

**TUMWATER JOINT CITY COUNCIL AND PLANNING COMMISSION**  
**MINUTES OF HYBRID MEETING**  
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**CONVENE:** 6:00 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Mayor Debbie Sullivan and Councilmembers Peter Agabi, Michael Althaus, Joan Cathey, Leatta Dahlhoff, Angela Jefferson, Eileen Swarthout.

Excused: Charlie Schneider.

Planning Commission: Chair Elizabeth Robbins and Commissioners Grace Edwards, Terry Kirkpatrick, Brandon Staff, Michael Tobias, and Anthony Varela.

Absent: Brian Schumacher and Kelly Von Holtz.

Staff: City Administrator Lisa Parks, Finance Director Troy Niemeyer, Transportation and Engineering Director Brandon Hicks, Water Resources and Sustainability Director Dan Smith, Planning Manager Brad Medrud, Communications Manager Ann Cook, and Land Use and Housing Planner Erika Smith-Erickson.

**2024 LONG RANGE  
PLANNING WORK  
PROGRAM:**

Manager Medrud reported that the Planning Commission and staff develop a preliminary work program reviewed by the City Administrator and the Mayor for consideration by the City Council each year.

Manager Medrud reviewed 2023 accomplishments to include the addition of Housing and Land Use Planner Erika Smith-Erickson, who joined the department in 2023. Planner Smith-Erickson assumed the role of the City's first designated housing planner. Other notable achievements include the adoption of the rental registration ordinance, identification of 2023 Comprehensive Plan Amendments and Development Code Housekeeping Amendments, and a draft Hazard Mitigation Plan scheduled for adoption early next year. Many other planning processes are ongoing. The first is the 2025 Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code Periodic Update, conclusion of a community survey, and the Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP). U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) provided some detailed comments on the HCP that will need to be addressed. Staff anticipates submitting an outline to USFWS of the City's approach to the comments early next year. Other work has been in support of the Regional Housing Council and the Equity Toolbox anticipated to be completed by mid-2024. As part of the project, the focus is primarily on tools that could be used for policy development. Work on the amendments in support of the Urban Forestry Management Plan will resume in March 2024.

Pending work includes potential amendments to the landscape, street tree, and tree and vegetation preservation ordinances. The work was nearly completed for presentation of draft ordinances to the Planning Commission when the City was notified of the pending adoption of the Washington

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Wildland-Urban Interface Code. Staff suspended the update process and have since met with officials from the State Building Code Council to request some changes to the code.

The proposed work program is based on items proposed by the Council, the Planning Commission, staff, and the public. All proposals are folded within the proposed work program. For the 2024 work program, the department budgeted 3.1 FTEs, which requires the addition of one planner. Half of staff time will be devoted to the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process. Ongoing work within the work plan includes the HCP and Regional Housing Council support requiring another quarter FTE.

The joint meeting is an opportunity for the Council and Commission to discuss the proposed work program as well as review the roles as part of the process. The work program is comprised of four sections focusing on the Comprehensive Plan Amendment Docket and Development Regulations Docket, other planning projects, and general management and coordination. Included on the work program are below the line projects with no assigned staff but the work might be necessary as it supports the work program. If time becomes available or a higher priority is assigned, staff adjusts the work program. Approximately one quarter of the time will be focused on the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update process excluding Development Code amendments. Other substantial initiatives are potential changes to development regulations, Urban Forestry Management Plan amendments, and Thurston County Title 22 amendments. Thurston County is wrapping up its joint planning processes with the City of Olympia and the City of Lacey. It is anticipated the Thurston County will direct staff to pursue updating the joint code between the City and the county as it has not been updated since 1995. Title 22 speaks to the City's growth management area and the county's codes that are not in alignment with the City's development codes.

Other planning projects are the Food System Plan with staff efforts on the plan scheduled next year, completion of the Hazard Mitigation Plan Update, managing the Multifamily Tax Exemption Program, code enforcement, and responding to public inquiries.

Tasks related to general management and coordination involves coordination with the code compliance team, transportation team, Green Team, stormwater team, and with GIS staff, as well as general coordination with local jurisdictions primarily with Thurston County and the City of Olympia. As a member of the Regional Housing Council, the City is required to dedicate a quarter FTE to support the Regional Housing Council.

Manager Medrud reviewed some discussion topics and asked for feedback on a series of questions:

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- What went well with the 2023 long range work program and what could be improved? *Commissioner Dahlhoff recommended more crossover and touch points between the Commission and the Council. Scheduling the first joint meeting in December is too late.*

*Commissioner Tobias asked whether staff tracks any proposals originated by the Commission and staff that are either successful or changed by the Council as opposed to proposals that were changed during the review process.*

*Councilmember Althausen responded that the Council has revised some recommendations based on the legal substance of the change that was not germane to the goal of the overarching issue. When the Council has made changes that are significant, the Council's common practice has been to refer the proposal to the Commission for a second vetting. Differences of opinions can occur in terms of the language of any proposal. As Chair of the General Government Committee, he recommends the Council should enact a process of returning differing proposals to the Commission for additional review and as an opportunity to promote an exchange of ideas and opinions between the Commission and the Council.*

*Chair Robbins asked for feedback on what the Council believes a successful Comprehensive Plan should entail to assist the Commission.*

*Councilmember Althausen commented that success is measured in a variety of ways as discussed to some degree by the General Government Committee. Councilmember Dahlhoff has been a strong advocate for ensuring public input and public interaction during the update of the Comprehensive Plan. Public accessibility has been an important goal and the General Government Committee has discussed ways to simplify the Plan to increase accessibility. Another option is production of a resident guide to the Comprehensive Plan. His vision for success is ensuring the vision established for the City is reflected throughout the Comprehensive Plan in all elements and strategies. Another important consideration is ensuring the public understands the Plan.*

*Councilmember Cathey said the Council should provide some clarity by identifying the goals for 2024. At the last joint meeting two years ago, the goal was environment. Although progress occurred in some areas, more joint efforts by the Council and the Commission would assist in achieving more progress on environmental efforts. She stressed the importance of coordinating actions between the Commission and the Council to advance goals that have been identified by the Council. She questioned the terminology associated*

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*with “equity” within City planning documents. It may affect how the City assigns zones. She thanked and acknowledged Commissioners for their efforts in support of the City.*

*Councilmember Jefferson said she views the work of the Planning Commission as seamless with good communication between the two bodies because of the limited number of issues returned to the Commission.*

*Councilmember Althausen conveyed appreciation as both the Council and the Commission established realistic expectations at the beginning of the year of what could be achievable with current resources.*

*Councilmember Cathey encouraged Commissioners to consider items listed below the line to determine if some items deserve some attention or address some issues directly to the Council.*

- How has coordination between the City Council and Planning Commission gone in 2023 and what can be improved in 2024?

*Commissioner Dahlhoff suggested hosting a community forum next year with the Planning Commission and possibly other Commissions and Boards, as it would fall within the timeline of the update of the Comprehensive Plan.*

- Are there additional projects in 2024 to be considered? If so, what projects currently proposed can be delayed?

*Commissioner Dahlhoff said she would provide staff with a list, as the current list might be modified or edited because the Council has not held its retreat at this time. Councilmember Cathey agreed and pointed out that the question would be timelier after the Council’s retreat.*

*Councilmember Swarthout offered that climate change would be a priority moving forward. Another issue is funding another position to focus on climate change because the existing staff position is responsible for both sustainability and climate change. The Council should consider budgeting another position focused only on climate change.*

*Councilmember Althausen said the work plan item for the parks and open space element lacks a long-range plan for the golf course. The property will be paid in full in the next several years and a community conversation is warranted to discuss whether to retain the property as a golf course or consider another use of the property.*

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*Councilmember Cathey expressed some reservation with the suggestion as it speaks to a topic that she believes is important for both the Council and the Commission to consider. One of the challenges next year and beyond is to ensure efforts on economic development align with the environment. Today, the planet is facing a climate crisis and efforts and actions by the Council must be balanced. The golf course is an environmental issue with a river running through the property. Decisions by the Council, Commission, and planning staff for the future must be balanced recognizing the climate crisis in all decisions.*

- If adjustments to the 2024 long range work program are needed, what projects have less priority?

*The Council supported deferring the question until after the Council's retreat.*

Manager Medrud reported the General Government Committee is scheduled to receive a briefing as a follow-up on the discussion in January. Staff will then seek approval of the Work Program at the Council's January 16, 2024 meeting. The Work Program can also be amended at any time.

**2025  
COMPREHENSIVE  
PLAN PERIODIC  
UPDATE – SURVEY  
SNAPSHOT:**

Manager Medrud referred to the survey documents contained in the agenda packet.

Commissioner Tobias inquired about the date the survey closes. Manager Medrud advised that staff is coordinating the date but that the survey would likely close in January based on the response rate.

Councilmember Dahlhoff questioned how staff plans to aggregate the survey data based on conflicting responses. Manager Medrud advised that the purpose of the survey is soliciting opinions, which may often be conflicting. Staff plans to compile the data to produce a concise and comprehensible synopsis of the survey results.

Councilmember Althaus asked whether survey responses would be weighted based on specific demographics. Manager Medrud explained that the request is likely beyond the scope of the contract; however, the contractor and staff will strive to quantify survey data.

Commissioner Tobias inquired as to whether the City measures the immediate impact of certain projects, Comprehensive Plan amendments, or areas of prioritization. He cited the example of measuring outcomes by allowing more accessory dwelling units or increasing housing density.

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Councilmember Swarthout added that it would also be important to ascertain the cost to the City versus the benefit of the Council's action to offer a property tax exemption program for some housing. The City adopted the program many years ago and it is only recently that some developers are beginning to take advantage of the program. It would be important to provide information to the Council on the cost/benefit aspect of the program.

**MAYOR/CITY  
ADMINISTRATOR'S  
REPORT:**

Mayor Sullivan reminded the Council that the December 19, 2023 Council meeting and the December 26, 2023 Council worksession have been cancelled. She conveyed wishes for Councilmembers and Commissioners to enjoy the holidays.

In response to previous questions from Councilmembers Agabi and Cathey, Mayor Sullivan advised the ordinance to amend Tumwater Municipal Code on public parks is scheduled for discussion by the Council in January on the approach for community involvement.

City Administrator Parks added that staff is working on providing accurate information to communicate to the community and to many community members who have communicated with the City to include recommendations on timing and the methodology for communicating with the community. Staff will present a recommended strategy on communicating with the public and alternatives for the Council to consider with respect to the direction of the ordinance.

Commissioner Dahlhoff noted that the timing of the City's process should consider the status of the appeal of the Ninth Circuit Court decision as the appeal process could change outcomes. Mayor Sullivan said the pending appeal would be included in the Council's discussions.

Commissioner Agabi recommended scheduling a public hearing to receive testimony that could be presented and considered by the Council during its discussions. Mayor Sullivan said staff efforts are focused on determining the type of community engagement as it could include scheduling a public hearing or hosting an open house. Staff is working on those details for the Council's conversations in January.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**With there being no further business, Mayor Sullivan adjourned the meeting at 7:13 p.m.**