

Process and Engagement

Sustainable Thurston is a community conversation to develop a vision for a vibrant, healthy, and resilient future, and to identify the actions and responsibilities to achieve it.

The Sustainable Thurston Story

The seeds of the Sustainable Thurston project were planted during the Thurston Regional Planning Council's 2009 policymaker retreat. Members — representing local cities and towns, Thurston County, tribes, school districts, fire districts, the Economic Development Council, The Evergreen State College, Intercity Transit, and the Thurston Public Utility District — expressed frustration



with the lack of opportunity and resources needed to address several key issues that crossed jurisdictional boundaries. They identified four priority areas:

- Coordinate land-use planning better;
- Integrate climate change-related issues into local plans and decisions;
- Understand and address issues related to water infrastructure, water quality, and quantity; and,
- Increase efficiency in providing government services.

In 2010, 29 public and private jurisdictions and organizations from throughout the Thurston Region applied for a federal Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Partnership planning grant to develop a regional plan for sustainable development. The partners committed to working together to address the tough issues facing our community. They understood this represented an unprecedented opportunity for a truly regional communitywide conversation about a full range of quality-of-life topics.

The Thurston Region was one of 45 across the country to receive funding under this grant program. So began Sustainable Thurston — a three-year community conversation to lay out the vision, goals, and actions of a long-range plan for a more sustainable future.

Community Engagement

From the outset, public views strongly influenced the project. The topics explored by the panels and workgroups supplied one of the most visible examples of this influence. The original application identified eight subject areas:

- Sustainable Economy;
- Housing;
- Land Use, Transportation, and Climate Change;
- Health and Human Services;
- Public Safety;
- Schools and Transportation; and,
- Water Infrastructure.

Based on feedback from community members and stakeholders, we added three other topic areas:

- Local Food Systems;
- Energy; and,
- Solid Waste.

In summer and fall of 2011, 180 individuals representing 104 organizations, joined panels to develop a series of white papers based on the 11 topic areas. The panels articulated community strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.

To set a baseline, Washington State University (WSU) conducted a general outreach survey of 1,200 people, asking them to identify community values, ways people receive information, and overall feelings about community participation. An education and outreach panel developed a public-engagement plan, laying out the course for the remainder of the project.

To engage residents, in spring 2012, the planning team mailed a postcard to every household in the region and instituted a series of radio spots, local newspaper stories, and videos on local television. Sustainable Thurston partners reached out to their individual contacts/communities through notices on their websites and in newsletters and e-mails. The planning team placed posters on storefronts. These efforts called for action encouraging people to attend the workshops held throughout the region and to send in their comments.

More than 400 people, including business owners, students, seniors, community leaders, and people new to public process, shared their hopes, fears, and bright ideas for the future in small group discussions or through letters and e-mails. The planning team also attended events throughout the region, working booths, and connecting with residents. All in all, thousands of people gave input in the early stages of the project. We distilled all that the communities and panels had to say into the Plan's Foundational Principles & Policies.

In early 2013, the partners sought a second round of public engagement on the work produced by the Sustainable Thurston Task Force, panels, and planning team. In a series of workshops and online



"The Sustainable Thurston project makes me want to be involved and stay involved. It connects me to the community. I have kids; I want them to grow up understanding the importance of this."

— Ruth Chapman,
Providence St. Peter
Hospital nurse and
Thurston Region resident

engagement efforts, we rolled out the vision, goals, actions, as well as three land-use scenarios. The public spoke clearly and directly: **“BE BOLDER and CREATE MORE SPECIFIC GOALS AND TARGETS.”**

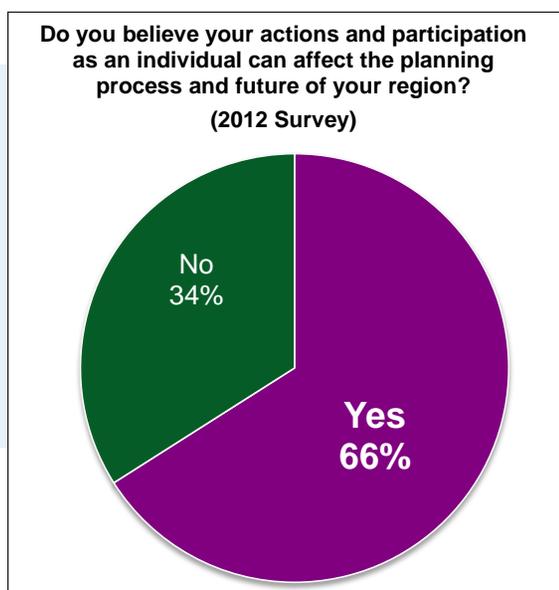
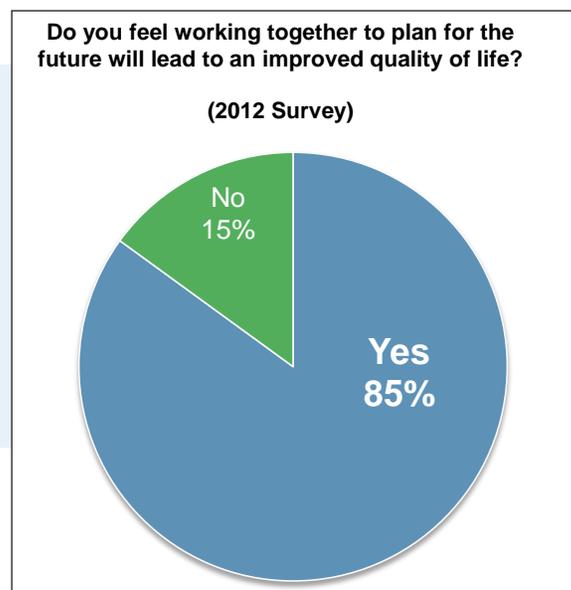
The Task Force responded with a bold vision statement, a land-use vision, and 12 priority goals and targets.

In fall of 2013, TRPC released the draft Plan for public comment. Briefings were held in every local city hall and the County Courthouse, reaching another 300 people in person. Other people participated online, took a survey, or sent in comments, helping to shape the final plan.

Throughout the project, local policymakers and stakeholders engaged in a series of large forums, brainstorming sessions, city council and planning commission briefings, and twice-monthly Task Force meetings.

Targeted Outreach

Partners such as the Thurston County Housing Authority, Community Action Council, Family Support Center, and Thurston County Food Bank helped the project team reach individuals who do not typically participate in planning processes with a “Basic Needs Survey.” The planning team conducted interviews with local tribes and organizations representing low-income residents and minorities to inform the



What did people say in the 2012 Sustainable Thurston Survey?

“A group of people discussing real issues is better than one person deciding for everyone”

“More minds working is great”

Regional Housing Plan. The Sustainable Thurston partners wanted to hear the voices of youth, so teachers encouraged students to attend workshops. The Economic Development Council held a Sustainable Economy luncheon highlighting the Sustainable Economic strategy for more than 250 business people, and the Northwest EcoBuilding Guild designed a series of workshops for the development community around the Sustainable Thurston project. Other community organizations wrote articles, contributed to blogs, and sent out newsletters encouraging residents to participate in the project.

Why such attention to gathering public input? As a core value, our community believes that working together as a region will improve quality of life. In Washington State University's 1,200-person survey, conducted at the beginning of the project, 85 percent of the respondents noted their belief in the value of working together. Around 66 percent said that their voice counts in our community.

Next Steps Already Underway

During the course of the three-year project, opportunities for next steps emerged. This Plan notes these as "Sustainability Actions Already Underway." Many grew from the relationships developed during the first years of the project, when inspired community leaders took next steps, such as the Thurston Thrives, South Thurston Economic Development Initiative, Entrepreneurial Center, Brewery District, Martin Way, and Woodland District planning projects.

It is Just the Beginning

Sustainable Thurston began a communitywide discussion that led to a vision: "*... We will view every decision at the local and regional level through the sustainability lens — thinking in generations, not years. The region will work together toward common goals, putting people at the center of our thinking, and inspire individual responsibility and leadership in our residents.*"

Successful action toward that vision will depend on motivated, inspired, and informed leaders and residents who continue to expand the engagement and partnerships that began with Sustainable Thurston. A sustainable future — a healthy environment, vital society and robust economy — depends on it.

We.

The use of "we" in this Plan is intentional. "We" refers to the people who will make the vision happen, including residents, business owners, and community leaders. "We" represents local people taking local actions to increase the quality of life in our community.

Community Outreach By The Numbers

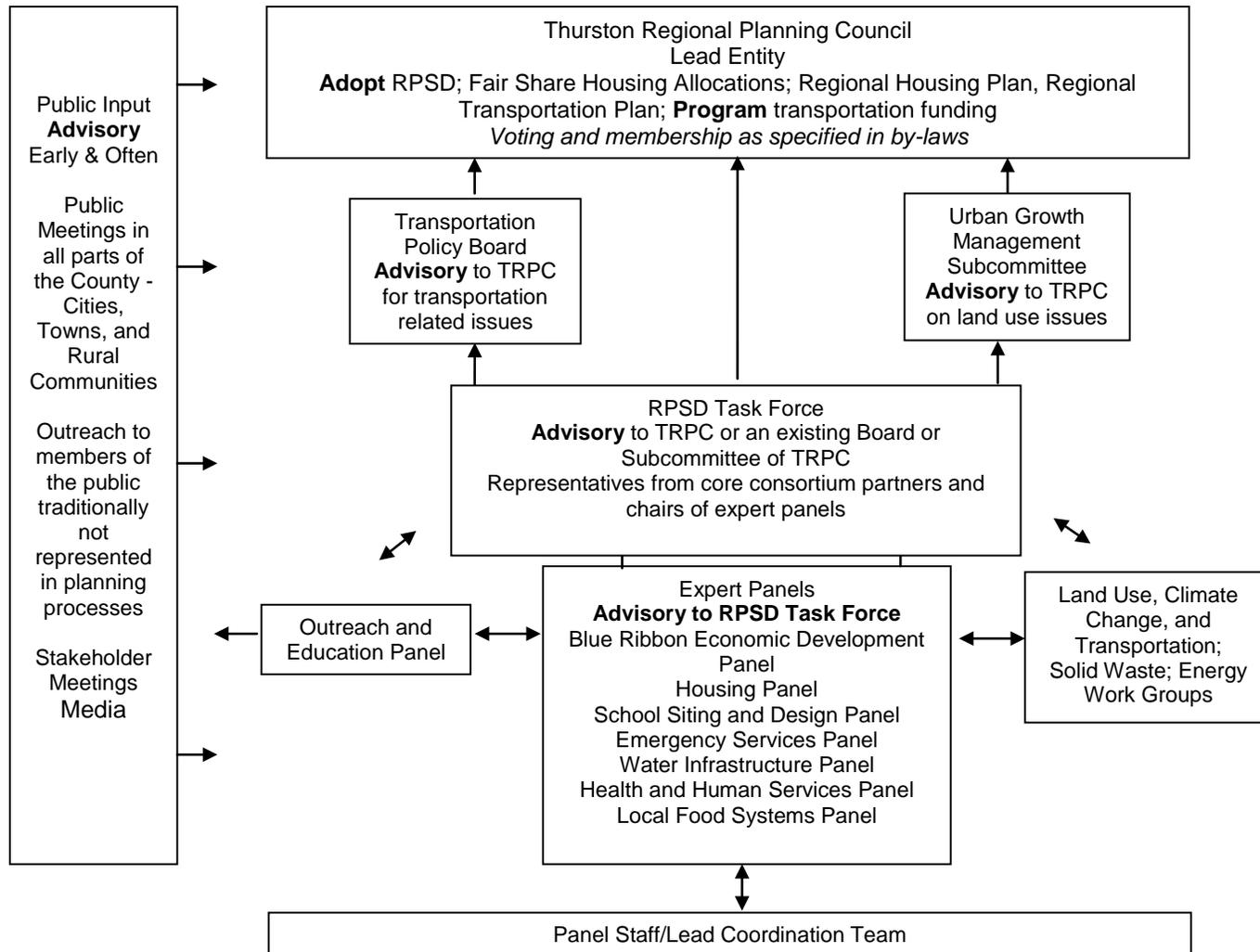
- 29 partners signed a Memorandum of Understanding
- 180 people participated on 12 topic panels
- 23 Sustainable Thurston Task Force members held 38 discussion sessions
- 104 jurisdictions, agencies, organizations, and community groups represented at Task Force and panel meetings
- 9 Workshops held around Thurston County, with 400 public participants
- 3 Regional forums
- 250 Business leaders attended the Sustainable Economic Futures luncheon
- 1,500 people visited www.EngageSustainableThurston.org almost 15,000 page views and 140 ideas submitted
- 55,000+ page views of the project website
- 8,000+ documents downloaded
- 12 briefings reaching every city/town - 300 people reached
- 185 people took a survey on the draft Plan
- 1,800+ residents responded to two Sustainable Thurston surveys about priority issues, concerns and values
- 1,000 low-income residents responded to a Sustainable Thurston survey about meeting minimum basic daily needs

Community Outreach By The Numbers

- 110,000 postcards sent to homes and businesses countywide
- 1,650 unique email addresses regularly contacted on Sustainable Thurston email list
- 8 libraries targeted with posters and flyers
- 8 city/county halls targeted with posters and flyers
- 215 Employee Transportation Coordinator worksites targeted with posters and flyers
- 3 radio advertisements played 640 times
- 4 on-air radio interviews with TRPC staff
- 5 tabled events
- 2 newspaper editorials in The Olympian
- 5 news articles from regional newspapers and newsletters
- 6 videos produced with 2,400 views on YouTube.com
- 225 people and associated networks reached on Facebook and Twitter



Process and Product: An Organizational Chart for Development and Adoption of the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development





Thurston Regional Planning Council members participating in 2013 Council Retreat.