

Housing related questions (Answers written by Loretta Seppanen)

Q: I'm also seeing permanent supportive housing being called out here, which is fantastic, but are there also conversations occurring on how we can provide the appropriate level of funding required to operate permanent supportive housing complexes - do these plans financially allocate a general level of funding based on projections?

A: The community can call for commitments in the Comprehensive Plan for funding streams for permanent supportive housing. Funding is often not a topic in Comp Plan updates. Therefore, if you want that consideration ask county commissioners and city council members to include this type of funding issue in the scope of the housing discussion. Make such requests directly and before the end of summer.

Q: So “market forces” are expected to take care of low-income housing?

A: The HB 1220 calls out three levels of low-income housing and suggests that at the two lowest levels market force are “unlikely” to address the housing need.

The Dept of Commerce summary of Comp Plan requirements from HB 1220 says: “The market is unlikely to provide housing affordable to the lowest income segments, so ... communities should document programs, funding sources and other actions needed to encourage, support, and provide housing affordable to these groups. This could include housing funds, surplus lands, innovative housing types or programs, incentives, fee waivers or other tools.”

The three levels are:

- Low – income just above the middle of Thurston County median income – 50% to 80%
- Very low - income between 30% and 50% of Thurston County median income
- Extremely low income – incomes less than 30% of Thurston County median income

Commerce is expecting market forces to address housing needs for families at the 50% and higher of median income, but unlikely to meet the all the need for the below 50% income segments. As county commissioners and city council member set the “scope” for the Comp Plan work they can include documenting how the jurisdiction can secure the funds and other incentives to support the housing needs for the lowest income levels. Community members can urge elected officials to emphasis this funding/incentive work. That should be done by communicating directly with commissioners and council members this summer.

Q: What policies result in the building of affordable housing units that can serve our local families?

A: During the Comp Plan Update process in 2022-23 the community can participate in a discussion of the strategies it most supports to meet the requirements of HB1220 about planning for housing at various income levels. The cities of Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater worked together to identify the most pressing housing gaps in the area. Just last year, each city developed a plan to address those

specific gaps. The analysis shows the results of discussions on best practices for specific housing needs. The pressing housing needs are:

- **Affordability.** Reduce the cost of housing for low-income and cost-burdened households.
- **Supply.** Increase the inventory of housing for all households.
- **Variety.** Increase the variety of housing sizes and types
- **Seniors.** Increase the stock of housing options needed for aging seniors.
- **Improvements.** Maintain the existing housing stock, including improving energy efficiency and air quality.
- **Stability.** Increase household wealth by providing safe, stable options for rental housing and pathways to homeownership.
- **Supportive Housing.** Increase permanent housing options for people with disabilities and those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.

The action steps are available at:

Olympia:

https://www.olympiawa.gov/government/codes,_plans_standards/housing_action_plan.php

Tumwater: <https://www.ci.tumwater.wa.us/departments/community-development/housing-and-homelessness>

Lacey: <https://cityoflacey.org/affordable-housing/>

Underlying policy and data for planning (Answers written by Loretta Seppanen)

Q: Is there an opportunity to modify the Communitywide Planning Policies (CPP), in advance or concurrently, with this round of local plan updates?

A: Yes, it is possible to update the Communitywide Planning Policies as the Comp Plan Update for 2023-24 begins. Urge your council members and Board of County Commissioners (BoCC) members to bring together the cities, and towns and the county to begin this work the summer or fall. The current policies are at <https://www.trpc.org/DocumentCenter/View/2362>. The Thurston Regional Planning Council facilitates these interjurisdictional work projects. See more information at their website - <https://www.trpc.org/651/Countywide-Planning-Policies>

Q: How is it decided how much increase in population is "absorbed" by each city/county?

A: The question has two parts: 1) Deciding how much population growth now to 2045 for the whole county, and 2) Deciding how much of that growth applies to each city, town, and the associated Urban Growth Areas (UGA) and how much applies to the remaining unincorporated Thurston County.

Total Thurston County Population Projections: The state Office of Financial Management (OFM) forecasts population for the state and for every county in the state. For planning purposes, the Thurston Regional Planning Council uses the median forecast of the three options OFM offers. OFM uses five different models for predicting each county's future population. They average the results of the different models, dropping out any result that is

considerably different than the others. The OFM median forecasts have tracked well historically with the actual population growth in the county.

The OFM forecasts, and population forecasts generally, are based mainly on two factors 1) natural increase, or the difference between births and deaths, and 2) migration, which is the difference between people moving to the region and people moving away from the region. Thurston County birthrates are forecasted to decline very slightly, people are forecasted to live longer, and the population is aging such that the number of deaths is increasing. As a result, the forecast calls for a small “natural increase” every year but at a slower rate than in past decades.

Migration accounts for significantly more of the population increase than natural increase. Migration into the county, primarily from other states but also from other countries, is strongly dependent on the local economy. When unemployment is low, migration tends to be high, and vice versa. Other factors influencing migration are increases and decreases of out of county or out of state at local colleges, the draw of retirement communities, and the draw of somewhat lower housing costs for people working in the more urban areas north of Thurston County. Migration tends to follow a roller-coaster pattern. It is projected to average out to about the same high level as in the past.

Allocating the county population to each city, town, UGA and remainder: The Thurston Regional Planning Council staff, working closely with staff from the cities and the county, use a forecast projection for where additional population will locate within Thurston County based primarily on:

- Where there is a housing market demand based on where jobs are growing, and/or quality of life associated with a given area.
- Buildable land supply
- Availability of infrastructure such as municipal water, sewers, and roads.

The forecast focuses on where additional housing will be created. That housing creation is based on which parcels can be developed and how likely they will be developed. Staff assign every parcel in the county with a status of already developed or likelihood for development as housing or other facilities. Parcels that are predominately critical areas are not likely to be developed. The same applies to protected agricultural and timber land, land in parks, or acreage constrained by conservation easements. The zoning on a land determines how much development can happen on the land. Industrial zoned parcels are not included in the land available analysis, for example. All those factors are considered along with an estimate of how quickly property owners plan to develop land that can be further developed based on surveys of landowners. A small portion of the population lives in group housing (dorms, nursing homes, and correctional facilities, for example). The housing for that 1.6% of the population is calculated separately.

Pierce County (Answer written by Elly Claus-McGahan, Climate Pierce County)

Q: What do you wish was in Pierce County or Tacoma Comp Plans on climate that is not in the plans right now?

A: The Pierce County Sustainability 2030 plan is a GHG reduction plan. It does not include a response to climate impacts. There is work being done to make it more of a regional effort and to include responses to climate impacts, and Climate Pierce County is working to support that. The Pierce Countywide Planning Policies does not include Wildfire as an impact, and yet we've experienced our first significant wildfires. Fire districts are concerned by the lack of policy and awareness of the dangers as we warm up and dry out. Another Climate Pierce County effort together with the Pierce County Conservation District is to prepare for a county wide Community Wildfire Preparedness Plan involving many stakeholders. Both the PC Sustainability plan and the Tacoma Climate Action 2030 plan involve regular updating as data changes. That they are living documents helps, provided we can get a lot of the policies moving forward with funding and action.