

# STAFF REPORT



Date: March 18, 2025  
To: General Government Committee  
From: Alyssa Jones Wood, Sustainability Manager

## 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update – Climate 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. To meet the deliverables for the Climate grant contract with the Washington State Department of Commerce, Tumwater must complete a draft of the new Climate Element by June 30, 2025.

The updated Comprehensive Plan will address diversity, equity, and inclusion throughout the Plan and incorporate a large number of state-required changes addressing housing, climate change, and other topics.

The intent of this agenda item is to discuss the draft goals, policies, actions, and associated timelines of the Resilience sub-element of new Climate Element.

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## 1. New Requirements

On May 3, 2023, Governor Inslee signed into law HB 1181, which added a new climate change and resiliency goal to the Growth Management Act. The City will need to adopt a new Climate Element as part of 2025 Comprehensive Plan periodic update by December 31, 2025, to meet the state deadline.

The legislation includes the following key changes:

- Adds as climate mitigation sub-element to address greenhouse gas emissions reduction as part of a Climate Element that is mandatory for the City and would require actions to reduce overall greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled. The City is required to use 2022 as their emissions baseline year and set incremental targets that lead to achieving net zero emissions in 2050, consistent with Washington’s statewide target.
- Adds a climate resilience sub-element as part of a Climate Element that is mandatory for the City. The Thurston Hazards Mitigation Plan, which was updated and adopted by the City in 2024, can be adopted, by reference, to satisfy the climate resilience sub-element requirements.
- Requires consideration of environmental justice as part of the development of a Climate Element to avoid worsening environmental health disparities.

## 2. Growth Management Act – Climate Change and Resiliency Goal

The state Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A RCW) requires that the City 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 City’s Comprehensive Plan and development regulations.

The following is a summary of how the new Climate Element will need to meet the goal related to climate change and resiliency. The state legislature added this goal in 2023.

14. ***Climate change and resiliency.*** *Ensure that comprehensive plans, development regulations, and regional policies, plans, and strategies under RCW 36.70A.210 and chapter 47.80 RCW adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate; support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled; prepare for climate impact scenarios; foster resiliency to climate impacts and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental justice.*

The Conservation Element, Land Use Element, and Transportation Plan of the Comprehensive Plan will need to address this as a new goal in coordination with the new Climate Element. A new overarching Comprehensive Plan goal will address increasing climate resiliency by promoting sustainability, reducing pollution, promoting health habitats, and supporting clean air and water.

### 3. Sub-Elements

The Climate Element will need to incorporate two sub-elements: climate mitigation, which addresses greenhouse gas reduction, and climate resilience.

#### A. Climate Mitigation

Climate mitigation addresses greenhouse gas emission reductions that involve actions taken to reduce or eliminate the emissions of greenhouse gases to reduce the rate and extent of climate change damage.

Greenhouse gases (GHG) include carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and any other gas or gases designated by the State Department of Ecology.

Increasing emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases are changing the City's climate in ways that will impact both human and natural systems. In general, we can expect to experience hotter, drier summers and warmer, wetter winters. These changes are anticipated to worsen existing hazards—like floods, landslides, and wildfires—and introduce new threats—like invasive plants, insects, and infectious diseases.

To ensure that the City significantly reduces local contributions to climate change, the Thurston Regional Planning Council, Thurston County, and the cities of Lacey, Olympia, and Tumwater adopted the following greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets in 2021 as part of the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan (TCMP):

- Forty-five percent reduction below 2015 levels by 2030; and
- Eighty-five percent below 2015 levels by 2050.

The City adopted the Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan in 2021, the actions of which will be updated and incorporated into the climate mitigation sub-element of the City's new Climate Element. Note that the Plan's goals and baseline are not consistent with the new statewide requirements for a 2022 baseline year and net-zero by 2050 goal.

The figure below is from the Thurston County 2022 GHG Emissions Inventory (by the Department of Commerce) and show current GHG emissions and the breakdown of GHG emissions by sector.

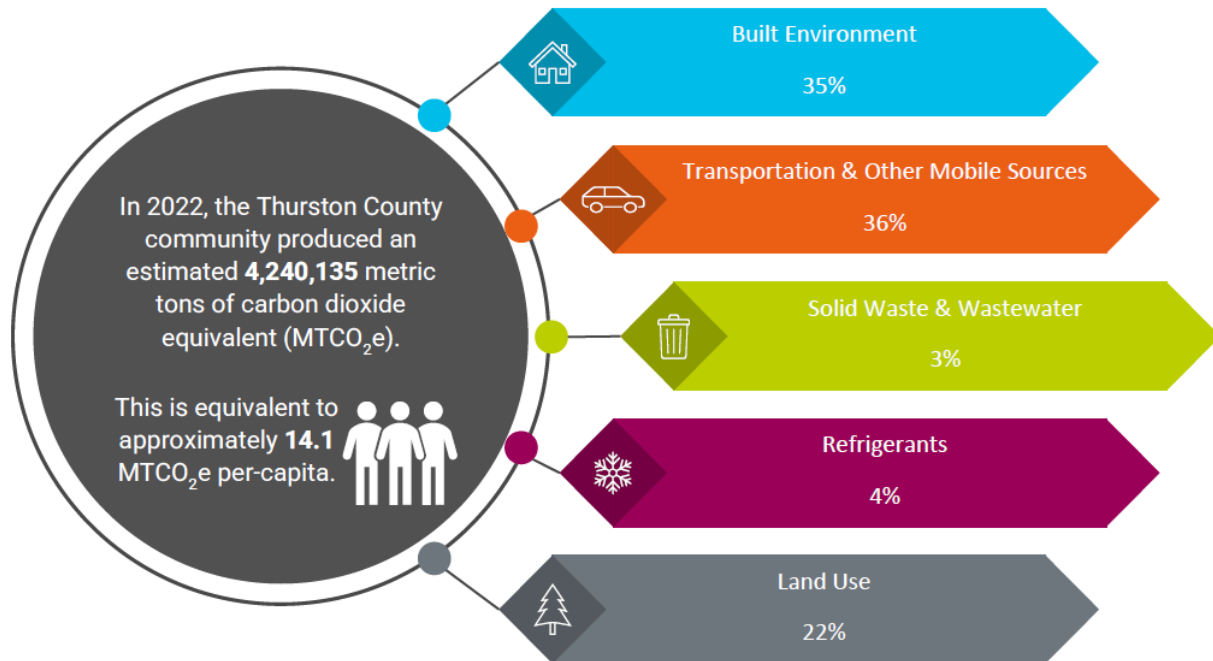


Figure 1. 2022 Emissions by Sector

The Department of Commerce has identified the following three pathways to meet the new state requirement for a climate mitigation sub-element.

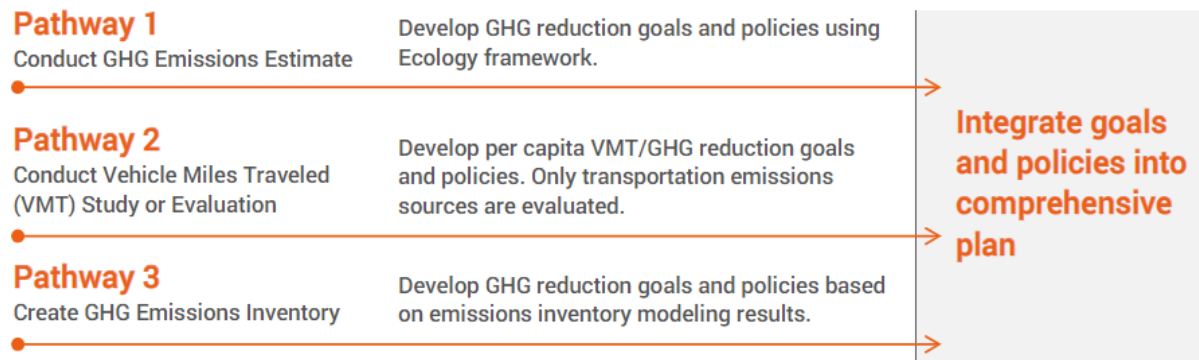


Figure 2. Pathway summary for GHG sub-element.

Staff will pursue pathway one and supplement the Tumwater GHG estimate with the 2022 Thurston County GHG Emissions Inventory provided by the Department of Commerce. Department of Commerce staff have confirmed that this method is acceptable for meeting requirements.

## B. Climate Resilience

RCW 70A.65.010 defines climate resilience as:

*“...the ongoing process of anticipating, preparing for, and adapting to changes in climate and minimizing negative impacts to our natural systems, infrastructure, and communities. For natural systems, increasing climate resilience involves restoring and increasing the health, function, and integrity of our ecosystems and improving their ability to absorb and recover from climate-affected disturbances. For communities, increasing climate resilience means enhancing their ability to understand, prevent, adapt, and recover from climate impacts to people and infrastructure.”*

The Department of Commerce has identified the following five step process to meet the new state requirement for a climate resilience sub-element.



Figure 3. Steps and pathways to integrate resilience into Comprehensive Plan.

The Thurston Hazards Mitigation Plan with the City of Tumwater annex was adopted by the City Council in 2024. The Thurston Hazards Mitigation Plan to date addressed Steps 1 through 3. The Thurston Hazards Mitigation Plan is in substantial conformance with the state guidance, so in Step 4, the City will be adopting the Plan, by reference, to satisfy the state climate resilience sub-element requirements.

In addition, the Thurston Regional Planning Council adopted the Thurston Climate Adaption Plan in 2018, the actions of which will be updated and incorporated into the climate resilience sub-element of the City's new Climate Element.

Staff and consultants will also utilize the Department of Commerce Climate Element Workbook to ensure any gaps between state requirements and previously developed content from the Thurston Hazards Mitigation Plan and/or Thurston Climate Adaptation Plan will be investigated and addressed.

## 4. Environmental Justice

The new state legislation requires that the Climate Element must:

- Prioritize greenhouse gas reductions in overburdened communities.
- Prioritize climate resilience in communities that will disproportionately suffer from compounding environmental impacts.

In addition, HB 1181 requires that as part of the required Comprehensive Plan periodic update process that:

- The Land Use Element avoids worsening environmental health disparities.
- The Transportation Plan ensures multimodal levels achieve environmental justice goals.

## 5. Transportation and Land Use Changes

In addition, the new state legislation requires other transportation and land use changes such as:

- Requiring that the Washington State Department of Transportation maintain a summary of the per capita vehicle miles traveled for cities and the unincorporated portions of counties. This resource will in turn support the required updates to the Transportation Plan and the new Climate Element.
- Adds multimodal concurrency.
- Must accommodate all users “safely, reliably and efficiently.”

## 6. Goals, Policies, and Implementation Actions Review

### A. Introduction

Example from the current Climate Element:

**GOAL CL-2     Increase the City’s capacity to implement climate action and adaptation priorities.**

**Policy**

**Action**

CL-2.2     Develop a program funding strategy to support equitable access to climate mitigation and adaptation programs developed by the City.

CL-2.2.1.     Review actions outlined in the Climate Element to determine what kinds of funding will be needed to support the programs created therein.

Goals and policies describe how the City 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.

## 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
<p><b>Statements of Inclination</b></p> <p>Conveys intent, but establishes no target or definition of success</p>	<p><b>Statements of Principle</b></p> <p>Describes clear targets or conditions of success</p>	<p><b>Statements of Impact</b></p> <p>Go further, describing specific situations where protecting critical areas is a priority</p>
<p><b>Example</b></p> <p>The City shall encourage protection of prairie lands.</p>	<p><b>Example</b></p> <p>The City shall endeavor to support the maintenance of 100-acres of conservation land.</p>	<p><b>Example</b></p> <p>Work with nonprofits to support active maintenance of prairie conservation lands to protected habitat standards.</p>

## C. Draft Time Period and the Climate Crisis

The Tumwater City Council passed resolution No. R2021-002 on January 19, 2021, which declared a climate emergency and support for the mobilization of community and region wide efforts to mitigate climate change in order to provide a safe environment for future generations. All aspects of the Climate Element – climate mitigation, adaptation, environmental justice, and equity – are exceptionally urgent issues requiring action and system change on a local and global level. However, unilateral actions taken without adequate community engagement and ownership often lead to unintended consequences and harm. Also, system change – which is the most pivotal to addressing these urgent issues – takes time that is tragically not well aligned with the urgency of the climate crisis.

The City of Tumwater, and all governments working on climate change, are faced with a paradox of the urgency of action and the necessity of working at the speed of trust with community, especially those in the community who have been historically marginalized, left out, or forgotten. Staff have done their best to balance the urgency of action, the anticipated speed of trust for actions, community demand, existing commitments (GHG targets), and internal capacity to draft timelines for each action in the Climate Element. Bringing this paradox to light is not intended to be interpreted as an excuse, but rather careful consideration and nuance that staff are incorporating into their work as they address the climate crisis.

## D. Initial Review

Attachment B is the initial draft of the Climate Element. This draft has been reviewed by staff and the Climate Policy Advisory Team (CPAT). This draft is not final, and feedback provided by the community and General Government Committee will be incorporated as much as possible.



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

The State Department of Commerce has a webpage for Climate Element guidance.

<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/growth-management-topics/climate-change-2/>

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

The Municipal Research Services Center has a Comprehensive Planning webpage as well as webpage addressing the new legislative requirements.

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

[MRSC - New Legislation Related to Climate and the Natural Environment](#)