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**COMMUNITY PLANNING &
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT**

Creating Solutions for Our Future

Joshua Cummings, Director

MEMORANDUM

TO: Thurston County Planning Commission

FROM: Maya Teeple, Associate Planner
Allison Osterberg, Senior Planner

DATE: May 1, 2019

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Plan Update: Chapter 9 – Environment, Recreation and Open Space

Overview of the Environment, Recreation and Open Space Chapter

The Environment, Recreation and Open Space Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan identifies areas of need over the next 20 years and potential challenges for 1) environment and 2) parks and open space. This chapter establishes a framework for how the County will protect its natural beauty, environmental quality, and parks and trails while minimizing the impacts of natural hazards, including climate change.

The Washington State Growth Management Act states the following goal for the environment:

“Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.”

And, the Washington State Growth Management Act states the following goal for the open space:

“Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.”

Thurston County has experienced an increase in population growth over the last several decades and is expected to continue growing in population by more than 40% into the year 2040. In addition to population growth, the County will continue to face natural hazards and may see increased frequency, duration and strength in these hazards when combined with climate change. These challenges increase the need to protect the environment and open space.

The Environment, Recreation and Open Space Chapter helps address topics such as:

- Balancing a variety of land uses, such as agriculture, forestry, mining, and residential and commercial development with maintaining the natural environment.
- The need for additional public recreation areas and open space to accommodate for growth in the County and acquiring and maintaining those facilities.
- Balancing human uses with protection of water, air and environmental quality.
- Planning, preparing, and mitigating for the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.

Public Feedback on the Environment, Recreation and Open Space Chapter

Over the past few months, staff have met with multiple stakeholder groups to discuss hopes and concerns for the future. A few of the group meetings and opportunities for feedback included:

- Stakeholder Group Meetings: Thurston Thrives Action Teams (Environment, Climate and Clean Energy, Storm and Surface Water Advisory Board, Shellfish Protection District Advisory Committee, Sierra Club)
- Comprehensive Plan Open Houses (March 27 and March 31, 2018)
- PC Public Hearing – Scope of Mineral Resource Designation (March 7, 2018)
- Nisqually Subarea Open House (March 3, 2018)

Citizens expressed the following concerns on the environment and open space:

- Maintain and increase open space in Thurston County.
- Plan for connectivity for open space, fish and wildlife and other habitat areas.
- Include goals to reduce emissions and increase renewable energy.
- Ensure ground water is available for the future and protect ground water quality.

Major Changes of the Environment, Recreation and Open Space Chapter

This Chapter has been renamed from “Natural Environment” to “Environment, Recreation and Open Space” Chapter. Updates to the Environment, Recreation and Open Space Chapter reflect current conditions, future challenges to the environment, impacts of natural hazards and climate change to the County, and supply and demand of open space and recreation in Thurston County. Major changes in this chapter include:

- Chapter has been renamed from ‘Natural Environment’ to ‘Environment, Recreation, and Open Space.’
- Reorganization of chapter into 3 sections: environment, natural hazards, and parks and recreation.
- Addition of background information, goals, objectives and policies related to climate change and natural hazards.
- Updated information on water quality improvement work.
- Addition of information on water availability and streamflow restoration planning in response to the 2018 Streamflow Restoration Act (RCW 90.94).
- Streamlining of information and coordination of information between the Health chapter (11) into the Environment chapter (9).

- Update the Level Of Service (LOS) projection based on the new population forecast for Thurston County, through the year 2040. This may be revised and updated again at a later time, when the *Parks, Recreation, Trails and Natural Resource Preserve Plan* is updated.

Decision Points

Consider whether the draft changes to Chapter 9 are clear and sufficiently describe the county’s approach to planning for environment, recreation, and open space, within the scope of the periodic update.