

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

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

Staff: Planning Manager Brad Medrud and Land Use and Housing Planner Erika Smith-Erickson.

**APPROVAL OF  
TUMWATER  
PLANNING  
COMMISSION  
MINUTES:**

**NOVEMBER 28, 2023,  
DECEMBER 12, 2023,  
JANUARY 9, 2024,  
JANUARY 23, 2024,  
FEBRUARY 13, 2024,  
& FEBRUARY 27,  
2024:**

**MOTION:** Commissioner Varela moved, seconded by Commissioner Tobias, to approve minutes of November 28, 2023, December 12, 2023, January 9, 2024, January 23, 2024, February 13, 2024, and February 27, 2024 as published. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.

**COMMISSIONER'S  
REPORTS:** There were no reports.

**MANAGER'S  
REPORT:** Manager Medrud reported on the recent departure of Economic Development Manager Austin Ramirez to return to California.

Staff is preparing for the joint tour with the City Council on April 9, 2024 at 6 p.m. to tour housing in Tumwater and Olympia.

Planner Smith-Erickson advised of the Council's approval of the resolution for the Hazard Mitigation Plan and adoption of the floodplain overlay amendment.

Manager Medrud reported the state approved the City's floodplain ordinance, which was also forwarded to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).

Restarting urban forestry proposed amendments will begin after the

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Legislature passed the Wildland-Urban Interface Code with agreement to defer some provisions for additional review. Currently, a joint work session of the Planning Commission and the Tree Board is scheduled in June to restart the amendment review process.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** There were no public comments.

**2025**  
**COMPREHENSIVE**  
**PLAN PERIODIC**  
**UPDATE –**  
**COMMUNITY**  
**SURVEY RESULTS:**

Manager Medrud noted that the presentation would review the results of the community survey, which is not considered a scientific survey. The survey format was designed as a self-responding survey posted on the City's website. The City's community engagement process for the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update seeks meaningful opportunities throughout the process with the community and stakeholders to participate in the update. The survey represents the first community outreach as part of that process. Moving forward, outreach will focus on individual topics and comprehensive plan elements. Results of the survey will inform the review of the comprehensive plan and guide future discussions.

The community received notification of the survey by a postcard mailed to addresses in the City in November 2023. The objective for the survey was to inform the community about the periodic update, obtain information from the community on specific issues and elements of interest, and seek information on future notification methods for meetings and events. The survey also helped inform staff as to those in the community responding and those in the community that did not. Other notices announcing the community survey were included on the City's social media platforms and on the City's webpage. The survey closed on February 14, 2024. The survey generated 975 responses compared to a similar survey in 2016 of only 120 responses.

Demographic responses from the survey compared to the 2023 Statistical Profile prepared by Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) reflect the difference between the profile of survey respondents and the population of the community. Demographic questions related to respondents' employment, residency, housing type, income, gender, race/ethnicity, age, household size, and education. Approximately 80% of the respondents reported living in the City with 25% living in the City less than five years. A majority of the respondents have lived in the City more than 11 years. A majority of the respondents live in a single-family home. Most of the respondents (68%) were homeowners, 10% are renters, and 20% did not answer the question or did not live in the City. Statistical data from TRPC reflects that 58% of the community owns their homes and 42% rent their homes. Survey responses were reflective of more homeowners and the need to improve outreach to renters. Staff is pursuing some strategies to improve outcomes.

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Approximately 40% of the respondents work in the City, 10% reported owning a business in the City, and over 37% reported an annual household income of over \$125,000. The area median income for the City is \$102,000.

Commissioner Varela asked whether the percentage for jobs reflects only those individuals who physically work in the City or whether the figure also includes respondents who work remotely for other employers outside the City. Manager Medrud said the survey question did not specify the location of the job. Commissioner Varela commented that with the increase in remote and telework, infrastructure might be deserving of a review for improving capabilities.

Commissioner Tobias asked whether the survey question on annual household income accounts for household size. Manager Medrud said the responses were reflective of all household income and did not specify those who were contributing income. Planner Smith-Erickson added that the survey also included a question on the make-up of the household. Respondents also had an option to skip specific questions.

Manager Medrud reported more females completed the survey than males reflecting a higher percentage of females compared to TRPC statistical data. In terms of race and ethnicity, the results compared favorably to TRPC statistical data. Most of the respondents were aged between 35 to 65 years with those less than 35 years old considerably less. Most of the respondents were married with both children and no children. Respondents reporting as single were underrepresented compared to other City data. Results on education tracked closely with TRPC statistical data with a high number of college-educated community members living in the City.

Respondents were asked to provide feedback on how they receive information and personal preferences for receiving information. Basic questions asked respondents about the best times for engagement. Based on the survey results, staff plans to schedule open houses on Wednesday and Thursday evenings. Preferred ways to communicate with the City included email and telephone. A majority of the respondents preferred to attend virtual meetings versus in-person meetings. Respondents reported email as the primary source of learning about community information followed by other community members, the City's website, social media, direct mail and utility bill inserts, and newspapers.

Manager Medrud reviewed the results of questions on City services, quality of life, critical issues facing the City, and the City's greatest assets. Respondents rated the City well in police and fire services with

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parks and recreation following. However, roads, sidewalks, and bicycle lanes were not rated as high. Because of the amount of construction occurring in the City and the frequency of interaction of those services by the community, the ratings were lower with other provisions of services rating average or better.

Questions related to quality of life generated some common themes with safety often a repeated theme with a “good place to raise a family” rated as very important by 70%. Comments depicted that proximity to employment and shopping opportunities were not as important to the community as other quality of life questions. Manager Medrud said the response for programs for seniors reflected a high percentage of “not sure” and did not match as closely for “yes” compared to parks and recreation.

Commissioner Varela asked whether the structure of the question was too vague as programs for seniors can include many elements ranging from activities in parks, medical services, and rehabilitation services.

Commissioner Tobias offered that many of the responses of “not sure” could be attributed as “not applicable” to their particular situation or because of their age.

Chair Robbins asked whether the survey included any questions about walkability within the City. Manager Medrud advised that walkability was not specifically addressed within the quality-of-life questions. However, it is possible to extrapolate general themes from responses to the quality of sidewalks and bike lanes because many respondents indicated a need for improvements. Chair Robbins noted that many of the respondent comments addressed the need to provide sidewalks, paths, trails, and in particular, between neighborhoods and neighborhoods and small businesses. Manager Medrud added that staff is finalizing a scope of work for the transportation consultant. The scope includes development of a bike and pedestrian plan as part of the Transportation Plan within the Comprehensive Plan. Chair Robbins stressed the importance of walkability in addition to services for seniors. Walkability is important for quality of life for seniors as it hinges on successfully assessing services by walking.

Planner Smith-Erickson said that based on many respondent comments, walkability and sidewalks in terms of quality of life were an area of concern. Many of the survey questions were open-ended enabling respondents to provide comments.

Manager Medrud said the survey asked respondents to rate Tumwater on quality-of-life factors. In terms of shopping opportunities, housing options, and streets and roads, the response was overall average or less

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than the other quality of life questions. Other issues rated as high concern are critical areas, crime and public safety, housing costs and rent, and homelessness with jobs and the economy, racism, and equity rated lower as a concern. He encouraged Commissioners to review the written responses.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick noted that the question is phrased as “Please pick the two most critical issues facing Tumwater “today.” The question does not necessarily reflect that the respondent is thinking of today but could be envisioning the future especially as to the question about concerns on homelessness and safety because of what is occurring in neighboring communities and in Seattle. Manager Medrud noted that at the community meeting in February of over 130 participants, similar questions generated a strong response from participants. Most of the comments acknowledged that the City is currently not experiencing those issues but want to avoid those types of situations in the future.

Chair Robbins commented on the importance of acknowledging how much homelessness actually exists in the City. Manager Medrud responded that the City has data based on the Point in Time survey for homelessness, as well as service provisions for the homeless to document on-the-ground issues currently in existence today. Since 2016, he has been involved in the Point in Time Count in the City. The annual counts do not reflect a dramatic increase in homelessness, and it has never reached the level experienced by the City of Olympia or City of Lacey. However, poverty conditions are much more difficult to hide in the City because of the lack of a downtown as readily apparent in downtown Olympia. Based on areas of encampments in the City, there has not been a dramatic change over the years.

Commissioner Tobias asked whether the areas of concern are similar each year or whether different encampments are occurring in different areas of the City over the years. Manager Medrud said there are some areas that include encampments or have housed encampments in the recent past based on geography and proximity to services.

Commissioner Varela asked whether data exists that correlates the level of homelessness with crime over the last five years. Manager Medrud said the City’s data reflects no change in level of crime; however, property crime continues to be high and affects many in the community. He offered to follow up with the police department on recent data as well as from monthly reports produced by the police department.

Manager Medrud reported common themes from written responses to the City’s greatest assets included:

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- Parks, landscape, trees, proximity to recreation, community events
- Small town feel and central location
- Schools and community
- Police, fire, government, and crime prevention
- Not many homeless encampments
- Historical background

The survey included questions about quality of life now and in five years, housing, growth strategies, topics of greatest interest for the periodic update, top three priorities, and other comments and ideas that City leadership should hear about. The question on “How would you rate the overall quality of life in Tumwater today?” generated a response of 71.66% as excellent or good. Interestingly, the question on “Looking ahead 5 years from now, how do you expect to rate the quality of life in Tumwater?” generated a response of only 62.53% as excellent or good.

A question on different strategies the City should pursue generated the following responses:

- 27.84% - Encourage development near transit services
- 45.85% - Provide more options to get around without a car
- 22.22% - Allow for higher density development
- 61.87% - Increase open space or green space in urban areas
- 49.47% - Support the development of affordable housing
- 68.19% - Encourage walkable and bikeable communities
- 57.78% - Protect environmentally sensitive areas
- 41.17% - Prepare for climate change
- 45.73% - Diversify and increase job and business opportunities

A question on topics of most interest to comment on generated the following responses:

- 48.45% - Affordable housing
- 31.96% - Climate and environment
- 44.67% - Economic development
- 34.02% - Transportation
- 14.78% - Utility services
- 24.57% - Other

The top three priorities ranked by respondents are (1) police, fire, and crime, and City services, (2) housing, and (3) economic development. Comments included reducing homelessness, prioritization of public safety and reducing crime and drugs, hiring more firefighters, police, provide programs for the homeless, more programs for special needs or family needs, maintain a clean City, and improving schools. The survey

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generated approximately 500 written comments on the priorities.

Responses for housing included:

- Reduce sprawl
- Keep small town feel
- Have more affordable options for owning/renting
- Create more middle housing
- Improve building permit process
- Create affordable senior housing

Responses for economic development included:

- More local shops/restaurants
- Redevelop the brewery
- Create a downtown
- Create a more uniform building code/theme
- Create more jobs
- Bring in and attract more employers and industries
- Diversify business
- Create more community spaces for events/venues

When asked how respondents believe the current housing situation is on a scale of 0 to 10, where zero is “not a problem and ten is “a crisis,” the average survey response was 5.5. The survey response does not match other survey results, such as affordable housing ranked as one of the most important things for the City to consider.

A number of the survey questions focused on housing, services (important components of the Comprehensive Plan update), and whether the City offers a mix of housing and services that encourages residents to continue living in the community at every stage. The responses ranged from Yes, No, No Opinion, or Not familiar with what Tumwater offers. Written responses provided some insight:

- Not enough housing for seniors, retirement homes, fixed income, or assisted/independent living
- Need more middle housing and mixed development – with options to buy duplexes/condo/smaller houses
- Not enough affordable housing – rent or owning. Rentals are too high priced, and people cannot save to buy houses
- Smaller more affordable single-family residences or multifamily units that could be purchased
- Concerns about homelessness and crime in public places/parks

Chair Robbins inquired as to whether the survey addressed housing purchased by large corporations (multifamily and single family) as it

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speaks to policies the City might consider adopting that would slow the practice, which in many locations is responsible for driving housing costs upwards. Manager Medrud said the question is interesting as the City is also experiencing much single-family housing development in the City despite the shift in the last three years to multifamily development based on the number of permits issued. Staff knows of some completed subdivisions that are withholding some of the homes as rental homes and one development where the entire subdivision will be rental units. The City has no regulatory control over those types of situations in terms of ownership of property. Chair Robbins conceded that it is likely any regulations preventing such situations would require action by the State Legislature; however, there are some mechanisms that promote individual home ownership and better pricing for rental properties to ensure generational wealth occurs over time. Manager Medrud advised that he does not believe the City has the authority to determine the outcome of units after construction.

Commissioner Varela pointed out that some homeowner associations have some leverage in terms of the percentage limitation on the number of homes rented. He questioned whether the City might have a similar option to reduce rental-owned subdivisions and limit the number of homes purchased by large corporations. Manager Medrud responded that except for specific ongoing maintenance requirements for stormwater or private roads, the City does not review or approve HOA covenants, as covenants are a private issue and are typically established by the developer. State laws guide provisions included within covenants.

Chair Robbins acknowledged the City's limitations but suggested consideration of ways the City could encourage land trusts or homeownership trusts to ensure properties continue to remain available at a more affordable price to primary residents. Manager Medrud said land trusts are a good example as the City and the Regional Housing Council are looking at land trusts in terms of manufactured home parks. The City of Tumwater's zoning restricts the use of those lands for mobile home parks with limited ability to change the property's use. Additionally, the City, in 2018, worked with land trusts to help residents in mobile home parks jointly purchase the property to control costs and preserve mobile home housing. Unfortunately, the cost to purchase the land is often prohibitive for owners of mobile homes.

Manager Medrud said the survey generated written comments about concerns of high-density housing, overcrowding of schools, lack of infrastructure to support growth (roads and utilities), and population growth. There were also concerns surrounding short-term rentals, and private companies purchasing housing and using them as rentals, as well as ideas for controlling the rental market and prices. A number of



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comments spoke to anti-growth and development, keeping single family and not building more apartments, and that more housing would not solve homelessness. Other housing considerations addressed level of traffic, increasing impact fees, streamlining and creating a faster permitting process, halting the increase in property tax to incentivize more affordable housing, behavioral health services and treatment centers, and housing affordability of all income and age groups.

Commissioner Tobias asked whether there was any correlation between the City incentivizing the development of more housing and increasing property taxes for residents. Manager Medrud said the program offered by the City is the multifamily tax exemption program. The program provides tax exemption for 12 years for a limited number of units. The program reduces the property tax burden to the owner of the property with the property tax reallocated to other property owners in the City. One of the discussions is how development must pay for impacts. However, the building industry views those costs as a disincentive to construct housing as those costs are in addition to the costs of construction and land acquisition. When development occurs, those costs exist because capacity must be increased to accommodate growth and changes in services. The issue is who must absorb those costs – the developer or the community.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick pointed out that the City of Tumwater's property tax assessment includes a voter-approved levy to purchase fire engines. Another portion of property tax is for voter-approved bonds or levies to improve schools.

Discussion ensued on the status of the Tumwater School District both in enrollment and facility needs.

Manager Medrud encouraged the Commissioners to review the 227 survey responses to a question asked of respondents to provide additional comments or ideas they would like City leadership to hear. The responses are varied.

Next steps include a joint tour with the City Council on April 9, 2024 for housing and a joint tour on August 13, 2024 for transportation. Joint work sessions with City Council are scheduled on the following Comprehensive Plan Elements and 2025 Work Program:

- Tuesday, June 25, 2024 – Development Code
- Tuesday, July 9, 2024 – Climate
- Tuesday, July 23, 2024 – Economic Development
- Tuesday, October 22, 2024 – Land Use and Development Code
- Tuesday, December 10, 2024 – 2025 Work Program

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Upcoming open houses have been scheduled with the caveat that the dates might change because of staff resources. Each open house will be in person with a separate online component starting the day of the open house and remaining active for two weeks:

- Wednesday, May 29, 2024 – Housing
- Wednesday, July 31, 2024 – Climate
- Wednesday, October 2, 2024 – Development Code

Chair Robbins complimented staff for successfully outreaching to the community to generate nearly 1,000 survey respondents, as well as the information contained in the staff report by including many of the comments that spoke to different graph results.

Manager Medrud acknowledged the support of Planner Smith-Erickson for summarizing survey results. The presentation will be provided to the General Government Committee in April.

Commissioner Tobias reported he would be unable to attend the joint tour with the City Council on April 9, 2024.

Chair Robbins encouraged members to share information with their friends and coworkers about the possibility of applying for a position on the Commission. The Commission currently has three vacant positions.

**NEXT MEETING  
DATE:**

The next meeting is a joint tour with the City Council on April 9, 2024 from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

**Commissioner Tobias moved, seconded by Commissioner Varela, to adjourn the meeting at 8:12 p.m. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.**

Prepared by Valerie L. Gow, Recording Secretary/President  
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