

Thurston  
*Healthy Forests*

# A-25 Forest Conversions Ordinance

Board of County Commissioners

Work Session 1

Nov 2, 2023





# Overview

1. Project Scope & Timeline
2. Forest Practices Review
3. Tree Protection Today
4. Proposed Changes
5. Questions
6. Next Steps



# Overall Project Scope & Timeline

Priority 7 on Development Code Docket



*Phase 1: Managing Forest Conversions  
(Spring 2022 – Winter 2023)*

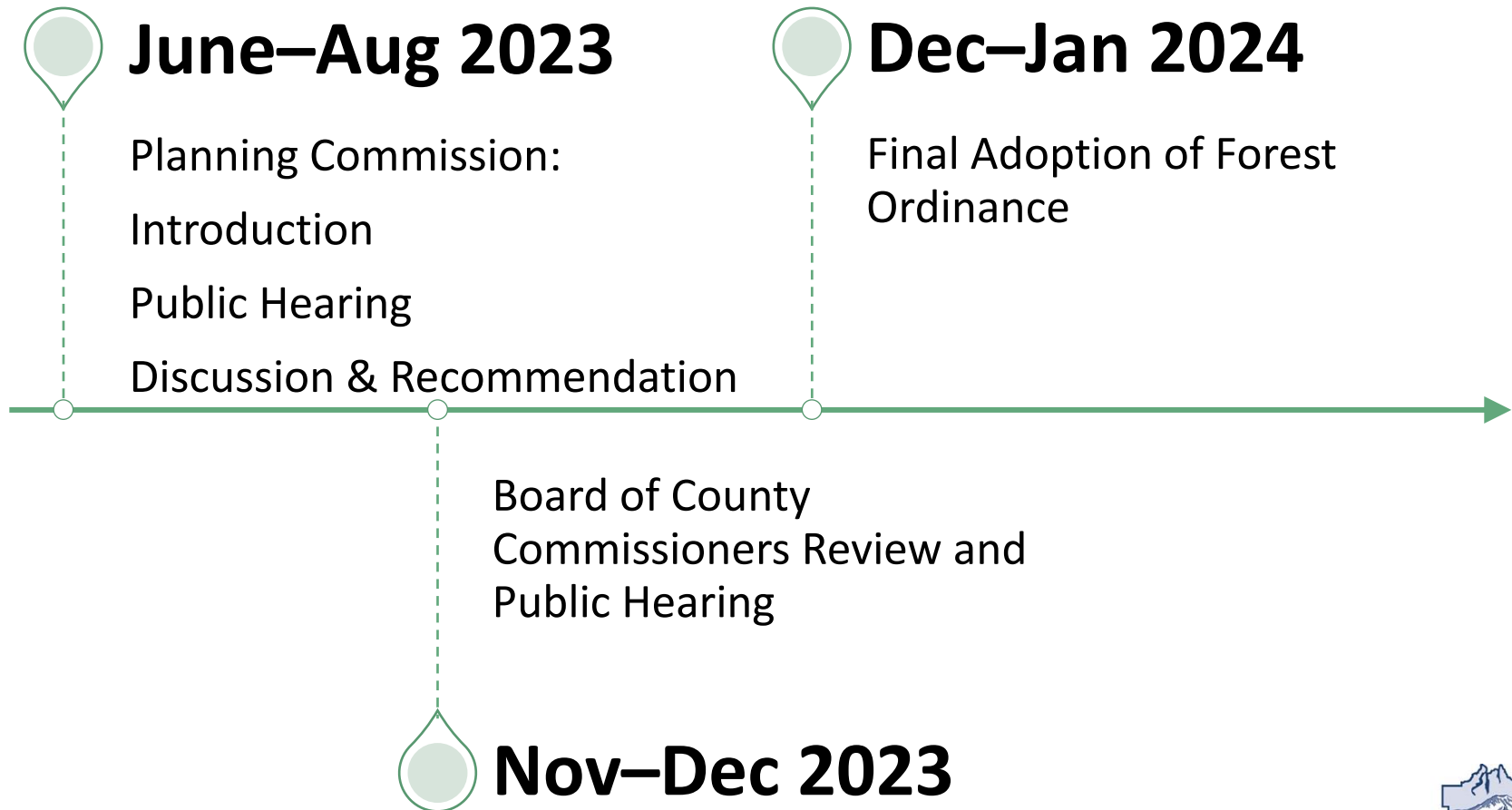
**Phase 2: Studying our Forest Canopy  
(Summer 2022 - Winter 2023)**

**Phase 3: Growing our Forest Canopy  
(Winter 2023 – Fall 2024)**

**Phase 4: Planning for our Urban Forests  
(Fall 2023 – Fall 2024)**



# Phase 1 Timeline



# Current Policies & Codes

## **Thurston County Comprehensive Plan contains policies for:**

- Protecting rural land uses and preserving natural vegetation
- Improving community resilience to climate change
- Enhancing tree canopy across urban and rural areas

## **Thurston County Development Code contains provisions for:**

- *Converting forestlands to non-forestry use*
- Open Space, landscaping and planting standards
- Tree retention / replanting in sensitive environmental areas
- Protections for oak woodlands

## **DDECM (Drainage Manual) contains:**

- Best management practices for stormwater management and low impact development
- Operations and Maintenance regulations
- Incentives for tree preservation during development / redevelopment







# Forest Practices

## Class I – Personal Use

- Under 5,000 board feet

## Class II and III and Class IV- Special

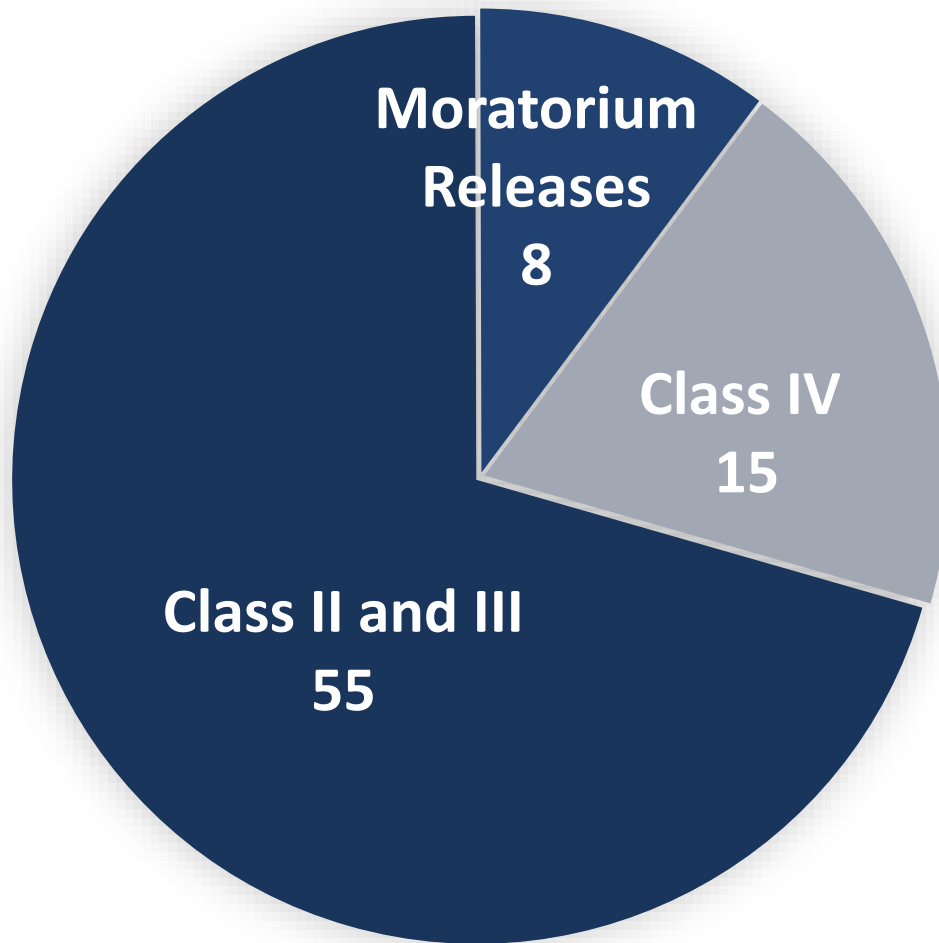
- Forest Industry
- Harvest and Critical Areas guidelines from DNR
- Protected by Forest Practices Act
- Includes a moratorium for development

## Class IV - General – Conversions

- County Adopted first ordinance 1997



# Average Permits Per Year 2006-2022



# Forest Conversion Regulations

## Inside North County UGAs

- Tree removal permits exempt:
  - on developed properties
  - On undeveloped when <5,000 sf is disturbed
- Concurrent development application
- Tree protections required

## Outside North County UGAs

- Tree removal permits exempt for removing <5,000 board feet in 12-month period or on properties <2 acres in size
- No development application required
- No replanting required





# Conversion Option Harvest Plan

- Offers an alternative to moratoriums
- For applicants who are unsure about development or want to sell the land
- Requires compliance with local critical areas ordinances
- Approved by county staff and submitted to state with application for Class II or Class III permit
- Reforestation is required
- Standards require forester expertise
- 35% of the area may be harvested



# Moratorium Releases

- Waiver
  - Single-family home on lots >20 acres
  - Home site limited to 2 acres
  - Harvesting / reforestation complies with State forest practices act
- Administrative Release from Moratorium
  - Single-family home on lots <20 acres
  - Applicant did not attempt to avoid county forest conversion requirements
  - Critical Areas / Shorelines not damaged during harvest or such damage can be restored
- Hearing Examiner Release from Moratorium
  - Non-single-family homes
  - Applicant did not attempt to avoid county forest conversion requirements
  - Critical Areas / Shorelines not damaged during harvest or such damage can be restored

6-year development moratorium applies to any state forest cutting permits or unauthorized clearing





# What do other counties do?

## Forest Conversions

- Same for inside / outside UGA
- Concurrent development applications
- Protections for significant trees
- Requirements for tree replanting

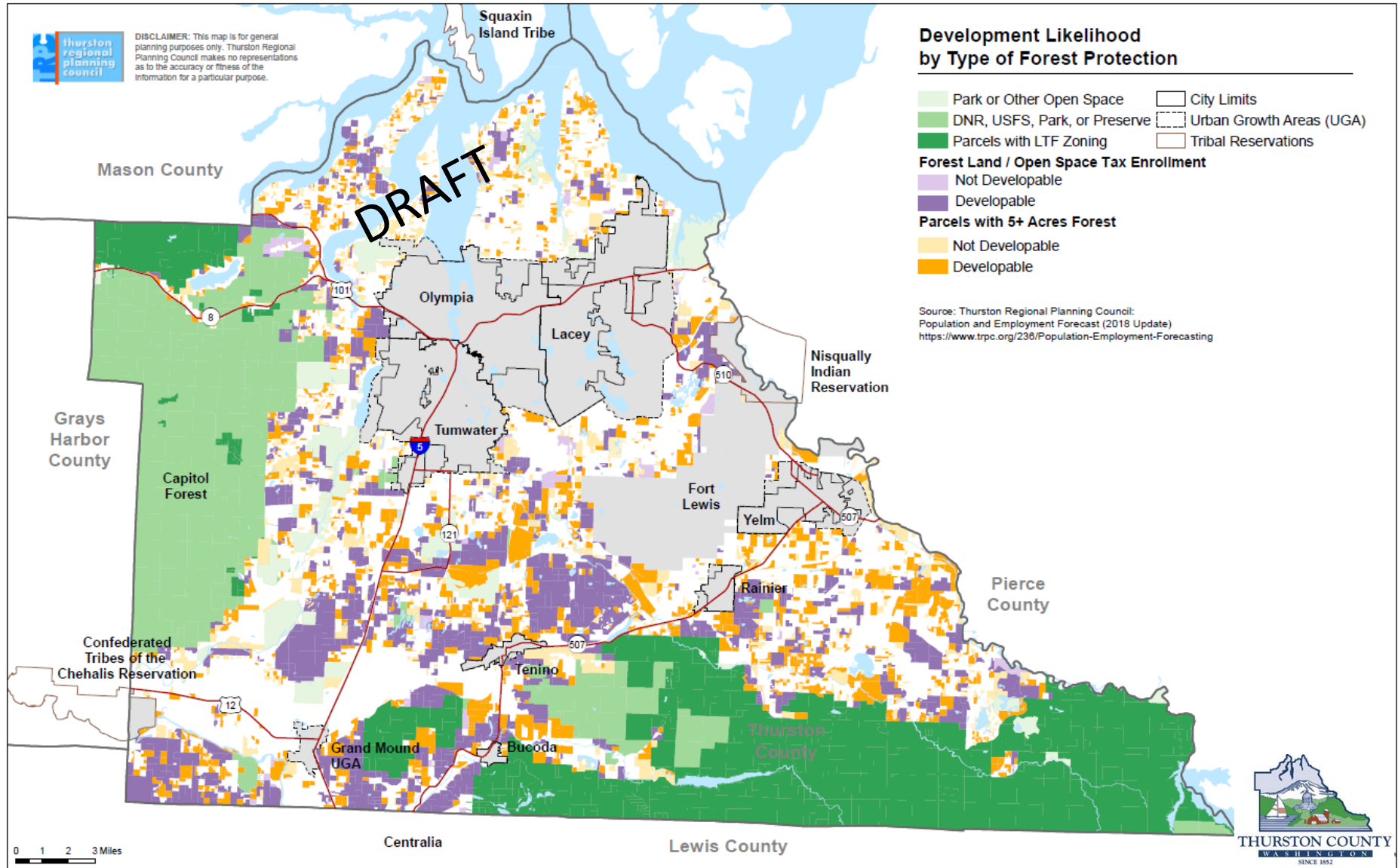
## Moratorium Releases

- No moratorium waivers
- Restrict eligibility – min. 3-year waiting period; releases granted only for public facilities or single-family homes
- Requirements for reforestation
- Restrictions for homesite size





DISCLAIMER: This map is for general planning purposes only. Thurston Regional Planning Council makes no representations as to the accuracy or fitness of the information for a particular purpose.



P:\ThurstonCounty\Healthy\_Forests\_2022\Maps\_Images\Conversion Risk.mxd



# Outreach

## January 2023 - June 2023

- 68 Interested Parties Participated
- 8 written comments accepted



Concerned about the cost and time taken for permit review



Larger trees should be prioritized for protection



Development should occur with tree conservation in mind



Concerned about the enforcement on current regulations



# Public Hearing

August 16, 2023

Attendance:

2 In person

4 Virtual

Written Comments:

Open July 19 - August 16, 2023

2 additional comments received





# What we heard...

- Concerns about clarity with tree classifications, percent retention, and measurement.
- Concerns about enforcement policies and fees.
- Concerns about COHP implementation.
- Concerns about Wildland Urban Interface (WUI) building code updates.
- Concerns about permit notification and public involvement with conversions.





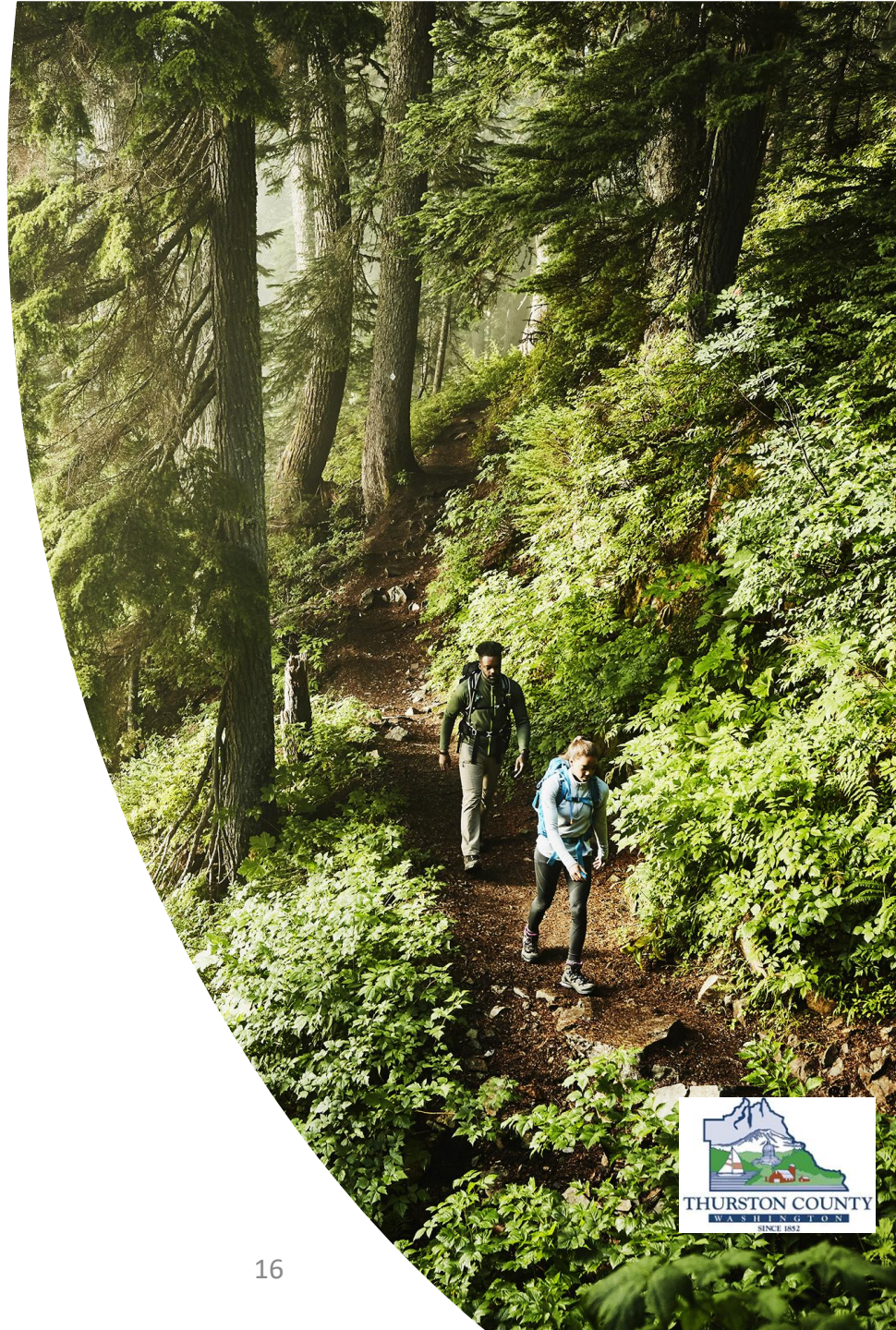
# Proposed Changes

## Conversion Requirements

- Simplify standards - same for inside / outside UGA
- Require concurrent development application
- Tree protections in place for significant trees and/or mature stands
- Require replanting for any protected trees that are removed
- Provide alternative through revised COHP standards

## Moratorium Releases

- Limit eligibility to single-family homes after 3-years, once DNR permit is closed





# Planning Commission Recommendations

## Code Changes

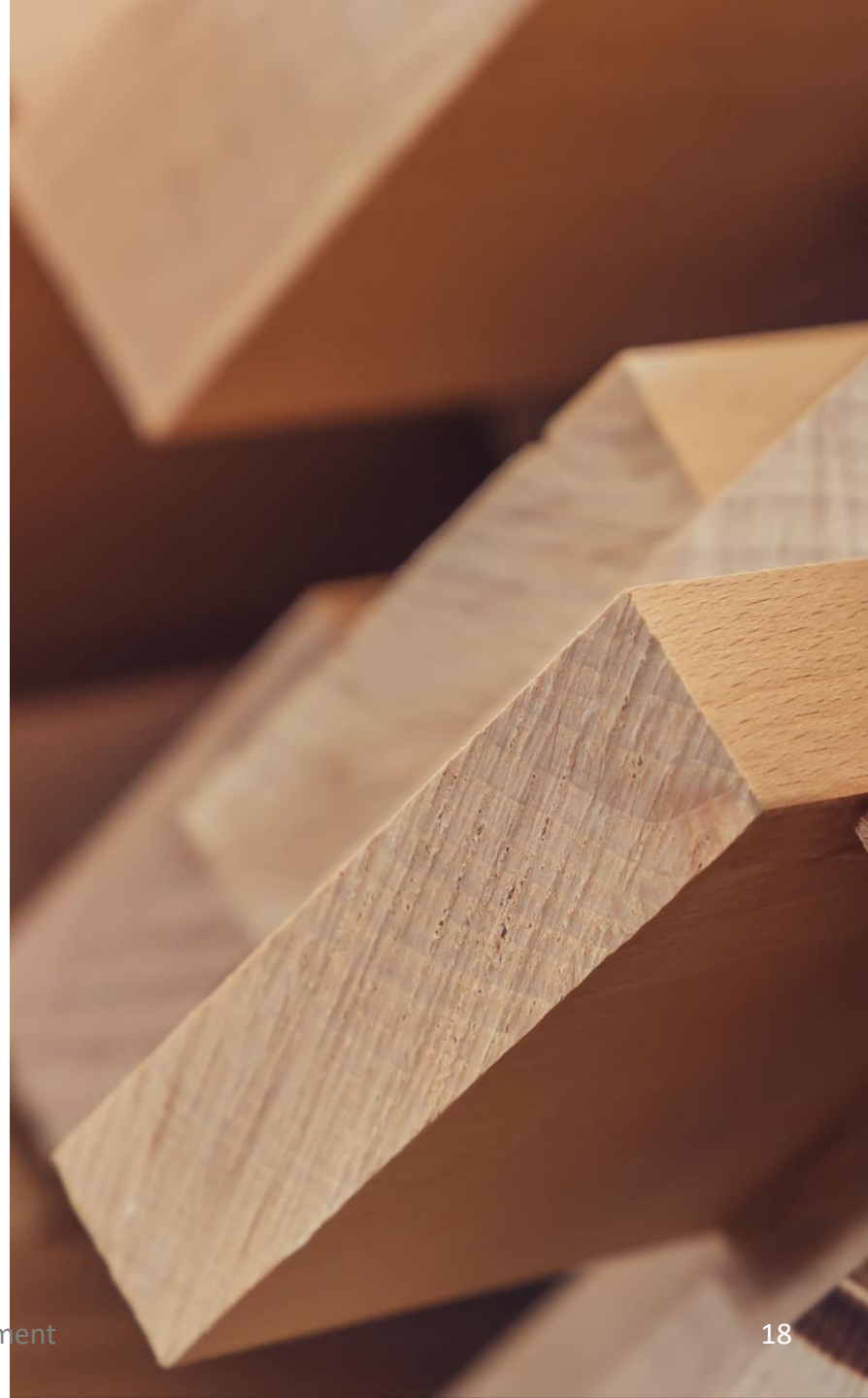
- Recommendation passed 5-2

## Incentive Based Fee Structure

- Recommendation passed 6-1

# Next Steps

- Set public hearing
- Adopt code changes
- Complete analysis of tree canopy data
- Zoning and open space chapter amendments
- UGA and Joint plan updates





# Questions or Discussion?

## ***Draft Motion:***

- Staff will return in late November to set a public hearing at an official Board meeting

## **Staff Contact:**

Dana Bowers

Natural Resources Planner

[Dana.bowers@co.thurstoncounty.wa.us](mailto:Dana.bowers@co.thurstoncounty.wa.us)

(360) 490-0834

