within the introduction as it an automatic source for many users to obtain information on what is included and the purpose of the plan. Commissioner Kirkpatrick added that another important aspect is to consider that the user guide is intended to attract interest in all Elements of the Comprehensive Plan. A user guide would speak to not isolating some parts of the Comprehensive Plan as all the elements are interconnected.

Planner Smith-Erickson shared and described the format of several examples of other user guides from several jurisdictions.

NEXT MEETING DATE: The next meeting is scheduled on July 8, 2025.

ADJOURNMENT: **Commissioner Staff moved, seconded by Commissioner Kotek, to adjourn the meeting at 9:00 p.m. Motion carried unanimously.**

Prepared by Valerie L. Gow, Recording Secretary/President
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