

Introduction

Chapter 1

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives a brief overview of the Storm and Surface Water Utility: its service area, infrastructure, core services, customers, and community involvement. It also describes this Storm and Surface Water Plan: its purpose, key elements, planning process, and how the plan is organized.

1.1 Storm & Surface Water Utility

The purpose of Olympia’s Storm and Surface Water Utility is to protect public and environmental health by ensuring that surface water runoff is collected and conveyed to streams, rivers, and Puget Sound with the aim of reducing the frequency and severity of flooding, improving water quality, and protecting, enhancing, and restoring aquatic habitat.

The Utility plans and manages the built and natural storm and surface water system to achieve the Natural Environment and Utilities goals of the Olympia Comprehensive Plan (see Chapter 5).

The Utility operates within the Public Works Department as part of the Water Resources line of business, which includes the Wastewater and Drinking Water utilities (see Chapter 3). It works in cooperation with other City departments, neighboring jurisdictions, state and regional agencies, and the public.

Service Area

The Utility provides storm and surface water services to residents and businesses within Olympia City limits. Properties located in Olympia’s Urban Growth Area (UGA) are served by the Thurston County Stormwater Management Utility. When property is annexed into Olympia, Utility staff works with Thurston County Stormwater staff to transfer utility mapping data, maintenance agreements, and system inspection records for the annexed properties.

Infrastructure

Utility systems and services are designed and managed with the basic understanding that surface water flows through the natural environment. The built infrastructure is designed to channel the water in such a way as to supplement and protect the natural systems, including swales and small drainage courses, streams, rivers, lakes, wetlands, and Puget Sound.

The built stormwater system consists of 160 miles of underground pipe, 7,400 catch basins, 1,400 manholes, 166 flow control structures and 126 stormwater treatment facilities that carry stormwater runoff from roads and hard surfaces to streams, lakes, and Budd Inlet. An additional 20.7 miles of combined sewer pipe, maintained by the Wastewater Utility, conveys stormwater runoff from approximately 330 acres to the LOTT Clean Water Alliance Budd Inlet Treatment Plant.

See Chapter 4 for details on the built and natural infrastructure.

Core Services

The Utility has a total of 21.6 Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staff in Planning and Engineering, Operations, and Environmental Services. Their work is organized into nine core services, listed below and described in Chapter 9:

- Long-Range Planning
- Asset Management
- Technical Review and Support
- Flood Prevention
- Emergency Response
- Pollution Prevention

- Habitat Management
- Capital Facility Program
- Utility Administration and Support

Customers

As of March 2016, the Utility served a total of 15,495 customer accounts in four rate categories as shown in Table 1.1. See Chapter 12 for an explanation of the Utility’s rate categories.

Table 1.1 Utility Customers

Customer Categories	Number of Customers
Residential	14,057
Commercial - Total	1,438
Category 1 (1990 to present)	323
Category 2 (1980 to 1990)	229
Category 3 (Before 1980)	886

Community Participation

Community education is essential to accomplishing the Utility’s goals. Activities for citizens, landowners, and businesses are aimed at increasing awareness and changing behaviors to prevent flooding, and improve water quality and aquatic habitat. In its educational activities, the Utility collaborates with other City departments, utilities, neighboring jurisdictions, and organizations.

Utility customers receive the “Five Things” utility bill insert with each bimonthly utility bill. The City’s most recent citizen satisfaction survey found that citizens ranked the bill insert as the primary way they receive information from the City. The bill insert includes such topics as notices of new stormwater construction projects, upcoming habitat stewardship events, seasonal property management reminders, and opportunities to weigh in on planning projects. The Utility also maintains webpages on the City’s website, olympiawa.gov, and increasingly uses social media for public outreach.

The Utility relies heavily on the Utility Advisory Committee (UAC) to provide input and feedback on the Utility’s planning for capital facility projects, rate adjustments, and storm and surface water policy development. The nine members of the UAC are citizen volunteers appointed by the City Council and serve three year terms, with the possibility of renewal.

1.2 Storm and Surface Water Plan

This Plan is informed by the vision, goals, and policies of Olympia’s Comprehensive Plan, particularly those in the Utilities and Natural Environment chapters. See Appendix 1 for a list of these Comprehensive Plan goals and policies.

Plan Purpose

The *Storm and Surface Water Plan* contains the policy and financial guidance to guide the Utility in operating, maintaining, and improving its built infrastructure and natural elements for the next 10 years.

The Plan explains the challenges the Utility faces, programs and capital projects to address those challenges, and presents the financial implications of the Plan’s recommended program and capital project enhancements. These recommendations will inform the development of the Utility’s annual operating budget and capital facilities program.

Unlike the City’s Drinking Water and Wastewater utilities, which are required by regulation to maintain and regularly update their management plans, there is no planning requirement for the Storm and Surface Water Utility. Nevertheless, given the complexity of its mission, the Utility has developed a management plan to guide its work. The first Storm and Surface Water Plan was adopted in 2003, and it was revised in 2010 to update the Utility’s water quality and aquatic habitat goals. This is the first complete update of the Plan since 2003.

Plan Goals

The following goals will drive the activities of the Utility for the next 10 years. See Chapter 10 for the Objectives and Strategies recommended to accomplish these goals.

- Goal 1 Reduce the frequency and severity of flooding so hazards are eliminated.
- Goal 2 Improve surface water quality.
- Goal 3 Protect, enhance, and restore aquatic habitat functions provided by wetlands, streams, lakes, marine shorelines, and riparian areas.
- Goal 4 Ensure reliable functioning of the built and natural stormwater infrastructure.
- Goal 5 Manage Utility finances responsibly and recover costs equitably.

Key Elements of Plan

Following an analysis of its current state and the development of goals and objectives, the Utility developed the strategies it intends to implement in order to achieve its objectives and key challenges. The Utility proposes two types of strategies –those that represent a continuation of the Utility’s existing core services and those that represent an enhancement.

The Plan recommends enhancements in the following eight of the Utility’s nine core services:

- Long-Range Planning
- Asset Management
- Technical Review and Support
- Flood Prevention
- Emergency Response
- Pollution Prevention
- Habitat Management
- Capital Facilities Program

See Chapter 10 for details on “How” each Enhancement Strategy could be implemented, including cost assumptions and level of priority.

The Utility’s success at resolving flooding problems during the last 15 years has created an opportunity to focus increasingly on water quality improvement, habitat protection, and scheduled replacement of aging pipe systems.

See Chapter 11 for the Utility’s list of capital projects.

Planning Process

This Plan has been prepared by Storm and Surface Water Management Utility staff with financial analysis by Financial Consulting Services Group.

To develop the Plan's recommended programmatic strategies and capital projects, Utility staff analyzed the current state of flooding, water quality and aquatic habitat in Olympia. The data used by staff in its analysis is presented in the Plan.

Official Review

The Utility Advisory Committee serves as the principal public advisor on policy matters for the City's four public utilities: Drinking Water, Wastewater, Storm and Surface Water, and Waste ReSources. Committee members played a key role in reviewing this Plan and making recommendations to clarify and improve it. Throughout the planning process, the Utility provided a total of seven separate Plan briefings to the UAC. In a February 2, 2018 correspondence, the UAC recommended approval of the draft Plan to the City Council.

The Land Use and Environment Committee, a Olympia City Council committee, focuses on the following topics: community development, land use, planning, utilities and environment and sustainability. The draft Plan was reviewed by the Land Use and Environment Committee during two separate committee meetings. On January 18, 2018 the Land Use and Environment Committee recommended forwarding the draft Plan to the full Council for consideration. Following a March 6, 2018 Olympia City Council study session, a public hearing on the draft Plan was held on April 10, 2018.

Public Review

In May 2016, an online survey was conducted to collect feedback about Utility priorities. The survey's information video was reviewed 1,310 times and 196 responses were received. Key responses include:

- In ranking four stated priorities for the Utility, the survey responses reflected the following priority order:
 - Protect groundwater quality
 - Improve surface water quality
 - Maintain or improve aquatic habitat
 - Reduce flooding
- When asked to what extent you would support a monthly rate increase, 19 percent of respondents did not support a rate increase, while 20 percent supported a \$1 a month increase, 17 percent supported a \$2 a month increase, 20 percent supported a \$3 a month increase, and 23 percent supported greater than \$3 a month increase.
- 74 percent of respondents supported giving more emphasis to correcting and preventing water pollution.
- 66 percent of respondents supported giving more emphasis to protecting and enhancing fish and wildlife habitat in local streams.
- 36 percent of respondents supported giving more emphasis to correcting and preventing problems arising from minor flooding.

In July 2016, a focus group consisting of community members and representatives of environmental organizations met with Utility staff to give feedback on the aquatic habitat components of this Plan.

The strategies proposed for incorporation into this Plan were presented for review and comment at a community open house in August 2016.

Plan Organization

The Plan is generally organized in three parts, describing the What, Why, and How of the Plan.

What

The first four chapters describe the Plan, the natural and historical context for planning, the Utility's responsibilities, and the natural and built infrastructure for managing storm and surface water.

- **Chapter 1** gives a brief introduction to the Utility's purpose, service area, infrastructure, core services and customers; and Plan purpose, planning process, and organization.
- **Chapter 2** provides the context for the Plan by describing the physical setting of the service area, and its population and land use; and tracing the history of stormwater management in Olympia and the Utility's evolving priorities.
- **Chapter 3** outlines the Utility's responsibilities, internal organization, and relationships with other agencies and jurisdictions.
- **Chapter 4** is an overview of the built and natural infrastructure that, in combination, form the Utility's stormwater system.

Why

Chapters 5 through 8 describe the reasons motivating the need for this Plan and its direction, including the regulatory environment and the challenges of flood mitigation, improving water quality, and protecting aquatic habitat.

- **Chapter 5** outlines the complex set of laws and regulations which increasingly define the Utility's operations.
- **Chapter 6** reports on the significant reductions in the severity and frequency of flooding, impacts of flooding, the role of the Utility in enforcing requirements of the *Drainage Design and Erosion Control Manual*, and remaining challenges the Utility faces in mitigating flooding impacts.
- **Chapter 7** describes activities that impact water quality, the current quality of Olympia's water bodies, the Utility's role in implementing Clean Water Act regulations, and remaining challenges the Utility faces in improving surface water quality.
- **Chapter 8** details existing conditions of Olympia's aquatic environment and habitat, the Utility's role in implementing and supporting habitat stewardship efforts, and remaining challenges the Utility faces in protecting and enhancing aquatic habitat.

How

The last four chapters describe the Utility's recommended approach, including its funding strategy, to address a changing regulatory environment and the challenges of flood mitigation, improving water quality, and protecting aquatic habitat.

- **Chapter 9** explains in detail how the Utility is addressing challenges of flood mitigation, pollution prevention, and habitat protection through its nine Core Services.
- **Chapter 10** details the strategies proposed, in response to current challenges, to effectively address Utility goals and objectives during the next 10 years.
- **Chapter 11** presents the Utility's capital projects planned for implementation between 2017 and 2036.
- **Chapter 12** describes the Utility's multi-year strategy for ensuring the revenue required to meet total operating and capital costs of providing storm and surface water management services to its customers.