

INTRODUCTION

Olympia is a special community. What makes it such a desirable city is a combination of its energetic, creative, and farsighted people and its beautiful northwest setting. Understanding who we are and what we value will help us make wise choices for the future. These choices will help us preserve the reasons why people choose Olympia as a place to live and work. This chapter explores the Olympia culture by providing a snapshot of who we are and the places we live, work, or invest.

OLYMPIA - ITS PEOPLE

Population Profile

Population is a key factor in projecting needs for future parks, arts, recreation programs, and facilities. Population forecasts are crucial to managing growth. The Washington State Legislature compelled cities and counties to manage growth when it passed in 1990 and 1991 later amended a law called the Growth Management Act.

The Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) publishes population information for Olympia, Lacey, Tumwater, and Thurston County. U.S. Census Bureau information is used by TRPC to make population forecasts and reveal other useful information about who we are, such as:

- Population
- Population by Age Group
- Housing
- Income



Volunteers In Parks Participant

Planning Area

The planning area for this study includes all areas within the Olympia City limits; as well as, the regionally agreed upon urban growth areas designated for Olympia. The purpose of including the growth areas is to plan for areas that may eventually become part of the City proper. Olympia’s UGA’s are depicted on the Facilities Plan Map in Chapter Six.

Population Estimates

Today Olympia’s population is estimated at 43,684. Outside the city limits, but within Olympia’s urban growth boundary, reside another 9,405 people. The total combined population is 53,089. Table 3.1 illustrates the population forecast to 2025.

Table 3.1
Population Estimates
Olympia Planning Area

Area	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
City Total	42,514	45,440	48,080	51,030	54,020	56,970
UGA Total	8,583	10,640	12,940	16,470	19,630	22,060
Total	51,097	56,080	61,020	67,500	73,650	79,030

Source: Thurston Regional Planning Council

TABLE SUMMARY

This table reveals:

- The rate of growth inside the city will increase 27% or around six percent on the average every five years.
- In clear contrast, the population for the urban growth area for Olympia is expected to rise near 127% or about twenty five percent every five years.
- Overall, the population of the both the city and urban growth area is projected to grow by over 22,000 people or about 44% over the next 20 years.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PLAN

- Planning for the urban growth area in the future is essential if residents wish to enjoy the same levels of programs and facilities that we enjoy today.
- Increases in population will drive the demand for additional facilities, programs, and services.
- With increasing growth, opportunities to acquire land for parks open space and trails will become increasingly difficult and expensive.
- A significant portion of the new growth in the region is occurring outside the city limits of Olympia. This regional growth will continue to place a demand for City parks and services.

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Population by Age Group

Table 3.2
Population Estimates by Age Group
Olympia Planning Area

Age	1990	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	Percent Change
0-4	2,624	2,986	3,115	3,406	3,791	4,108	38%
5-9	2,690	3,241	3,242	3,353	3,695	4,031	24%
10-12	1,447	1,847	2,022	2,019	2,117	2,292	24%
13-17	2,395	3,079	3,374	3,545	3,639	3,832	24%
18-24	4,169	4,829	5,550	6,046	6,545	6,636	37%
25-34	6,863	7,111	7,212	7,948	8,998	9,779	38%
35-44	6,994	8,423	8,594	8,228	8,353	9,084	8%
45-54	4,135	7,235	8,239	8,970	9,109	8,691	20%
55-64	3,050	4,585	6,104	7,587	8,831	9,654	110%
65+	5,804	7,510	8,488	9,994	12,406	15,392	105%
65-74	3,145	3,665	4,086	5,148	6,919	8,690	137%
75-84	1,973	2,764	3,081	3,251	3,668	4,691	70%
85+	686	1,081	1,321	1,595	1,819	2,012	86%

Source: Thurston Regional Planning Council

TABLE SUMMARY

This table reveals:

- The largest segment of the population in 2000 is the 35-44 age group. In 2020 the largest segment of the population will be the 65+ age group.
- In the future, the 55 and older age group will comprise over 50% of the total population. Today it is only 38%.
- In total numbers, the teen and young adult age groups will not change dramatically.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PLAN

- As the middle age population becomes older, more facilities and programs should be considered for this population segment.
- While it is easy to look at increasing programs for aging populations, there will still be youth and young families who will need arts and recreation programs, facilities and services.
- The City will need to keep abreast of the population changes as different needs occur.
- Over time, park and facilities may need to be changed to reflect changes in the population profile.

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Changes in Family Structure

According to 17th Edition of *The Profile* (October 1999) published by TRPC there are some noteworthy general changes in family life in Thurston County:

- Increasing tendency to postpone marriage;
- Increase in the number of people choosing to live alone;
- Greater numbers of widowed people choosing not to remarry;
- Enhanced self-sufficiency of women;
- Increase in divorce rates;
- Growing number of non-traditional households;
- Decreasing household size in Olympia;
- Decrease in percent of married couples with children;
- Increase in percent of married couples without children;
- Increase in one-person households; and
- Decrease in households with children.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PLAN

- Single parent families will need recreation programs and family-related services to ease the burden of raising children.
- Programs for youth and families will meet the need for social gathering, learning, and caring.
- Innovative programs for adults and seniors will help offset times when individuals are traditionally alone. These times will be during the evenings and weekends for adults and seniors.

“In the coming era, parks and recreation must evolve a new social vision which is based on an understanding of how and why our world is changing.”

-Geoffrey Godbey

Housing

According to the 1999 Profile, Olympia has not been a hotbed of residential activity over the past several years. In Olympia, housing starts in the latter 1990's are about half when compared to the beginning of the decade. The average number of lots created annually in Olympia is about 146. There are fluctuations in both housing starts and subdivision activity in Olympia, reflecting a steady increase over the long term.

While housing activity is slower in Olympia, over the past several years, about thirty five percent of single-family housing starts occurred in the unincorporated area, immediately outside the Olympia city limits.

The Growth Management Act guides how development occurs in both Olympia and Thurston County. Two guiding principles in the act influencing residential development are:

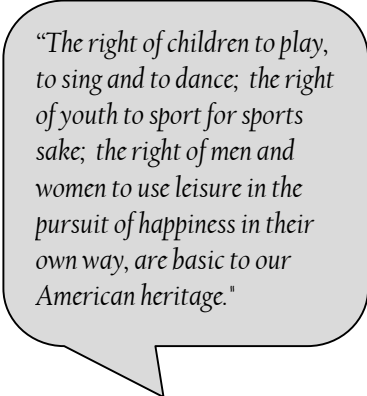
- Focus growth within urban areas

- Reduce urban sprawl by increasing densities within urban growth boundaries

These principles have a direct impact on planning for amenities to support the quality of life for future Olympia residents wishing to live in higher density neighborhoods.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PLAN

- A major funding element for future parks and open space are Park Impact Fees. With fewer housing starts, less impact fee revenue is available to fund the acquisition and development of parkland. However, the need exists to acquire parkland while it is still available.
- While subdivision of land remains steady, housing has slowed. With the steady creation of new lots, it becomes increasingly difficult to aggregate parcels for parks, trails, and open space.
- Higher densities and increasing population will have a dramatic effect on the quality of existing parks if additional parks are not acquired and developed. Increased use of parks will require more maintenance.
- As Olympia continues to build out, acquiring and developing parks in established neighborhoods may face more opposition. It can be difficult for homeowners to share public space near their homes out of fear for personal safety, trespass, and declining property values. These fears likely will grow as more and more people are asked to live in a given amount of space.
- As the city's population increases, there will need to be additional programs and facilities to meet the recreation and leisure needs of Olympia youth, families, and adults. Arts and recreation programs are doses of prevention for many social problems. As the baby boomers make their way into senior years, this age group will need housing, transportation, and recreation services.



"The right of children to play, to sing and to dance; the right of youth to sport for sports sake; the right of men and women to use leisure in the pursuit of happiness in their own way, are basic to our American heritage."

-Harry S. Truman

Income

Thurston County likely will remain an area of economic stability because it is the seat of state government. State government creates a substantial employment base and high wages. Even with such a steady base and other opportunities for economic expansion in the health care and traditional manufacturing sectors, challenges for the local economy will continue to not only support individual well-being but community services such as parks, arts, open space, and schools.

Real per capita income in Thurston County has been relatively flat for the 1990's. While the county has seen an increase from \$21,937 to \$23,607 (six percent between 1990 and 1997), the statewide increase is 11 percent. Household income growth in Thurston County also was less than the statewide average, but higher than surrounding counties. In 1999 the median household income was \$43,408.

The poverty levels in Thurston County are higher than the statewide average. The heaviest rates of poverty are found in the small south

county towns. However, Olympia has a higher concentration of low income than surrounding cities due to concentration of social services that are unavailable in the other cities. Of all the households to watch, those headed by single mothers are of real concern. In Thurston County, 35 percent of all the households headed by single mothers are below the poverty line.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PLAN

- Historically, Olympia residents have not shown a willingness to pay for additional parks and recreation facilities through tax supported bond measures. The June 2000 survey found that 56% would support a bond measure costing them \$50 a year, while an additional 32% said they would support spending \$100 a year. The City will need to fully examine public support before a voter-approved funding proposal is considered. Without a robust expanding economy and more disposable income, families may find it difficult to approve bonds for major new facilities
- Many residents will continue to rely on low cost or free arts and recreation programs to meet their leisure needs.
- Good distribution of parks throughout the community will make it easier for single parent families and children to access safe recreation opportunities in their neighborhoods.
- Olympia residents have a rich history of finding creative solutions to meeting needs. Creative problem solving, partnerships, donations, park impact fees, and grants matched with other general funds and voter approved bonds will be required to expand programs and facilities.



League Volleyball Participants

OLYMPIA - THE PLACE

Those who live here treasure Olympia's location at the southern end of Puget Sound. We value our relationship to our natural environment. We cherish our backyard-forested ravines, wetlands, and evergreen landscape. Our environment is rich in beauty and diversity. Besides our wonderful people, it is the other half of what makes our quality of life so high in Olympia.

Topography

Olympia is a place of many diverse natural features. Long ago movements of ice and receding glaciers heavily influenced the landscape. The Deschutes River and Capitol Lake split our town into east and west. Views of blue saltwater and distant Olympic Mountains and Mt. Rainier on a sunny summer day somehow define our kinship to this community. It is the variety of tree-covered hillsides and meandering ravines with small streams and creeks that give us some separation from each other. Perhaps that is why people love Priest Point Park-it has all the essential elements of a northwest landscape that we love most.

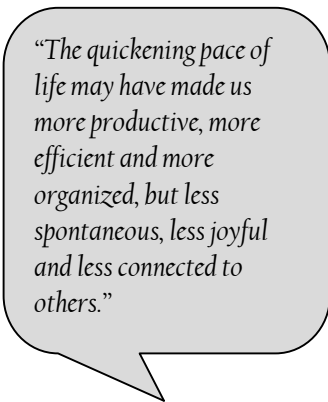
The city has followed a typical pattern of development, with growth starting at the water's edge and moving back away to surrounding upland. According to the 1999 Thurston County Profile, of the land available for residential development in the Olympia area, about 20% is developed, 20% is available for development, and 60% is not developable.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PLAN

- Olympia residents place a high value on preserving their quality of life. They seek to balance preservation of open space with places for natural vegetation and urban wildlife in close proximity to where they live. Olympia's topography comprising steep slopes and wetlands establishes natural boundaries for development activity. With local zoning regulations prohibiting development in certain environmentally sensitive areas, these areas can be preserved.
- With only a limited amount of developable land remaining and steady subdivision activity, the time will be never better than now to acquire those high quality sites for public use and open space preservation.
- Ravines and stream corridors may be poor areas for development, but may be well suited for trails and greenways. A system of greenways can serve both recreation and trail needs. Greenways can link our neighborhoods to various parts of the community. Greenways also can provide areas to preserve urban wildlife habitat.

Vegetation

Olympia's wide variety of landscapes and soils formed by the Ice Age and temperate marine climate treated early residents to thick forests of Douglas Fir, cedar, and hemlock. Ancestors of the Squaxin Island,



“The quickening pace of life may have made us more productive, more efficient and more organized, but less spontaneous, less joyful and less connected to others.”

-Dr. Robert Ornstein
and Dr. David Sobel

A “STATE” OF MIND



Over the past three years, individuals and teams from the City of Olympia have represented the city at State, Regional, and National competitions. In fact, since 2000, city-league men’s basketball teams have claimed the state championship in the Men’s AAA Division, the highest adult division recognized by Parks and Recreation Departments in Washington. Additionally, we have had Olympia youth compete in Major League Baseball’s Diamond Skills competition at the All-Star game in 2001 and 2002. Although Olympia participants have had great success competitively from programs that begin at the local level, the philosophy of our programming is based on sportsmanship and life-long skills. The net result of this approach is safe, fun recreational opportunities that attract skill levels from recreational to competitive.

Nisqually, and Chehalis tribes harvested shellfish and salmon along the shorelines with a backdrop of undisturbed forest.

Northwest evergreen forests have an understory full of a wide variety of native shrubs and plants that provide food and shelter for an equally diverse list of birds and animals. The same can be said for wetlands and streams that provide for an array of amphibians, fish, and other aquatic organisms and microorganisms. As Olympia builds out, these second growth forests, wetlands, and stream corridors become our urban wilderness.

SIGNIFICANCE FOR THE PLAN

- The natural history of Olympia is interpreted in some parks on signs and on information kiosks. School students visit parks with teachers and other groups, such as Stream Team, to learn about the natural world around them.
- People have a natural attraction to wilderness and water that gives them places to seek quiet and rejuvenation at different times of the day, week, year or even periods of their lives.
- Providing environmental education opportunities to learn about nature within walking distance of a school, will give children greater understanding about how precious life and our environment really are.
- We need to better understand how to manage our urban wilderness so that it is safe for people and, at the same time, retains the function and value as habitat.

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ISSUES

Age/Composition

Olympia is aging. Over the next 20 years a third of our population will be over 55. Single parent families are increasing and have special needs. Both these groups will have needs for cultural, recreation and other social services. The plan needs to reflect these changes.

Housing

Olympia is building out steadily. According to recent estimates, only 20% of land for residential building remains. Policies encouraging higher residential densities to help meet land use and transportation goals will mean greater numbers of people living within a geographic area. Continuing land subdivision and development should strengthen our commitment to retaining and acquiring, as needed, the spaces that preserve the character of Olympia that we value.

Income

The ability of Olympia residents to afford a large park system seems uncertain because per capita income has remained steady due to our dependence on state government jobs. Even though the economy is strong today, Thurston County is largely immune to large swings of disposable income up or down because of the government based local economy.

However, even with our steady economy, Olympia residents treasure their community and are creative about funding needed programs and facilities. Partnerships with other jurisdictions or private industry may have to be aggressively pursued if Olympia residents wish to fund major park, arts, and recreation facilities in the future.

While improving the cost recovery on art and recreation programs may seem a meaningful goal, we need to remember those who can't afford to pay for programs. Youth and single parent families of low income may depend more on social agencies and city programs to provide their recreation and leisure needs.



Community Mural Project Participant