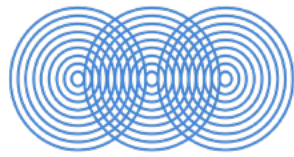


INFLUENCING POLICY AND PLANNING:

A Civic Engagement Toolkit



**Puyallup Watershed
Initiative**

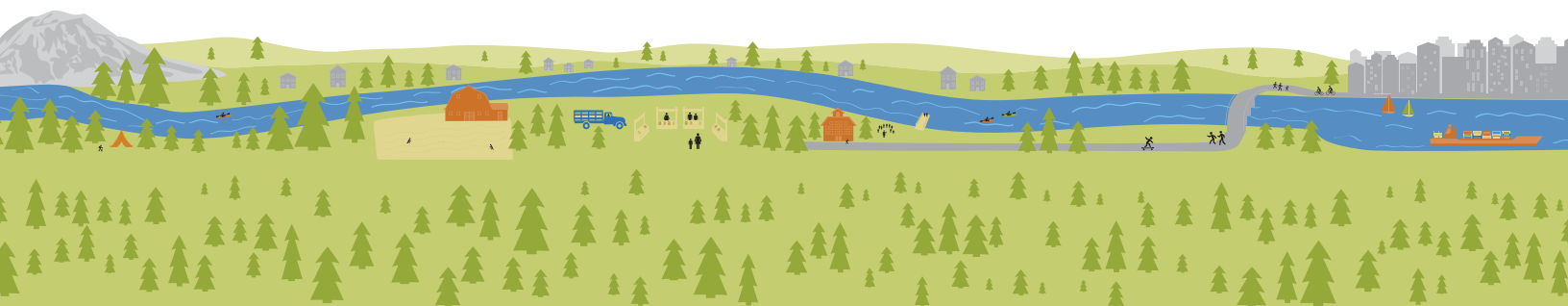


TABLE OF CONTENTS

About this Publication	1
Acknowledgements	1
Land Acknowledgement	2
Introduction	3
The Planning Process	4
Key Players and Their Roles	4
Important Laws and What They Do	7
Development Process Basics	10
Planning Process for Development Projects	10
Planning Process for Comprehensive Plan or Development Regulation Amendments	11
Influencing Decisions	12
Participate early. Participate often.	14
The DOs and DON'Ts of Public Participation	16
Engagement methods	19
Beyond Taking Action	22
Appendix	24
How To's	24
Definitions	29
Acronyms	29
Reference: Advocacy Organizations	29



About this Publication

This publication was produced by Forterra for the Pierce Conservation District and the Puyallup Watershed Initiative. At the time of its drafting and publication, COVID-19 was an ongoing public health emergency that had dramatic effects on civic engagement. It increased opportunities for virtual participation while also limiting in-person activities. It is our hope that more inclusive practices, such as virtual public meetings and hybrid models of virtual and in-person participation in the civic process, remain in the post-pandemic world.

Pierce Conservation District's mission is to equitably support community-driven solutions to the most pressing local environmental challenges. Learn more at: <https://pierced.org/>

Puyallup Watershed Initiative's mission is to improve social and environmental conditions throughout the region, which comprises more than 1,000 square miles from Mt. Rainier to Commencement Bay. Learn more at: <https://www.pwi.org/>

Puyallup River Watershed Council's mission is to restore, protect and enhance the environmental, economic and cultural health of our watershed, from Mount Rainier to Commencement Bay. It is through the Puyallup-White River Local Integrating Organization that funding was available to support this toolkit. <http://www.piercecountywa.gov/prwc>

Forterra drives land-based solutions in Washington to support a healthy environment and resilient communities for all. Learn more at www.terra.org.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the following individuals and groups for their contributions:

- Pierce Conservation District staff, especially Melissa Buckingham
- Puyallup Watershed Initiative staff, especially Lexi Brewer and Carrie Hernandez
- Ryan Mello, Pierce County Council
- Linda T. Burgess, former Edgewood City Council
- Seaport Alliance staff
- Port of Tacoma staff

Land Acknowledgment

Pierce County includes 1,806 square miles of ceded lands of four Federally recognized Tribes: the Puyallup Tribe, the Nisqually Tribe, the Muckleshoot Tribe, and the Squaxin Island Tribe. These Tribes are sovereign governments that predate the founding of the United States, and their sovereignty is an inherent right that has existed since time immemorial, recognized with a government-to-government relationship by the United States.

We recognize that the traditional and current homelands of these Tribes and their territorial lands, waters, and air are contiguous and transcend U.S. government-established boundaries. This means the quality and abundance of the County's natural resources directly affects the quality and abundance of natural resources of Tribal Nations.



INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this publication is to create a well-informed, well-organized, and well-prepared community – one that is ready to participate in policy and planning processes that affect their neighborhoods and people. Community members who are knowledgeable about these processes and are proactive with their engagement can have a powerful influence on local land use decisions that shape the future of their communities.

This publication is for practitioners, community members, and other stakeholders in policy and planning decision-making that impact the watershed. The material included in this toolkit is a synthesis of information drawn from interviews with current and former elected officials, community members, and staff members of organizations that have worked on engagement efforts; research into best practices and available tools included in other toolkits; and feedback from community members and practitioners.

We acknowledge that the current system of policy and planning places the burden of providing feedback on community members. This is an example of institutional racism that we want to address in a future iteration of this toolkit in addition to the intersections of race, environment, planning decisions, justice, and equity. This includes applying a better understanding of how power and privilege influence planning and policy decisions, and who can more easily participate in them. Recognizing these constraints, this toolkit describes how engagement in planning and policy decision making processes occurs and how to make meaningful contributions to shape land use outcomes.



THE PLANNING PROCESS

Key Players and Their Roles

The roles and responsibilities of various decision-making bodies vary across jurisdictions within the Puyallup Watershed, but the following captures the key players generally involved in land use decisions:

1. **Who:** Community members

What they do: Community members are stakeholders and key players in the land use planning process. They are your neighbors living nearby, workers and owners of local businesses, visitors to the parks and open spaces nearby, and members of faith and values-based groups in your neighborhood. Members of the community raise questions about potential impacts of a proposal on the community and share knowledge about conditions in the area that should be considered during project review. There are many things community members can do, here are just a few: comment on a land use action or code update, testify at a public hearing, submit a letter to endorse or oppose a permit proposal, attend a workshop to help define the local vision for the comprehensive plan, participate on an advisory committee, engage others on local issues, and find other opportunities to influence the policies and plans that will impact the community. Another significant contribution community members can make is to demand transparency in processes conducted by governments. Many state and federal laws require public processes and the community can ensure these requirements are met.

2. **Who:** Applicant

What they do: An applicant is the person who submits an application for a development project, variance, zoning change, code amendment, or other land use approval. Applicants can include developers, consultants, landowners, attorneys, or members of the community. They are required to comply with federal, state, and local development codes, however, in instances where they believe they cannot comply with these requirements, they will often apply for variances from the codes to become exempted from requirements. It is important to note that these variances do not, in most instances, have a public process for appeal.



3. **Who:** Tribes

What they do: Tribes are sovereign nations who are co-managers of land and resources. There are treaties between Tribal governments and the US government that determine authority over land and its use. The history of these agreements and contemporary understanding of them, especially within the context of land use decisions, requires greater attention. Tribal governments and local and county governments can enter into formal consultation agreements on land use decisions, and community members should request that their representatives consult with Tribal government representatives as needed and required by state and federal law.

4. **Who:** Planning Staff

What they do: Planning staff are nonpartisan career civil servants who receive and review planning applications, enforce zoning codes, provide background information and recommendations on land use applications to appointed and elected officials, conduct pre-application meetings with developers, and serve as a resource for the public on land use planning activities. They also work with the community to develop a long-term vision for the future, document those plans, and adopt a plan of action to realize that vision. This work can be seen in the Comprehensive Plan at the county and city levels, subarea plans, community plans, and other guiding documents. The work of planners can be divided into two categories: current planning and long range planning. Current planning is permit review and code enforcement. Long range planning is comprehensive planning, subarea planning, rezoning, and other long term strategies. The connection between the two is that current planning is implementing the code updates that come out of long range planning.

5. **Who:** Planning Commission

What they do: The Planning Commission is an advisory board composed of volunteers appointed by elected officials. There are Planning Commissions at the county and city level. They assist the City and County Councils in making decisions by serving as a sounding board for new ideas, conducting public hearings, and offering recommendations about planning and land use. This can include changes to the Comprehensive Plan, zoning code, land use regulations, and other planning related proposals. The Planning Commission serves an advisory role and can make suggestions to council but does not have decision-making authority.

6. **Who:** City Council

What they do: City Council members are representatives elected by the public. Their responsibilities include setting policy, making final decisions on plans, hearing appeals of certain lower-level decisions, adopting ordinances and changing zoning, and appointing members of the Planning Commission or other elected advisory boards (such as the Transportation Commission or the Sustainable Tacoma Commission). These Commissions then provide Council with updates and recommendations that pertain to the purview of the Commission. City Council also provides opportunities for the public to express their concerns in a Council and public meetings, group or individual meetings, phone and email correspondence, and other forms of engagement.

7. **Who:** County Council

What they do: Similar to the City Council, County Council members are elected by the public and serve the same functions as listed above throughout the entire county, focusing on unincorporated areas. City Council also provides opportunities for the public to express their concerns in a Council and public meetings, group or individual meetings, phone and email correspondence, and other forms of engagement.

8. **Who:** Local government

What they do: This includes city and county staff that are responsible for a range of integral services including schools, housing, planning, waste collection and more. For this toolkit, the focus of their role is on the administrative side of comprehensive plan updates, development regulation amendments, and support for elected and appointed officials.

9. **Who:** Hearing Examiner

What they do: This role is appointed by the County Council and is responsible for conducting public hearings, preparing official records for said hearings, pulling together findings based on laws and facts, and issuing final decisions for land use cases that make it to the hearing examiner for determination. The county and your city will use recommendations and decisions made by the Hearing Examiner for land use permits, site plans, variances, and subdivisions.

10. **Who:** Land Use Advisory Commission

What they do: Not all jurisdictions have these commissions, but Pierce County has several Land Use Advisory Commissions. These can be comprised of a mix of elected officials, staff, and/or members of the public. Their role is to serve in an advisory capacity on issues related to land use to the Executive, the County Council, the Hearing Examiners, the Planning Commission, and Planning Staff. They hold meetings to facilitate communication across community members, property owners, business owners, and the County on significant land use issues. They review applications for proposed developments which require a public hearing and make recommendations for updates to their community plan.

11. **Who:** Other Boards, Committees, and Decisionmaking Bodies

What they do: The above list is not exhaustive of the bigger picture of public agencies, their elected representatives, and staff beyond the city and council levels. Other significant bodies include public utilities, libraries, schools, parks districts, conservation districts, and more. Ultimately, these bodies adopt budgets where values are translated into investments and services.

12. **Who:** State and Federal Agencies

What they do: Some decisions are made at the state or federal level and regulations coming out of these agencies also come with different civic engagement processes than decisionmaking at the city or county level. Some significant policies that are governed by the state or federal government are outlined below.



Important Laws and What They Do

There are many laws – federal, state, and local – that govern land use planning and decision making. The following is a summary of some of the most referenced laws that stakeholders should be familiar with. Due to their complexity and the overlaps with more specific local regulations, federal laws such as those governing endangered species, wetlands, and stormwater discharge are not discussed in this publication.

Growth Management Act

The Growth Management Act (GMA) is a Washington State statute enacted in 1990 in response to the threat that unplanned growth poses to the environment, sustainable economic development, and quality of life. The GMA establishes goals to:

- discourage sprawling development, encourage development in urban areas with adequate public facilities,
- encourage economic development throughout the state consistent with comprehensive plans,
- encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems,
- protect shorelines,
- provide for the protection of property rights, and
- provide for early and continuous public participation in the planning process.

Within the framework provided by the Act, local governments have responsibilities regarding the specific content of comprehensive plans and implementing development regulations. One intent of the GMA is to give local governments the discretion and flexibility to create plans that best meet their needs. This is also what makes civic engagement on these topics important.

One significant requirement of the GMA are protections for “critical areas,” which are often referred to as a Critical Areas Ordinance. This requirement is in place to preserve the natural environment, habitat, and drinking water. It also limits development in areas that are at risk of natural hazards. An extension of regulating critical areas also appears in the form of tree regulations, which are rules for pruning, removal, planting, and more on public and private land. Tree regulations can differ widely across different cities and counties.

State Environmental Policy Act

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) was adopted in 1971 and provides the framework for counties and cities to consider the environmental consequences of a proposal before taking action. It also gives local governments the ability to condition or deny a proposal due to identified likely significant adverse impacts. The elements of the environment reviewed as part of the SEPA process include both the natural environment (earth, air, water, plants and animals, energy, and natural resources) and the built environment (environmental health, land and shoreline use, transportation, public services and utilities). Environmental review is required for development projects of a certain size and for official actions such as the adoption of a comprehensive plan or development regulation.

Shoreline Management Act

The Shoreline Management Act (SMA) was passed by the Washington State legislature in 1971 to manage and protect the shorelines of the state by regulating development in the shoreline area. The goal of the Act is “to prevent the inherent harm in an uncoordinated and piecemeal development of the state’s shorelines.” The Act establishes a broad policy giving preference to uses that protect the quality of water and the natural environment, depend on proximity to the shoreline, and preserve and enhance public access or increase recreational opportunities for the public along shorelines.





Comprehensive Plan

A comprehensive plan is a legally adopted document required by the GMA that reflects the community's vision, long-term goals, and objectives. Comprehensive plans must contain certain elements addressing land use, housing, capital facilities (infrastructure), utilities, transportation, economic development, growth targets, and more. Comprehensive plans are implemented using zoning codes, development regulations, and other tools and ordinances. Local governments may amend their comprehensive plans no more than once per year and must undertake thorough reviews of them every eight years. These major updates represent a valuable engagement opportunity.

Development Regulations and Zoning

Development regulations are the rules that implement land use policies of the comprehensive plan. These regulations establish what kinds of construction and uses are allowed where, along with rules for building heights, densities, permitting, and physical characteristics of new construction (often referred to as zoning). These may include anything from parking, landscaping, tree retention, setbacks, or design. Local governments are required by law to review development regulations annually. Councils update development regulations through an amendment process.

Sometimes a city or county will surplus, or put up for sale, properties that are no longer needed for municipal purposes. The city of Tacoma offers the Puyallup Tribe the first right of refusal for all lands that are surplussed.

DEVELOPMENT PROCESS BASICS

Planning Process for Development Projects

(The basics explained here apply to proposed developments that require a permit. Some do not meet the threshold requiring publication. Check your jurisdiction's regulations to understand when a permit is required so you can follow land use proposals that may or not need a permit.)

PHASE	WHAT THE APPLICANT AND CITY ARE DOING	OPPORTUNITIES FOR COMMUNITY ACTION	DECISION MAKING BODY
Concept and Feasibility Review	<p>Applicant evaluates project ideas.</p> <p>City and applicant discuss project and required government approvals.</p> <p>Applicant submits application for project.</p>	<p>Generally, stakeholders are not involved in this phase of the development process.</p> <p>Reviewing application materials as available (ie Planning Commission meeting notes); compiling available relevant data related to the project.</p>	<p>At this point the applicant decides whether or not to proceed with project.</p>
Application Submittal/ Review	<p>City publishes notification.</p> <p>City staff begin application review.</p> <p>Conducting public hearing on project.</p>	<p>Submitting written comments on project to planning staff.</p>	<p>City reviews application for compliance with applicable statutes.</p> <p>Planning staff prepares recommendation for review authority.</p>
Hearing/Decision	<p>Publishing decision.</p>	<p>Attending public hearing. Giving verbal testimony and submitting written testimony and supporting documentation into the record.</p>	<p>Depending on the governing body, process can be over if decision is agreeable to all. However, some bodies may have appeals process, which can be prompted by applicants or community members.</p>

Planning Process for Comprehensive Plan or Development Regulation Amendments

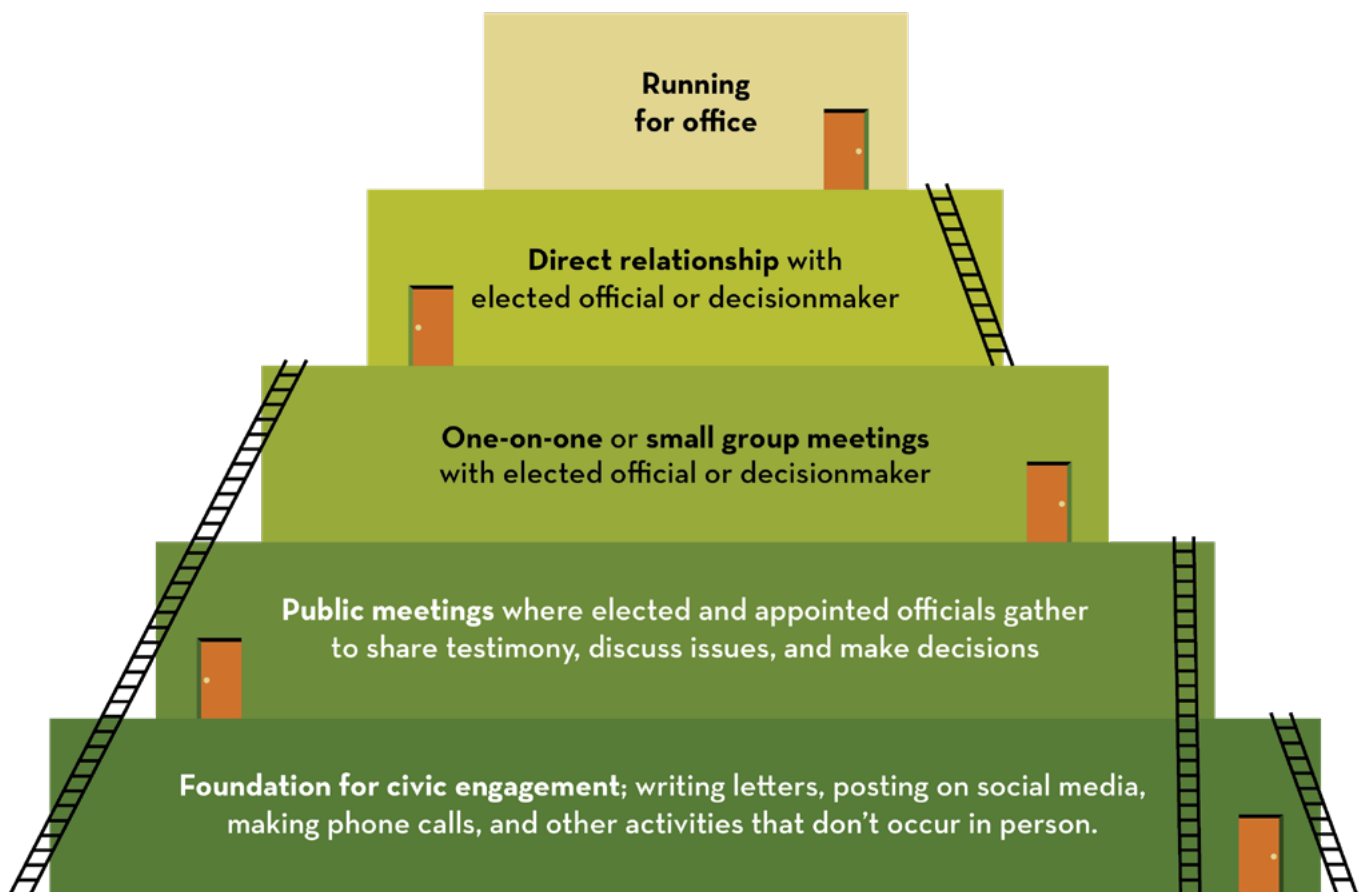
There are two kinds of comprehensive plan updates: annual updates (usually minor changes, site specific rezones, technical amendments) and major 8 year cycle updates. The table below offers a general description of the planning process for annual updates to the comprehensive plan or development regulation amendments. It is important to check your local government's website to help you determine the right people and agencies to contact.

PHASE	WHAT THE APPLICANT AND CITY ARE DOING	WHAT INVOLVED STAKEHOLDERS ARE DOING	DECISION OR ACTION TO BE TAKEN
<p>Amendments Proposed</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Comprehensive Plan amendments allowed once a year and are announced on a city's planning web page. Development Regulation amendments must be considered at least annually 	<p>An amendment is proposed by either a community member or by the City.</p> <p>A list of requested amendments is presented to City Council to decide which amendments to evaluate further.</p>	<p>Proposing changes during the update process to help shape the plan and regulations.</p> <p>Reviewing other amendment requests and submitting written comments on those requests to planning staff and decision makers.</p>	<p>Local government prepares draft amendments based on community and city recommendations for City Council.</p> <p>Council decides which amendments to focus on and evaluate further.</p>
Public Participation Process	<p>An amendment is proposed by either a community member or by the City.</p> <p>A list of requested amendments is presented to City Council to decide which amendments to evaluate further.</p>	<p>Proposing changes during the update process to help shape the plan and regulations.</p> <p>Reviewing other amendment requests and submitting written comments on those requests to planning staff and decision makers.</p>	<p>City staff prepares draft amendments based on community and city recommendations for City Council.</p> <p>Council decides which amendments to focus on and evaluate further.</p>
Public Hearings/Decision	<p>Cities publish engagement plans, convene workshops, and share surveys.</p>	<p>Attending public meetings and hearings where proposed amendments are discussed.</p> <p>Submitting comments to support preferred alternatives and amendments.</p>	<p>Vote ends process. If there are technical or legal challenges, opponents may appeal to the Growth Management Hearings Board.</p>

INFLUENCING DECISIONS

This section describes how and when to engage with your community and your decision makers. When you participate, how you do it, and the most effective method for a given situation can be organized into a pyramid of impact. At the top of this pyramid is a direct relationship with elected officials or decision makers. Actions at the top of the pyramid include one-on-one and small group meetings that community members can use to communicate priorities to elected officials. These meetings provide valuable space for discussing an issue in depth with opportunities to ask questions, clarify concerns, and build relationships with elected officials.

The next level in the pyramid is public meetings, where community members and public officials gather to share testimony, discuss issues, and make decisions. At the base of the pyramid is the foundation for civic engagement: writing letters, posting on social media, making phone calls, and other activities that don't occur in person. Getting involved at the base of the pyramid supports and leads to in-person meetings and sparks interpersonal and working relationships between community members and with your decision makers. The top of the pyramid represents more direct and personal engagement with fewer opportunities to make contact, while the bottom of the pyramid offers easy and multiple ways to engage, albeit in a less personal way. There are meaningful ways to engage at all levels of the pyramid and an effective civic engagement strategy will include each.



START WHEREVER—CLIMB AS HIGH AS YOU LIKE

Timelines vary by jurisdiction and proposed changes

Government decisions have varied timelines based on which government entity is setting the policy and what step they are on in the process. Some policies can be enacted within a few days while most take weeks and months with multiple opportunities for public influence and comment. Below is an example based on recent actions taken at the county level:

Park Master Planning

On October 5, 2021, the Pierce County Council passed resolution R2021-168 - Orangetate Park Master Plan Update, 2021. This plan is a major midpoint on a park 23 years in the making in the Summit-Waller area of Pierce County. The 150 acres of land was purchased from the Department of Natural Resources by Pierce County in 1998 and a first master plan was commissioned by the council in 2007. However, this first plan was not implemented as the project went unfunded in the county.

In 2016, the county passed an impact fee update that generated revenue for parks. The Orangetate Park was identified as a priority expansion project for the Parks department and in 2020 efforts to draft an updated master plan began. The county solicited feedback from major local stakeholders like school district officials and community organizations as well as public surveys of 599 individuals in the fall of 2020. In May of 2021, county staff presented the new master plan to the Pierce County Parks Citizens' Advisory Board for approval. The board's approval sent the plan to the County Council's Community Development Committee for review and approval by county councilmembers. The Community Development Committee unanimously approved the plan in September of 2021. Passage by this committee advanced the plan to final approval by the County Council.

The plan approved by Council included cost plans for 2 phases of construction. Design and construction of phase 1 is slated to happen in 2022-2024 and the construction timeline for phase two is still to be determined. In sum, land purchased for a park in 1998 will not realize it's final fully developed purpose until sometime after 2024. After phase 1 completion, it's likely Pierce County Parks will return to the public for further public input on phase 2 and a future body of Pierce County Council will have final say on construction through budget appropriations. There are often opportunities to subscribe to email updates to stay updated on new developments in a complex project like this one. At each step of this year's long process, particularly the public input and public meetings, community and interested parties have had a say in the future of the park and opportunity to contact citizen board members and county council elected officials.



Participate early. Participate often.

It is important to keep an eye out for proposed changes in your neighborhood coming from the city, county, or other government entity. This kind of information can be found by tuning into or attending public meetings, looking at proposed land use signs in your neighborhood, following local news, word-of-mouth, and other means. Most jurisdictions have a permits department webpage to get notified about specific permits underway. If you want to stay informed about a planning process or update, you will need to know the agency leading it to subscribe to updates or follow other updates. Cities publish agendas for each council meeting with accompanying detailed exhibits, which you can typically sign up for to receive via email. The earlier you get involved, the more opportunities you will have to learn and provide input. Here's what you can do once you know changes are under consideration:

Get to know your decision makers.

The Planning Commission and the Council play key roles in planning decisions. Planning Commission and Council meetings are held regularly and are open to the public. Attend a few public meetings to get a feel for how they work. Bonus: these meetings now have virtual viewing options and are recorded so you can watch in the background or when you have the time. Meet with commissioners and council members personally – they should want to hear from constituents. Another opportunity to get to know your decision makers is during study sessions when Council members can be seen in a more informal setting learning about issues that will come up in future council meetings. Hearing their questions to staff gives one an understanding of their concerns and issues.

Organize your community.

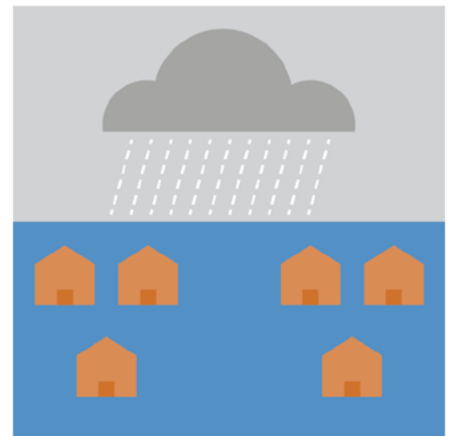
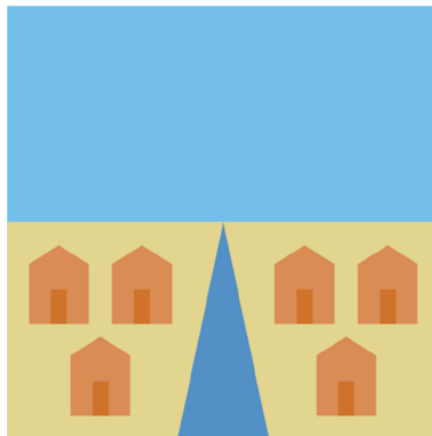
Get to know your neighbors and like-minded individuals and consider forming a neighborhood or issue-based association to discuss issues that may impact you. Research existing groups with the same or similar interests that you can join. It is more effective to advocate for change with other people than as an individual. Neighborhood councils are also a great avenue for people to connect with neighbors on a local level and bring up issues and concerns.

Track public notices.

Public notice of proposed land use actions and planning processes can come in many forms. Sometimes, you will actually be mailed written notice of a proposed action near your property. Notices are also published in the public notice section of local newspapers' classifieds. You may also see a large board with "Notice of Land Use Action" or similar wording placed at a proposed development site. Be aware of vacant land in your community; these are the locations where developments are most likely. Local governments also use email lists and their websites to notify the public about projects and land use changes early in the process.

Example Scenario

A group of community members is concerned about a potential development that will impact the watershed. They want to get the issue in front of their decision makers and for them to review the environmental impact based on the project idea that has been shared. There is nuance across jurisdictions within the Puyallup Watershed, so the group divides responsibilities. Someone checks their city's website to find out who their councilmember is, the contact information for that elected official's office, and reaches out to set up a meeting. Then, get familiar with the councilmember's voting history, especially on issues similar to the one you wish to discuss. One community member finds and reviews the current policy on environmental impacts from a development project similar to the one proposed and outlines what they think should be changed to address the group's concerns. Another community member shares this information with the group and coordinates efforts making use of a range of activities including phone calls, writing letters, posting and tagging on social media, and 1:1 meetings with elected officials to get this project on the docket for a formal review. Get familiar with other councilmembers and reach out following the above steps to those that have a voting history or platform that closely aligns with your cause.



The DOs and DON'Ts of Public Participation

The following table is by no means comprehensive but is intended to support engagement in processes as they currently exist. One important distinction to keep in mind is between public participation and advocacy. This toolkit's focus is on the former and for these purposes is defined as community involvement and inclusion during policy and planning decision making processes, especially from people interested in, or affected by, those decisions. The line between this and advocacy can be challenging to define, but for this toolkit advocacy means specific support for a policy or cause when engaging with civic processes, which is beyond the scope of this toolkit. There are many organizations that work in the advocacy space and the appendix includes a short list of them for reference.

There are times when one tactic will work better than another, so consider these general do's and don'ts to be broad strokes and add in context based on the issue. Keep in mind that there will be others doing this work and it will help to coordinate your efforts, determine together what is most effective to get the attention needed, and come together in defining your community's needs.

Tactics in the following tables are divided into ethics and actions. **Ethics** are a code of conduct and this table identifies principles for approaching actions you will take. **Actions** are concrete tasks you can make to advance your position. The tables are also organized by level of time commitment (1 is the least time intensive, 2 is moderately time intensive, and 3 is the most time intensive) as appropriate.

Disclaimer: These are recommendations, ignore or adapt as you see fit.



Action DOs and DON'Ts

Commitment Scale	TRY	AVOID
I	<p>Send letters, emails, and messages on social media to raise concerns.</p> <p>Follow through email subscriptions and social media proposals, updates, and other changes.</p>	<p>Wing it (ie showing up to give public testimony without preparation).</p> <p>Wait until after most decisions on a project have been made to raise objections.</p>
II	<p>Tell your story and show how changes will affect you personally.</p> <p>Advance your position in every way you can think of. Write an op-ed, draft a petition, participate in public hearings, approach the developer to advocate changes, provide decision makers with research and data to support your position, etc.</p> <p>Support your arguments with facts.</p> <p>Work within the planning process to advance your desired solution.</p> <p>Create a record for yourself to help you remember what happened during public meetings, meetings with elected officials, and community meetings.</p> <p>Submit your comments, testimony, letters, etc. to the official record to ensure community input is documented.</p> <p>Provide decision makers with information about the type of land use you want to see in your community.</p> <p>Coordinate with others who share similar objectives.</p> <p>Suggest solutions and alternatives.</p>	<p>Making your position seem black and white, all or nothing. In most instances developers or municipal officials are willing to hear your position, supported with facts, and try to address your concerns. If your position is unwillingness to negotiate, they may not have any options other than to dismiss your position entirely.</p>
III	<p>Build a relationship with your elected officials.</p> <p>Come to public meetings prepared with thoughtful and persuasive arguments in favor of your position.</p> <p>Participate as early as you can.</p>	<p>Being overly aggressive towards staff involved on the project who do not make the policies. Most municipal staff are only there to uphold the existing adopted policies and ensure compliance with the current laws. If you want to change policy or law, you will need to speak with a policy maker, such as a committee, advisory board, or Council.</p>

Ethics DOs and DON'Ts

TRY	AVOID
Focus on issues.	Focus on people and personalities over desired outcomes.
Stick with it.	Give up if you don't get immediate results.
Speak for yourself, not others.	Speak for your self-interest over the needs of your allies.
Be specific for whom you represent and honest about your reach.	Speak on behalf of the entire community or exaggerate your reach.
Focus on shared values.	Make personal attacks on public employees or elected officials.
Do your homework and research the voting history (available online) of an elected official you're meeting. Have something to thank them for, know what they support and oppose.	Make lots of verbal assertions or exaggerate.
Have the official you're meeting hear some of the ideas from constituents, they don't have to be in agreement.	Make unreasonable requests. Ignore the need for growth that developers are responding to or that property owners have rights.
Research endorsers and associated campaigns for an elected official you are meeting.	Give oral testimony only.
	Outline the problems, focus only on negatives.
	Blame decision makers for undesirable outcomes instead of holding them accountable for the decisions they have made.
	Make jokes, tell inappropriate stories, speak in hyperbole, or ask multiple rhetorical questions. This is a time to make your opinion heard rather than become a spectacle that detracts from your cause.



Engagement methods

There are several things to keep in mind no matter how you choose to engage. Consider these principles to be the foundation of communication: rely on facts, ask a lot of questions, and thoughtfully share your personal experiences.

Generally, when contacting an elected official or decision maker directly, it's best to start with those who directly represent you through a district model and work out to at-large members. Save representatives with influence over the decision you are hoping to influence that do not represent you or the project area for last.

For the following methods, in addition to the basics, consider what information to include, who is your audience, and what outcome you want to achieve. Often, shorter can be better and emphasis on your connection to the place or issue in question can tell a compelling story. The following methods are listed in order of assumed impact with a brief description of what it is and what it involves so you can determine which suits you best. More in-depth information and instruction can be found in the appendix.

Meetings

Individual meetings

One of the most effective methods of civic engagement is to meet face to face with an elected official or planning commissioner. Many elected officials meet with constituents, but many of them have limited time because they serve the public in addition to holding regular jobs and having personal obligations. Therefore it is essential to make the most of an opportunity to meet with an official. Community members can schedule individual meetings in several different ways; it's easiest to get time based on an existing relationship, if you happen to have one. In lieu of leveraging an existing relationship, contact information for the elected official and their staff is typically readily accessible on the city's and/or County's web site to schedule a meeting. Elected officials know they cannot do their job well without input from community so they truly value hearing from the public and your request is likely to be prioritized regardless of any prior relationship.

Public meetings

Public meetings in this context refer to workshops, open houses, information sessions, or other events where a local government invites community input or shares news about a topic. These are different from commission or council meetings, at which members of the public are also welcome. Public meetings are an opportunity to give opinions, ask clarifying questions, and share how they will be impacted by a project or plan, such as a rezone, comprehensive plan update, or code amendment.

Public hearings

Giving effective public testimony at public hearings provides an important venue for public participation. However, like written testimony, the quality of oral testimony matters more than the quantity. Most public testimony is limited to two or three minutes, and in that time making a connection with your decision makers by sharing an anecdote that gets to the heart of the issue rather than sharing only data points will be the most impactful.

Writing

Writing an effective comment letter, postcard, or email

Although the quantity of letters a commission or council receives may indicate the extent of neighborhood or agency interest, it is the relevance of the comments that will most affect a project's outcome. This method will be ineffective and could even be counterproductive if used to excess. For example, if members of an interest group send hundreds of identical form letters to public officials it might make less of an impact compared to a brief and poignant letter sent before a big decision will be made. Whether you send a form letter or not, the most important consideration is if this method of engaging matches your goal. Keep in mind that elected officials are not required to read every letter they receive.

Getting Into News Outlets

Often times, when large development projects are proposed or controversial land use decisions are being discussed, they receive coverage in local papers, newscasts, blogs, or local podcasts. Participating in how a project or decision is covered in the media is another way to help influence the planning process. For local papers, op-eds are an effective way to enhance and inform the community dialogue on a particular issue; a letter to the editor is an effective tool when an issue is already being discussed in the newspaper but you find the coverage to be biased or inaccurate. For local tv/radio news, blogs or podcasts, reach out to reporters and/or hosts directly about the issue and see if they will feature you and/or your community and cover your perspective.

Other Communications

Social Media

The use of Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, Next Door, and other social media platforms can be an effective means of gathering support, increasing the level of awareness on a particular issue, build relationships amongst supporters, and contribute to collaboration. It can also be overtaken by bad actors and misused for other purposes other than yours and your community's. For that reason, it should be used strategically and with opportunities for holding a dialogue between group leaders and supporters, and between community members and elected officials. You can use hashtags to increase visibility and tag other people and organizations to broaden your reach. Where elected officials participate in dialogue on social media this can be an effective, direct line of communication. Embrace the same principles for engaging on social media as you would for an in-person public meeting (see list of Dos and Don'ts).

Phone Calls

Calling your councilmember about a policy or land use issue with a personal touch can make an impact if done well. Going in with a script or some prepared notes will help you make all the points you want to whether you reach someone or have to leave a voicemail. Make sure to mention who you are, where you live or are located and how it relates to your elected official (if it isn't within their district they will be less likely to respond or get back to you since they aren't relying on your vote), share your story about why the issue at hand is meaningful to you, and the action the official can take.

BEYOND TAKING ACTION

Taking Public Office or Serving on a Board or Commission

Through civic engagement and advocacy on policies or projects of great importance to you and your community, you may catch the civil service bug. Consider running for office or seeking an appointment to a public board or commission with jurisdiction over policies that matter to you or are in your area of expertise. For example, if you are a planner by trade or urban growth management enthusiast, consider applying to join your city or county's planning or sustainability commission. If you are energized by renewable energy policies, look into qualifications needed to join a public utility board. There are other City boards, such as Parks, and if you are a businessperson, you might be interested in participating on the economic Development Commission. Some positions are appointed by elected officials and others are elected by the public.

Applicants for a board or commission should attend meetings and meet with current or prior members to learn about the priorities of the group and how it works. Consider also meeting with elected officials who appoint members prior to applying to find out what they are looking for in candidates. Pierce

County commissions are listed [here](#) and available vacancies as well as required qualifications are listed [here](#). [Washington State](#) and major cities like [Tacoma](#) and [Puyallup](#) also have various boards and commissions available and in need of volunteer applicants.

If running for public elected office sounds more appealing, check out the annually updated list of offices up for election and other information provided by the Pierce County Auditor [here](#). Groups of all types, both national and local, such as advocacy organizations and industry organizations like Chambers of Commerce hold candidate trainings and you should sign up for as many as possible to get a feel for the best strategies to running and winning.

Getting Involved with Your Conservation District

The Pierce Conservation District has a wide-reaching [calendar of events and volunteer opportunities](#) you can partake in to give back and make a difference. You can even become a member and register to vote in conservation district elections, which are distinct from general voter registration in Washington State.



Public Interest Groups and Advocacy Organizations

If you find yourself a bit lonely in your civic engagement efforts, you should consider joining a group or organization that advocates for issues you are passionate about. Many are non-profits with varying tax statuses dependent on the type of advocacy they perform. Examples include the [League of Women Voters](#), [WashPIRG](#), the [Sierra Club](#), [Tacoma Tree Foundation](#), [Washington Conservation Voters](#), [350 Tacoma](#), [Sunrise Tacoma](#), [Tacoma Urban League](#), [Centro Latino](#), [Asia Pacific Cultural Center](#), [Rainbow Center](#), [Friends of Pierce County](#), [Tahoma Audubon](#), [Conservation NW](#), [Environment Washington](#), [Communities for a Healthy Bay](#), [Puyallup River Watershed Council](#), or [Futurewise](#). Most of these organizations have local Pierce County or Tacoma chapters with members who share your passion for conservation and may make great allies in planning future civic engagement campaigns you lead. They can also help keep you apprised of issues they are tracking that impact your neighborhood. Consider reaching out to them directly to learn more about their priorities and how you can get involved or sign up for their email lists to get updates.

Political Campaign Engagement

Elected officials run for office to make laws and decisions that reflect their personal values and those of their communities. Campaigns for public office cost money. Making contributions to political campaigns can be a way to connect with an elected official before issues reach them in office, particularly when they share your values. This guide is not suggesting that contributions buy political influence, but rather that the decision to support a campaign sends a message about who is putting their time or money behind candidates based on their positions. While not everyone can or will want to support political campaigns, two main ways for those interested to get involved are:

- Volunteering – offering your time to make calls or speak to people in your community on behalf of a candidate, helping to run campaign events, or filling other clerical or office needs.
- Donating money – this is best done at a campaign event where you can meet the candidate and connect on a personal level. A conversation at a campaign event can lead to the cultivation of a working relationship or less introductory meetings later– the top of the engagement pyramid. The amount of a donation is less important than the show of support.

Supporting a campaign, either by volunteering or donating, can help you build relationships and demonstrates that you can mobilize a wider network of support if you bring others along. Elected officials aim to be in contact with communities when running for office and once in office. Getting to know them before you need something helps build trust and common understanding.

APPENDIX

How To's

Individual or 1-on-1 meetings.

Here are some tips for maximizing the value of an individual meeting:

- Find out how elected officials schedule their meetings. A city or county will usually have staff, such as a legislative aide, who can explain the scheduling process and help set up an appointment.
- When scheduling, know what topic you want to cover and how you relate to the official. Be specific – for example, you want to discuss flooding risks in your neighborhood. Do you live or work in their district? Do you represent an interest group or group of concerned community members? Are you their neighbor or prior campaign supporter?
- Make an effort to meet at a time and place of the official's choosing, to the extent that you can be flexible.
- Start with a specific appreciation for work the elected official has done that is somehow related to what you will be asking for. It breaks the ice and allows the elected official to respond a bit before just jumping in.
- Be prepared to discuss your topic: what is the issue, how does it affect you, what do you propose as a solution? Anticipate what questions they might ask. Do research to get a sense of their past decisions and statements on similar topics.
- Get straight to the point and try to determine whether they will support your requests and what level of priority your project is to them and their agenda. This information will be helpful in strategizing next steps and further community involvement.
 - If they are supporters, find out what they need from you and community to be successful advocates.
 - If they are unsure, find out what information they would like to further inform their opinion.
 - If they are opposed, try to ascertain if they will be actively or passively working against your activism or cause.
- Be respectful of their time and finish the meeting promptly. Thank them for the opportunity to connect and follow up with any supplemental information offered or requested by them.

Public meetings

Here are some tips on making the most of public meetings:

- Review the description of the meeting and any shared information in advance. This might include a draft proposal, maps, scenarios, or design images.
- Ask for accommodations and share accessibility needs. Language interpretation, wheelchair and walker access, and other accessibility needs can be met with advance notice to city or county staff. Support your community members by proactively asking for accommodations.
- Invite neighbors or other members of your community to attend.
- Help others overcome barriers to participation, such as figuring out internet connectivity needs, transportation, or childcare.
- Come prepared to share feedback. It's okay to oppose an idea, even better to offer alternatives.
- Balance listening and speaking, treat your fellow participants with respect and courtesy even when you are on opposing sides of an issue.
- Speak for yourself and share personal experiences – how has (or how will) an issue affect you?
- Use the opportunity to meet other people who share your interests.
- Take copies of printed material with you to share with others or share broadcast or meeting links with interested parties
- Sign up for notifications so you can get advance notice of additional opportunities to give input.

Public Testimony

The general tips outlined for submitting written comments also apply to oral testimony. Here are some additional tips for making the most of your public hearing time:

- Be strategic about when you sign up to speak. Most public hearings have a sign-up sheet for people who wish to speak. Public officials, like all of us, become weary after hours of public testimony, so it is advantageous to speak early when your audience is likely to be the most attentive. However, if you are part of a group of people all planning to testify with a similar message, it may be to the group's advantage to spread presenters out so that your audience hears your position repeatedly throughout the hearing and so that later presenters can address weaknesses or inaccuracies in other testimony. If there are no new points to make, yield remaining speaking slots as numbers of those signed in will still be reflected in public records even if they choose not to speak.
- Be prepared and polished. Three minutes goes quickly, so be certain to plan your comments in advance and practice to make sure you are able to convey your message in the allotted time. Keeping your remarks brief and focused will allow you to deliver your message from memory, or perhaps with the help of note cards. Looking your audience in the eye will make your presentation more memorable and increase the likelihood that the audience is engaged and focused on your message.

- Include the basics in your testimony. Start your testimony by introducing yourself and the name of any organization you may represent. Many jurisdictions will require you to give your mailing address. Even if not required, it is helpful for providing context for your comments. If at a council meeting, you may even say which district you live in (if applicable).
- Be brief but thorough and genuine. It is important to keep your remarks focused and succinct, but you want to make sure you are sharing your story or establishing a solid record of facts to support the decision you want made. It is often not possible to reference all the relevant research and data to support your position during your allotted speaking time. Instead, simply reference the existence of such data, and submit a written copy of the data into the record to supplement your testimony. Written data should be presented to the clerk before the public hearing, if possible. Ideally, it is helpful to provide enough copies for all of the decision makers at the hearing.
- It's not just what you say, but how you say it. It is essential to remain professional and courteous when giving public testimony. Take care not to overstate your case and risk undermining your position. Stay focused on the merits of your argument; it does not advance your cause to bring up past decisions you didn't like or to insult decision makers or planning staff. Stay focused on the issue you are there to discuss and do so in a way that is positive and professional.
- Say thank you. It is always helpful to thank your audience for their consideration of your comments and suggestions and to express your gratitude for being able to participate in the public process. Most often, decision makers at public hearings are volunteering their time and it helps to let them know that their efforts are appreciated. This also helps to keep a positive and professional tone to your testimony, even when you may be disagreeing with a particular action taken by a jurisdiction.

Sample public testimony outline:

1. Introduce yourself. Name any group or organization you represent. Include your mailing address and ask to be notified of other hearings, meetings, or decisions related to the project you are commenting on.
2. Briefly state the specific issue or issues that you believe should be addressed and why they matter to you/the community.
3. Describe your proposed solution to the issues you have identified.
4. If applicable, reference written materials you are submitting into the record that support your testimony.
5. Restate/summarize the issues you have identified and the action that you wish to see the decision makers take.
6. Thank the audience for the chance to testify and participate in the public process.

Writing an effective comment letter

Here are some tips on making your comments effective:

- Introduce yourself and why you are interested in the project.
- Get to the point up front. What is the decision you support? What outcome do you desire?
- State your concerns clearly and succinctly using objective language. Frame comments in the context of impact on you, your community, and the land involved.
- Stay focused on your objective. Comment only on issues relevant to the decision being made.
- State opinions and preferences, ask questions, and propose alternative solutions to particular issues. Where possible, include data to support your opinions.
- Ask for studies that you think are important but have not been provided.
- If the proposed project is subject to the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and you think it will have significant environmental impact, specifically identify the areas of the environment you are concerned about and request that an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be prepared.
- Identify project features that you like and think should not be changed.
- Ask to be added to the project mailing list and request a copy of the decision.
- Keep the length to one page or less.
- Sample comment letter outline:
 1. Introduce yourself – include your name, neighborhood, district, and any groups or organizations you represent.
 2. Explain why you're writing – share what the issue or issues are that have prompted you to write a letter, share your story, and how you and your community are impacted.
 3. Identify what is working and what isn't – are there some elements of a proposal you like or a position being taken by an elected official that you support? State what you support and what you find lacking.
 4. Propose solutions/share your ideas - now that you've explained the issue, its impact, and what you support transition into solutions or what steps you think can be taken to address them. Share any relevant data or studies and ask any clarifying questions.
 5. Closing statement – succinctly summarize the issue, its impact, and what steps you want decision makers to take.
 6. Gratitude – request any desired follow-up and thank the recipient of your letter.

Writing Effective Newspaper Submittals

Tips for submitting articles to the paper are outlined below.

How to write an Op-Ed:

1. Write about a controversial issue that is current and engaging. The purpose of an Op-Ed is to persuade middle-of-the-road readers. State the subject under controversy clearly, avoiding excessive rhetoric. If you base your argument on facts not commonly found in mainstream media, be sure to cite your sources.
2. If you have a professional title that suggests authority, use it. If you are part of an organization, seek permission to sign the op-ed on behalf of that organization.
3. Follow the local paper's length requirements. Most papers want Op-Eds that are between 600 and 800 words. Some are more lenient; some more restrictive. Tailor your submittal appropriately.
4. Avoid sending your Op-Ed to two newspapers in the same market. Assure the op-ed editor in your cover letter that the piece has not been submitted to any other paper in their market. If, on the other hand, you sent it to only one paper, let that paper know you are offering them an exclusive.
5. Try to think of a catchy title. If you don't, the paper will choose one—which may not emphasize your central message. Picking your own title doesn't guarantee that it is the title your Op-Ed will be published with, but a catchy title has a better chance of sticking.
6. If at first you don't succeed with your first-choice paper publishing your op-ed, share your idea with a back-up paper. Otherwise, shorten and re-submit your article as a Letter to the Editor if it does not get accepted as an Op-Ed.

How to write a Letter to the Editor:

1. Strike while the iron is hot. If you see an issue that you care about covered in the local paper and you want to respond to the coverage, respond right away. Ideally, you want your response received the very next day. If you delay, you reduce your chances of being published.
2. Explain who you are. Relating your particular experience or background to the issue helps to explain why you are qualified to comment. Include your title and contact information you're comfortable with publishing at the end of the letter.
3. Keep it short. Letters should have short sentences and be no more than a couple of paragraphs long. Short letters convey confidence in the writer's position. Lead with your main point and keep it short.
4. Make it punchy. Nit-picky letters aren't fun to read. Letters that are short and snappy are more likely to be published.

Definitions

Incorporated area: an incorporated area is one that is part of a town or city, with a charter and its own municipality, and elected officials

Unincorporated area: an unincorporated area is one that is not part of a town or city, and is often part of a larger municipality such as the county, and does not have its own elected officials

Variance: a variance is kind of like a waiver for zoning regulations. Property owners, or applicants, can request a variance to deviate from current zoning requirements.

District model: there are several forms of representation in existence. Some government bodies are made up of all at large members while others have all district representatives, and many have a hybrid of both at large and district representatives.

At-large members: At-large is a description for elected or appointed members of a governing body for a whole population. This is common at a city, county, and state level.

District members: A district member is an individual that represents an entire district.

Acronyms

There are many acronyms that mean different things across various contexts. Usually a quick internet search will let you know the meaning of an acronym.

Reference: Advocacy Organizations

[Puget Sound Stream Keepers](#)

[Communities for a Healthy Bay](#)

[Tacoma Tree Foundation](#)

[Sierra Club](#)

[Tahoma Audubon](#)

[Futurewise](#)

[Friends of Pierce County](#)

[Puyallup River Watershed Council](#)

