

# Fall Public Outreach & Comment Summary



**October 30, 2020 – Steering Committee Review**

## Overview

The public review period for the draft *Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan* ran from Thursday, September 17, through Friday, October 16, 2020. During that period, members of the public had many opportunities to learn about and comment on the draft plan. This document summarizes public outreach methods, comments received, and proposed responses.

- Online Open House & Feedback Survey
- Virtual Community Meetings
- Comments Received
- Other Outreach Methods
- Major Themes in Public Comments

For full text of public comments, see the attachments.

## Online Open House & Feedback Survey

Cascadia Consulting Group created an interactive online open house at [www.ThurstonClimatePlan.com](http://www.ThurstonClimatePlan.com) where members of the public could explore an overview of the plan contents and share their feedback and priorities through an online survey. The online open house was available 24 hours a day during the public review period.

### Online Open House

- **Number of Users:** 656
- **Number of Sessions:** 986
- **Typical Time Spent per Session:** 4.5 minutes

### “Share Your Feedback” Survey

- **Number of Responses:** 86
- **Completion Rate:** 74%
- **Typical Time Spent:** 7 minutes

### General Plan Support and Effectiveness

- **A majority (84%) of respondents indicated that their jurisdiction should adopt this plan** with 60% of respondents stating that it should be adopted with few or no changes. 24% of respondents favored adoption with moderate changes.

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- Respondents believe the plan **presents a clear path for meeting regional climate goals and provides a roadmap for elected government and staff.**
- When asked to rate how well the draft TCMP does at the following (1 being “Not at all” and 5 being “Very well”).<sup>1</sup>
  - The majority (58%) of respondents indicated the draft TCMP **presents a clear path for meeting regional climate goals.**
  - The majority (60%) of respondents indicated the draft TCMP **provides a roadmap for elected officials and local government staff.**
  - The majority (51%) of respondents indicated the draft TCMP **motivates and guides individuals to take action on climate change.**

Overarching Positive Feedback on Plan

When asked, “What do you like most about the draft Plan?”, common responses included:

- It is clear, comprehensive, and easy to follow.
- It focuses on the major sources of emissions and the wedge provides a clear breakdown the reductions from each strategy.
- It is a good starting place.
- It engages with all jurisdictions while offering opportunities for public input.

Top Priority Strategy Responses

This section summarizes feedback survey results relevant to individual plan strategies that are a **priority** for addressing climate change in Thurston County.

**Agriculture and Forests, Buildings and Energy, and Transportation and Land Use** were the focus areas with the strongest support (see table below for the **top five** strategies).

Strategy	% of Responses	Responses
<b>Preserve trees and manage forests to sequester carbon.</b>	38%	28
<b>Reduce energy use in existing buildings.</b>	35%	26
<b>Support increased density and more efficient transportation systems.</b>	30%	22
<b>Reduce energy use in new construction or redevelopment.</b>	28%	21
<b>Increase the production and use of local renewable energy.</b>	26%	19

Low Priority Strategy Responses

This section summarizes feedback survey results related to strategies that **should not** be a priority for addressing climate change in Thurston County.

**A majority (70%) of respondents indicated that all strategies are a priority.** The strategies with the lowest support were spread across all focus areas (see table below for the list of lowest priority strategies, but note the low number of responses).

<sup>1</sup> Note that results highlight responses which rated statements with a 4 or 5.

Strategy	% of Responses	Responses (n=60)
<b>All the strategies are a priority.</b>	70%	42
<b>Increase adoption of electric vehicles.</b>	12%	7
<b>Reduce energy use in existing buildings.</b>	10%	6
<b>Support increased density and more efficient transportation systems.</b>	10%	6
<b>Practice agriculture that reduces emissions and stores carbon.</b>	10%	6
<b>Advocate for climate-mitigating state and federal policy.</b>	10%	6

### Individual Climate Actions

This section summarizes feedback survey results relevant to which individual climate actions respondents are “already doing”, “interested in doing”, and “not interested in doing”

A majority of respondents (75% or more) indicated that they are already incorporating individual climate actions or were interested in taking climate action. Specifically, respondents indicated that they are already taking action relevant to **sustainable transportation, energy efficiency, responsible consumption, and low-carbon diets**. Respondents indicated the highest interest in **purchasing an electric vehicle, driving a more efficient vehicle, and/or investing in solar panels**.

Action	Already Doing	Interested in Doing
<b>Save energy at home and work by turning off lights and water, using energy-saving light bulbs, etc.</b>	94%	5%
<b>Regularly recycle and/or compost</b>	92%	6%
<b>Use reusable and compostable containers and beverage Bottles, or bring my own</b>	77%	13%
<b>Eat more fish, poultry, and vegetable protein</b>	77%	11%
<b>Drive less by combining trips, carpooling, taking public transit, walking, or riding a bike.</b>	75%	14%
<b>Shop at local businesses, in bulk, and/or at re-use or thrift stores</b>	73%	19%
<b>Invest in home or business energy improvements, such as installing insulation, efficient windows, and/or appliances</b>	62%	34%
<b>Drive an efficient vehicle that gets more than 30 mpg in the city</b>	60%	33%
<b>Participate in a renewable energy program through my local utility</b>	47%	28%
<b>Purchase or drive an electric vehicle</b>	26%	55%
<b>Invest in solar panels for my home or business</b>	13%	62%

The actions with the least amount of interest were related to **renewable energy and electric vehicle investments**. See the table below for a breakdown of the actions community members expressed they were not interested in doing.

Action	Not Interested in Doing
Participate in a renewable energy program through my local utility	25%
Invest in solar panels for my home or business	25%
Purchase or drive an electric vehicle	19%
Eat more fish, poultry, and vegetable protein	11%
Drive less by combining trips, carpooling, taking public transit, walking, or riding a bike	11%
Use reusable and compostable containers and beverage bottles, or bring my own	10%
Shop at local businesses, in bulk, and/or at re-use or thrift stores	8%
Drive an efficient vehicle that gets more than 30 mpg in the city.	7%
Invest in home or business energy improvements, such as installing insulation, efficient windows, and/or appliances	3%
Regularly recycle and/or compost	2%
Save energy at home and work by turning off lights and water, using energy-saving light bulbs, etc.	2%

## Respondent Demographics<sup>2</sup>

Demographics underlined and italicized indicate the top selection or top three selections for each question.

- **Location:**
  - Olympia (49%)
  - Lacey (16%)
  - Thurston County (unincorporated) (16%)
  - Tumwater (8%)
  - Prefer not to say (5%)
  - Other (3%)
  - Yelm (2%)
  - Bucoda, Rainier, Rochester, Tenino, I do not live/work in the Thurston County region (0%)
- **Gender:**
  - Male (42%)
  - Female (55%)
  - Other (3%)
- **Age:**
  - 0-14 (3%)
  - 15-24 (3%)
  - 25-39 (20%)
  - 40-54 (25%)
  - 55-69 (25%)
  - 70-84 (23%)
  - 85 or older (1%)
- **Race/Ethnicity:**
  - Black/African American (2%)
  - American Indian & Alaska Native (7%)
  - Asian (2%)
  - Hispanic or Latino (0%)
  - Native Hawaiian & Pacific Islander (0%)
  - White (89%)

<sup>2</sup> Note that only about 60-70% of respondents answered the demographic questions.

- Other (5%)
- **Income:**
  - Less than \$14,999 (4%)
  - \$15,000 - \$24,999 (0%)
  - \$25,000 - \$34,999 (4%)
  - \$35,000 - \$49,999 (7%)
  - \$50,000 - \$74,999 (19%)
  - \$75,000 - \$99,999 (26%)
  - \$100,000 or more (31%)
  - I don't know (9%)

## Virtual Community Meetings

TRPC hosted two virtual Community Meetings during the public review period, via the webinar function of Zoom, on October 5<sup>th</sup> and October 14<sup>th</sup>. Each meeting included an overview presentation on the planning process and draft plan, a panel discussion among people involved in developing the plan, and an opportunity for attendees to ask questions of the panelists and staff.

- Number of registrants: 144
- Number of attendees: 103
- Number of questions asked/comments provided during virtual meetings: 79

Both meetings were recorded and links to the videos are posted on the project website. Staff followed up via email with attendees whose questions were not addressed during the meetings due to time limitations.

## Public Comments

Members of the public were invited to send comments on the draft plan to the dedicated email [climate@trpc.org](mailto:climate@trpc.org). The totals listed below also include comments on the draft plan that were sent to project partners (such as the Olympia City Council) that were forwarded to TRPC staff. Duplicate comments that were collected from multiple sources are counted as a single comment.

Over the course of the public review period for the draft plan, TRPC received 159 unique email and letter comments from 141 individuals. Of the 141 individuals who sent emails or letters between September 17<sup>th</sup> and October 16<sup>th</sup>, 128 were first-time commenters on the climate mitigation planning process with no previous engagements recorded.

Of the 159 comments received, the majority (113 comments or 71%) expressed support for either implementing climate mitigation strategies or for the adoption of the draft plan itself. Major themes in these comments are integrated into the section below. While many submissions provided unique observations and recommendations, there was also evidence of coordinated mailing campaigns.

## High School Students

Olympia High School's Climate Action Club participated in and encouraged students to voice their support for the *Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan*. In all, 48 of the 141 commenters were Olympia High School students. These comments focused on affirming the existence of global climate change and the role of human contributions to increasing greenhouse gas emissions. Comments encouraged full

adoption by participating jurisdictions and highlighted the need for timely, focused climate action. This position was largely centered on themes of elevating social equity and environmental justice concerns.

## Realtors

About two dozen messages were sent by self-identified relators and brokers working within the region. Comments were provided by a form letter either in whole or with slight changes. While commenters expressed support for taking climate change seriously, many stated skepticism or opposition to plan adoption and implementation schedules due to a lack of in-person public participation, unspecified cost implications, or increased disparity in social equity outcomes. Focused feedback pertained to actions that eliminated natural gas hookups in new buildings and promoted electric appliances (B1.1 and B.2).

## Thurston Climate Action Team

The Thurston Climate Action Team has been a partnering organization during the development of the climate mitigation plan draft. TCAT members participated in the Advisory Workgroup and sector focus groups that help to assemble the communitywide actions list as well as provide technical support on subjects discussed by the project team and Steering Committee. In addition to helping guide action outcomes and language, TCAT also engaged in education and outreach to mobilize community participation in priority setting. Specific feedback focused on the role of individual trees and the urban canopy to provide carbon sequestration mechanisms needed to reach our emission reduction goals.

## Other Methods

Over the course of the public review period, the project team used a variety of methods to promote the draft plan and public review opportunities.

- **Website:** Information about the draft plan and online events was available on the project website. Visits to the website increased substantially during the review period, with the main drivers being search engine sites (Google, Bing), the online open house (ThurstonClimatePlan.com), and social media (Facebook).
  - Unique visitors, main page, Sept 17-Oct 16 = 1,161
  - Unique visitors, main page, Aug 18-Sept 16 = 237
- **Traditional media:** TRPC issued a press release with information on the public review period on September 17, 2020, and posted information about the community meetings on events calendars and notice boards for the following media outlets: *The Olympian*, *Thurston Talk*, *Nisqually Valley News*, *Centralia Chronicle*, KAOS Radio, KGY Radio, and KXXO Radio.
- **Social media:** TRPC promoted the public review period via Facebook (6 posts, 1 paid) and Twitter (1 post). The total reach of those posts was to 6,130 users between the two platforms, with 245 engagements (likes, shares, comments).
- **Contacts, Newsletters, Listservs:** Staff distributed information about the public review period to a wide variety of community contacts, including liaisons and interview subjects involved in earlier phases of the plan, contact lists and newsletter outlets. These included three “News Flash” updates to the 674 contacts on the climate action notification list managed by TRPC. Other contact lists that sent email notices included City of Olympia News Update, Thurston County Community Planning, South Thurston Economic Development Initiative (STEDI), Commute Trip Reduction (CTR) and Employee Transportation Coordinator (ETC) contacts,

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Intercity Transit, Thurston ECO Network, Emergency Management Coordinators, South Puget Sound Community College, Timberland Library System contacts, and others.

- **Community presentations:** Staff made presentations on the draft plan to community groups at their request throughout September and mid-October, including the Thurston Thrives Coordinating Council, Transportation Policy Board, Nisqually River Council, Thurston County Solid Waste Advisory Committee, and Panorama Green Team.

## Major Themes in Public Comment

### Overarching Themes

A review of public comment on the draft *Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan* revealed the following overarching themes. In the feedback survey for the online open house, these themes arose in responses to the questions “What would you change about the Draft Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan?”, “Should your jurisdiction adopt this plan?”, and “What would need to change for you to support the plan’s adoption?” Themes are ordered in order of frequency. Staff have identified potential ways to respond to feedback in the final version of the plan or in future work.

Theme	Feedback	Recommended Response
<b>Costs</b>	<p>Respondents want to understand the cost of actions and expected tax changes from plan implementation (especially low-income).</p> <p>Additionally, respondents expressed confusion on what the funding mechanisms will be for the plan.</p>	<p>Detailed cost estimates for specific actions – and for climate mitigation action as a whole – will depend on how jurisdictions decide to proceed in implementation.</p> <p>Include general information on costs and potential funding sources in each focus area section AND/OR create additional discussion in Chapter 6 – Implementation, as well as in Executive Summary.</p> <p>Plan could highlight actions that emphasize rebates, tax incentives, and/or savings. However, these actions will have different costs and benefits to different audiences.</p> <p>Costs and benefits for a subset of priority actions will be considered in a supplemental analysis that will be completed by mid-2021.</p>
<b>Broadness &amp; Action Specificity</b>	<p>Respondents indicated that the plan felt too “broad” and “vague” to understand the overall impact.</p> <p>Some respondents requested more specificity to the actions in the plan and would like to see more decisive language used.</p>	<p>Review actions and implementation section to ensure “levers” and implementation considerations (e.g., timeline, lead departments) are clear.</p> <p>More detailed information about specific actions will be developed as the project partners move into implementation.</p>



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Theme	Feedback	Recommended Response
<b>Equity &amp; Environmental Justice</b>	<p>Respondents indicated that the plan needed to be more explicit in how our climate mitigation actions impact and consider equity. Respondents expressed an interest in how actions were assessed through an equity lens.</p>	<p>Include a specific equity chapter or sub-heading towards the beginning of the plan.</p> <p>Equity was assessed as one of the potential co-benefits of actions, however, project partners agreed it will be more meaningful to consider equity impacts in implementation. Costs and benefits for a subset of priority actions, and the distribution of those costs and benefits, will be considered in a supplemental analysis that will be completed by mid-2021.</p>
<b>Goals &amp; Targets</b>	<p>Respondents indicated their interest in seeing more aggressive actions and targets. Some respondents were interested in carbon neutrality targets.</p> <p>Additionally, some respondents expressed interest in receiving progress reports on goals/targets (i.e., quarterly, or annually).</p>	<p>Present carbon neutrality as a potential future or “inspirational” target in the plan. Emphasize that target can be updated over time to reflect the science.</p>
<b>Outreach and Engagement</b>	<p>Respondents indicated that they would like to receive information on plan progress and would like to know what effort will be made to educate and provide outreach to the community.</p>	<p>Ensure that information about progress on the plan be made publicly available through a longer-term monitoring program and explicitly touch on achieved emissions reductions.</p> <p>Include a call-out in the plan that presents methods to share progress, educate, and get feedback.</p>
<b>Adoption and Implementation</b>	<p>Respondents indicated interest in both the timeframe for jurisdiction adoption as well as how mitigation actions will be implemented. This included legal authority, community participation, and costs.</p>	<p>Emphasize that the plan is a “guiding framework” for regional climate action and does not legally bind jurisdictions to desired goals or outcomes. Jurisdictions will take separate communitywide action but will coordinate efforts to achieve regional climate change mitigation.</p>

## Sector-Specific Feedback

Respondents also provided additional, specific comments regarding revisions to certain plan components. Key themes from individual sector response are summarized below.

### Agriculture and Forests

Theme	Feedback	Recommended Action
<b>Tree Protection</b>	Strong support for increasing tree canopy and enforcing tree protection standards. Many respondents were concerned about the recent reduction in tree canopy and the plan’s strategy to prevent further reduction.	<p>While the plan discusses the benefits of both maintaining current tree canopy and new, the scenario analysis only calculated the benefit of new trees in offsetting local emissions, using a very rough estimate. We do not currently have good baseline information on the role of existing trees in providing carbon sequestration, and the scenario analysis does not provide the technical basis for a recommendation to reduce loss of trees or forested land to meet the targets. This is information that could be developed as part of Actions A5.1, A6.9, and also Action G4.3.</p> <p>Request consultant to add information clarifying the role of tree protection in revised scenario analysis.</p> <p>Could consider adding additional actions around tree preservation that ranked lower in the multicriteria analysis.</p>
<b>Agriculture and Farms Role in Mitigation</b>	Many respondents showed interest in agriculture’s role in mitigation. Some respondents asked to see more actions on how agriculture practices and farmland preservation support mitigation.	<p>Existing strategies in the plan include: “Support agricultural practices that sequester carbon” strategies.</p> <p>Could consider adding action(s) that specifically address farmlands that ranked lower in the multicriteria analysis.</p>

Theme	Feedback	Recommended Action
<b>Wildfires &amp; Smoke</b>	Respondents indicated concerns over perceived increases in wildfire occurrences and poor air quality impacts from smoke. These events pose an increased threat to those with respiratory complications.	Emphasize that while wildfires are a natural process, we can reduce wildfire occurrence by promoting healthy forest and agricultural land. Promote growth management and reduce human activity outside developed areas.

## Buildings and Energy

Theme	Feedback	Recommended Action
<b>Local Renewables</b>	<p>Strong support for local production of renewables, rather than purchased from elsewhere. High support for electrification and energy-related incentives.</p> <p>Some respondents expressed concern about PSE's current fuel mix and the lack of access to publicly owned renewables.</p>	Could add action(s) that specifically address community-owned renewable energy, which ranked lower in the multicriteria analysis.
<b>Energy Efficiency</b>	Strong support for strategies and actions that increase energy efficiency, specifically within the built environment and transportation sectors.	Talk earlier about how actions in high-impact sectors like Buildings and Energy, Transportation and Land Use are prioritized based on their greenhouse gas reduction potential resulting from increased energy efficiency.
<b>Natural Gas Ban</b>	Respondents had mixed-support for natural gas bans and fuel-switching retrofits. Some showed strong support and understood the need for switching, while others disagreed with mandatory requirements, expressing concern on costs and exceptions (e.g., restaurants, water heaters).	Discuss the benefits and timing of fuel switching within the overall framework. The plan lays out a broad framework for climate mitigation work over the next 30 years, based on our best understanding today. Not all actions assessed for the plan will be implemented in Year 1; some are sequential. Actions focused on fuel switching are likely to be timed to kick in when our electrical grid uses cleaner sources of energy than it does currently. Local jurisdictions are at this point only interested in supporting a ban on new natural gas

Theme	Feedback	Recommended Action
		connections as part of a state-wide legislative change to the Building Code, and only after the effectiveness of voluntary measures and current requirements in the Building Code have been evaluated and shown to fall short of achieving the emission reduction targets.

## Transportation and Land Use

Theme	Feedback	Recommended Action
<b>Public Transit</b>	Strong support for expanded public transit service and infrastructure. Some respondents expressed interest in seeing actions related to rail transit.	Covered in “Increase the use of public transit” strategy.  Could add action on the consideration of regional rail transit, which ranked lower in the multicriteria analysis.
<b>Upstream Impacts of Electric Vehicles (EV)</b>	Respondents expressed support for EV adoption. However, those who opposed EV actions expressed concern over the upstream social and environmental impacts of EVs (e.g., lithium mining, battery production).	Add description of upstream considerations of EV purchasing. Plan could include a call-out highlighting the impacts of fossil-fuel powered travel compared to electric-based transportation.
<b>Parking</b>	Some support for reducing free on-street parking and adding preferential parking – concern on the equity and cost impacts from this.	Clarify equity and costs considerations within action description. This can also be considered as part of the supplemental costs and benefits assessment to be completed by mid-2021.
<b>Biking</b>	Respondents showed support for more bike related actions, with an emphasis on bike infrastructure and safety.	None – “Increase use of active forms of travel (such as, bicycling, walking)” strategy covers this.

## Attachments

- Public comment matrix, Comment Period – September 17-October 16
- Public Comments Received, September 17-October 16, 2020