

PURPOSE

The City of Walla Walla (City) is including a Climate Element (CE) in the City’s 2026 Comprehensive Plan update that will integrate climate resilience goals and policies into the City’s long-term planning framework. The CE will build on commitments made in the City’s current Comprehensive Plan, Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, and the Shoreline Master Program, to provide consistent, clear, and actionable guidance on climate resilience.

This memorandum identifies City climate policy trends, gaps, and opportunities to guide development of CE goals, objectives, and policies. Results from this assessment will be utilized to ensure the CE is consistent with existing City initiatives and Washington state guidance and requirements.

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INTRODUCTION

The memorandum is organized into the following sections:

- **Introduction:** Introduces the context, objectives, and methodology for the climate policy assessment.
- **Policy Trends, Gaps & Opportunities:** Summarizes key findings from the policy assessment of the City’s existing climate policies and goals. Includes:
 - **Cross-Cutting Policy Assessment:** Overviews cross-cutting policies and overarching implementation opportunities.
 - **GHG Reduction Policy Assessment:** Briefly overviews GHG reduction policies.
 - **Resilience Policy Assessment:** Overviews climate resiliency policy trends and opportunities.
- **Barriers to Implementation:** Identifies potential barriers to implementing climate policy in the City of Walla Walla.
- **Next Steps:** Outlines the next steps for Climate Element development.

Legislative Context & Background

The Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) was amended in 2023 under Washington House Bill (HB) 1181, requiring cities and counties to integrate climate policies¹ into comprehensive plan updates. For the City of Walla Walla, these required policy changes must address climate impacts and increase resilience across local sectors.

The Washington State Department of Commerce (Commerce) led a multiyear effort to develop model climate element guidance², which provides steps and pathways to integrate a climate resilience sub-element into the comprehensive plan, either as integrated policies or a standalone element. Jurisdictions are encouraged to assess their climate impacts and risks, seek input from key stakeholders and communities, and pursue pathways that modify existing or create new policies to increase community resilience. The City of Walla Walla’s 2026 Comprehensive Plan update will incorporate a CE aligned with Commerce guidance, existing City climate policies, and policies to foster sustainable and equitable planning in the face of climate change.

Washington State Policy

The City of Walla Walla’s CE will pinpoint specific actions the City can take to improve climate resilience. However, understanding key climate policy direction in Washington state will be essential to inform these local policies. In alignment with State policy, the City of Walla Walla has

¹ Climate resilience policies are required for all jurisdictions planning under the GMA. GHG emission reduction policies are only required for [11 of the fastest growing counties and cities](#) within them.

² Washington Department of Commerce. (2023). Climate Element Planning Guidance. Retrieved from <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/bhqov8pvbiygss9jxbmtezzgzrtr7nal>

adopted the 2021 editions of the [International Building Code \(IBC\)](#). Through the IBC, the city requires building designs to resist severe weather. The City of Walla Walla has also adopted the 2021 editions of [International Fire Code \(IFC\)](#) and the [Wildland-Urban Interface \(WUI\) Code](#), improving the City's wildfire resilience.

Methodology

As part of the climate policy assessment, Cascadia Consulting (Cascadia) developed a [policy database](#) that includes goals and policies from the City's key planning documents. This database was used to filter climate focus areas, Commerce-identified priority sectors, and climate impacts to identify trends, gaps, and opportunities for policy inclusion in the CE. Cascadia and City staff worked together to identify the following key documents for review:

- City of Walla Walla Comprehensive Plan (2018)
- Walla Walla County Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan (2024 draft update)
- City of Walla Walla Shoreline Master Program (2018)
- City of Walla Walla Urban Forestry Management Plan (2021)
- City of Walla Walla Water Systems Plan (2020)
- City of Walla Walla Stormwater Management Plan (2015)
- City of Walla Walla GHG Reduction Resolution (2012)
- CTUIR (Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation) Climate Action Plan (2022)
- City of Walla Walla 2024-2028 Strategic Plan (2024)
- Walla Walla Regional Housing Action Plan (2021)

Addressing Policy Gaps

The consultant team identified policy gaps and opportunities by utilizing climate element planning guidance to ensure that each focus area and priority sector was comprehensive and included key strategies for enhancing climate resilience and promoting climate equity. The guidance documents used to identify these gaps and inform policy development for the draft CE included the Commerce's Menu of Measures³ and Climate Element Planning Guidance⁴.

Policy Coding

Identified City climate policies, plans, and reports were coded for the following attributes to help assess climate policy trends and gaps:

- Focus area
- Priority sector
- Climate impacts

³ Washington Department of Commerce. (2023). Climate Menu of Measures. Retrieved from <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/n34kivgzn9rfe74jtz2vzxqlrv7j9m9>.

⁴ Washington Department of Commerce. (2023). Climate Element Planning Guidance. Retrieved from <https://deptofcommerce.app.box.com/s/bhqov8pvybiygss9jxbmtezzgzrtr7nal>.

The *Policy Trends, Gaps & Opportunities* section below provides definitions of each coding category, reason for inclusion in database, and findings. Only policies from the City's core documents were analyzed for the summary tables. Core documents included the Comprehensive Plan, the Shoreline Master Program, and the Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan. Each policy could be coded as multiple focus areas, priority sectors, or climate impacts. The cross-cutting code was used for policies that spanned several priority sectors or climate impacts.

POLICY TRENDS, GAPS & OPPORTUNITIES

Summary

The tables below summarize findings from Cascadia’s review of the City’s climate planning documents. The tables organize identified policies by focus area and priority sector, offering a high-level perspective on how the City’s existing plans address the focus areas of climate resilience, GHG emissions reduction, and climate equity.

Current Plans

The City of Walla Walla’s Comprehensive Plan features an "Environment and Natural Resources" section with broad policies on climate change. However, the plan lacks specific goals related to climate equity or resilience, such as flood protection, extreme heat mitigation, or climate-resilient infrastructure. Several other key documents contribute to shaping the City’s climate policies, including the Shoreline Master Program, Water System Plan, Stormwater Management Program, and the Urban Forestry Management Plan. At the county level, the City of Walla Walla is included in Walla Walla County’s Multi-Jurisdictional Hazard Mitigation Plan, which covers the City and neighboring jurisdictions’ approach to climate-exacerbated impacts like flooding and wildfires. However, this plan does not address hazards like extreme heat or drought specific to the City of Walla Walla or the county as a whole.

Focus Areas

Policies in the City’s core planning documents were analyzed based on their relevance to climate resilience and climate equity (Table 1). While the City of Walla Walla is only required to comply with the resilience sub-element requirements, identifying GHG emission reduction policies was a key part of the audit to assess the city’s overall climate policy landscape. The analysis found that the largest number of policies focused on resilience, followed by GHG emission reduction, with climate equity policy being least frequent. This suggests that while efforts to address climate-related challenges are growing, the focus on mitigating disproportionate impacts on vulnerable communities remains in its early stages.

Table 1. Identified City Policies, by Focus Area

Focus Area	# Policies/Actions ⁵
Resilience	71
GHG Emission Reduction	36
Climate Equity	12

⁵ The total number of policies may vary between tables, as some policies are categorized under multiple focus areas, priority sectors, or climate impacts. In total, 86 policies were analyzed for this quantitative review.

Priority Sectors

Policies were also analyzed by alignment with key priority sectors (Table 2). These priority sectors are drawn from Commerce guidance, which identifies the sectors as most vulnerable to climate impacts in the state. Reviewed planning documents reveal the prevalence of City policies across sectors, with particular emphasis on water resources, zoning & development, ecosystems, and transportation. Other sectors such as emergency management, buildings & energy, cross-cutting, health & well-being, economic development, waste management, cultural resources & practices, and agriculture & food systems had fewer policies, suggesting that these are limited or emerging areas of focus for the City.

Table 2. Identified City Policies, by Priority Sector

Priority Sector	Includes...	# Policies/Actions ⁶
Water Resources	Water quality and quantity	30
Zoning & Development	Site use, design, and other development facets	29
Ecosystems	Terrestrial and aquatic species, habitats, and services	27
Transportation	Multimodal travel and infrastructure	24
Emergency Management	Preparedness, response, and recovery	17
Buildings & Energy	Generation, transmission, and consumption	10
Cross-cutting	Intersects across multiple sectors, governance	10
Health & Well-being	Community well-being, equity, and engagement	10
Economic Development	Business continuity and opportunities	6
Waste Management	Materials recycling and disposal	5
Cultural Resources & Practices	Historic sites and cultural resources and practices	5
Agriculture & Food Systems	Production and distribution	2

Climate Impacts

Policies were also categorized by their relevant or targeted climate impacts (Table 3). Many of the reviewed policies addressed multiple, cross-cutting climate challenges, with 30 policies focusing

⁶ The total number of policies may vary between tables, as some policies are categorized under multiple focus areas, priority sectors, or climate impacts. In total, 86 policies were analyzed for this quantitative review.

on issues that span various climate-related impacts. Community well-being was a key area, with 21 policies aimed at mitigating its impacts through public education on climate issues and efforts to provide and protect green spaces. Variable precipitation, including risks like flooding and landslides, also received significant attention, with 13 policies specifically addressing this growing threat.

Table 3. Identified City Policies, by Climate Impact

Impacts	# Policies/Actions ⁷
Cross-cutting	30
Community well-being	21
Variable precipitation (flooding, landslides)	13
Wildfire & wildfire smoke	6
Extreme temperatures	2
Drought	2
Reduced snowpack	0

⁷ The total number of policies may vary between tables, as some policies are categorized under multiple focus areas, priority sectors, or climate impacts. In total, 86 policies were analyzed for quantitative aspect of the policy review (based on the core documents).

CROSS-CUTTING POLICY ASSESSMENT

The policy assessment identified several policies that address climate change resilience across several climate sectors and impacts. While these policies may not directly target a specific climate impact, they are cross-cutting policies that address several climate impacts. Such cross-cutting policies include:

- Policies that focus on **collaboration for regional planning** by coordinating with neighboring communities to increase resilience of natural systems to hazards.
- Policies on **protected and sustainable natural resource areas**. These policies aim to create and sustain protected natural resources, waterways, and forests. The policies promote thriving ecosystems and wildlife through conservation efforts and habitat preservation, specifically in the Mill Creek corridor.
- Policies that promote **community engagement and education** on climate action and hazard preparedness. Through public campaigns, events, and educational initiatives, these policies raise awareness and encourage actions that mitigate the impacts of climate hazards.
- Policies to encourage **quality of life for residents and community vitality** through aligning Urban Growth Area (UGA) development with sustainability standards, promoting public parks and green spaces, and supporting affordable housing.

To ensure that these cross-cutting policies and other climate resilience policies are **fully implemented**, we suggest the following additional policies for consideration:

- Continue to expand collaboration with regional partners in areas such as hazard mitigation, land use planning, and natural resource protection. Partnering with regional entities can improve resource sharing, amplify the impact of City-led initiatives, and enhance coordinated resilience efforts across the region.
- Evaluate and dedicate needed resources, such as partnerships, City staff, and funding, to implement the Climate Element.
- Bolster City capacity to monitor and report on climate resilience policy implementation through development and upkeep of progress reports and/or dashboards.
- Develop and maintain City staff technical expertise and skills related to climate change and environmental justice to support communitywide policy implementation, equity, and resilience.

GHG REDUCTION POLICY ASSESSMENT

The primary purpose of the policy assessment was to identify trends, gaps, and opportunities within climate resiliency policies. However, to provide a comprehensive review, climate-related policies targeting GHG reduction were also included in the policy assessment. The City of Walla Walla includes GHG reduction policies across the priority sectors of transportation, buildings & energy, waste management, and ecosystems. GHG reduction policies that intersected with resiliency or climate equity concerns were emphasized in the database as a potential opportunity for integration in the CE.

Table 4. GHG Reduction Policy Focus Areas

Priority Sector	Key Policy Focus Areas
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies emphasize a circulation system to ensure safe and efficient movement of people and goods, incorporating pedestrian and bicycle transportation while minimizing disruptions. • Policies foster active transportation and transit use by providing attractive end-of-trip facilities, reducing off-street vehicle parking requirements for developments near transit, and enhancing infrastructure for walking and biking.
Buildings & Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies have a strong emphasis on promoting energy-efficient building designs and the integration of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind, to enhance sustainability and resource conservation. • Policies mention exploring renewable energy opportunities, including maintaining and operating the City’s hydroelectric generating facility. • Policies aimed at adopting and implementing “green” standards, supporting energy efficiency, and minimizing environmental impacts in new developments.
Waste Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policies indicate a commitment to closing and rehabilitating unneeded public facilities, such as landfills, for future reuse, with an emphasis on efficient waste disposal and recycling practices. • There is support for sustainable materials management initiatives, focusing on recycling and minimizing waste generation within the community. • Policies highlight a collaborative approach to waste management, encouraging community cooperation and pursuing regional solutions for waste disposal and recycling to enhance environmental stewardship.
Ecosystems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • While the Comprehensive Plan does not include specific mention to carbons sequestration, the Urban Forestry Management Plan outlines the importance of maintaining and protecting healthy trees for carbon absorption benefits.

RESILIENCE POLICY ASSESSMENT

It is important to understand how climate impacts will affect the City to ensure the resilience policies within the CE address the unique climate vulnerabilities of the City of Walla Walla’s communities, natural resources, and infrastructure.

The following sections are organized by climate impacts identified to be most relevant to the City of Walla Walla and will be exacerbated by climate change. The [Climate Impacts Summary](#), conducted in fall 2024, details the projected climate impacts for the City of Walla Walla.

In summary, the City of Walla Walla is expected to experience the following impacts:

- **Extreme Heat:** Higher annual average temperatures, with especially high temperature increases during the summer months.
- **Wildfire and Smoke:** Increased wildfire activity due to extreme heat and heightened drought, resulting in increased smoke and poor air quality.
- **Drought:** Declining summer precipitation, leading to more frequent, longer, and severe regional droughts.
- **Extreme Precipitation and Flooding:** Increased flooding due to more frequent and intense extreme precipitation events.

Aligning to State guidance, the policies included in the resilience sub-element must, at a minimum, identify the action the City will take to fulfill the following:

Focus	Requirement
Resilience	Requirement 1: Address natural hazards created or aggravated by climate change, including sea level rise, landslides, flooding, drought, heat, smoke, wildfire, and other effects of changes to temperature and precipitation patterns;
	Requirement 2: Identify, protect, and enhance natural areas to foster climate resilience, as well as areas of vital habitat for safe species migration; and
	Requirement 3: Identify, protect, and enhance community resilience to climate impacts, including social, economic, and built-environment factors, which support adaptation to climate impacts consistent with environmental justice.

Climate Equity

Climate impacts, such as extreme heat or shifting precipitation patterns, will affect existing housing, transportation, and energy infrastructure, especially in areas already vulnerable to flooding or landslides. Climate change also worsens existing risks, such as chronic health conditions, social and economic inequalities, and pollution exposure, disproportionately affecting frontline communities, including communities of color, Indigenous people, and/or people with lower incomes who are impacted first and worst by climate change and environmental hazards. These compounding risks highlight the need for policies that address cumulative environmental and health burdens across the city.

Understanding which assets and populations are most at risk from climate and environmental burdens can inform policy focus areas and community priorities. The forthcoming **Climate Vulnerability Assessment** will guide policy by identifying areas, populations, and infrastructure most at risk from identified climate impacts. The assessment will also examine how socioeconomic stressors, such as poverty and inadequate housing, affect overburdened communities. These factors can exacerbate vulnerability when coupled with climate stressors, deepening societal inequities. Climate equity will be a key focus of the Climate Element policies.

Resilience Policy Trends, Gaps, & Opportunities

The tables below overview trends, opportunities, and gaps in the City of Walla Walla's current climate resilience policy. The table headings indicate the "Sector Nexus," representing the priority sectors where the theme or impact intersects. These priority sectors were identified in Commerce's guidance. The complete list is available in Table 2.

For a detailed review of the specific goals and policies that informed the identified trends, gaps, and opportunities, please refer to the [policy database](#).

Note that the forthcoming **Climate Vulnerability Assessment** will provide detailed projections on climate risks, adaptive capacity, and vulnerability within the City of Walla Walla, informing additional policy opportunities and priorities for CE development.

Community Well-being Impacts

Sector Nexus: Health & Well-being; Cultural Resources & Practices; Emergency Management; Economic Development; Zoning & Development		
Existing Policy Trends	Existing Policy Gaps	Policy Opportunities
<p>Current policies...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on emergency preparedness and response strategies, including risk assessment improvements, infrastructure readiness enhancements, and fostering a well-prepared community able to face potential climate hazards effectively. Focus on developing a system of parks, trails, and recreational facilities. Establish a housing assistance program for low-income homeowners to support small-scale green remodeling projects. Support emergency systems to supply water in the face of disasters, such as emergency power generators. 	<p>Current policies...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not provide adequate support for vulnerable populations, especially for low-income, homeless, or special needs populations. Do not adequately prioritize infrastructure resilience like retrofitting critical infrastructure (e.g., water systems, transportation networks) to withstand climate stressors like extreme heat or flooding. 	<p>Improve or add policies to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop infrastructure projects that include shaded pedestrian pathways, flood-resistant features, and heat-mitigating designs to ensure safe and accessible public spaces year-round. Strengthen the resilience, safety, and reliability of utilities in the face of climate change impacts, ensuring uninterrupted service and the protection of critical infrastructure. Protect vulnerable communities from disproportionate health and well-being impacts caused by climate-exacerbated hazards. Partner with community organizations to promote awareness and leadership training in climate resilience for underrepresented groups. Support implementation of the CTUIR’s Climate Action Plan (2022).
<p>Key Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate with the Economic Development Authority and Housing Authority on climate resilience measures aimed at enhancing community vitality and promoting green housing programs. Engage with local housing nonprofits, such as the Common Roots Housing Trust, to expand access to sustainable, affordable housing and prevent displacement. Collaborate with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation (CTUIR) on climate resilience measures that promote long-term sustainability and deliver social and economic benefits for both the City of Walla Walla and the Tribes. Ensure equitable access to resources, align initiatives with tribal cultural practices, and foster mutual economic opportunities through shared green infrastructure, water management, and housing programs. 		

Extreme Heat

Sector Nexus: Zoning & Development; Transportation; Buildings & Energy; Ecosystems; Agriculture & Food Systems; Health & Well-being; Water Resources; Emergency Management

Existing Policy Trends

Current policies...

- Establish overall goals for tree coverage, green spaces, and protecting natural resources and species, but no direct policy related to extreme heat or temperature.
- Mainly address physical infrastructure resilience, to hazards like earthquakes and floods, and general emergencies without specific measures for adapting to extreme heat.
- Ensure emergency shelters are prepared and available for community use, indicating that policy is being developed to ensure community-members have a safe and secure location in the event of a hazard.

Existing Policy Gaps

Current policies...

- Lack direct language addressing “Heat Islands,” “Extreme Heat,” or “High Temperatures.” While the Forestry Management Plan briefly mentions heat islands, it does not include specific heat-related policies or goals integrated into the overall tree canopy objectives.
- Do not include extreme heat as a listed hazard within the Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Policy Opportunities

Improve or add policies to...

- Protect the health and well-being of outdoor workers exposed to extreme heat and other climate-exacerbated hazards.
- Ensure that urban forestry management plans include considerations for the impacts of climate change and all relevant climate hazards.
- Ensure public transportation systems are resilient to heatwaves, with strategies to prevent delays and minimize community isolation.
- Expand community safety and resilience by designating accessible locations for people to use as a community shelter to provide heating and cooling during extreme weather events.
- Establish a community rebate program to install energy-efficient cooling and heating units in residential housing, prioritizing low-income housing to improve temperature regulation and energy affordability.
- Support frontline communities that lack proper cooling in homes or adequate shading in nearby parks and public spaces.
- Protect and restore riparian vegetation to establish cool habitats and accessible water sources for local wildlife, especially endangered species.

Key Considerations

The City of Walla Walla should implement additional measures to address extreme heat and temperature, as these pose significant risks not only for vulnerable communities but also for endangered species like salmon in Mill Creek. Recommended actions include:

- Collaborate with Walla Walla County to include extreme heat as a hazard in the County’s Hazard Mitigation Plan and for other city jurisdictions within the county.
- Propose a heat island mapping study along with an equity map to identify areas with high heat index and potential lower opportunity levels to help prioritize mitigation strategies.
- Conduct a similar study focused on water temperature in key salmon habitats to determine where additional riparian vegetation or shading is needed to protect aquatic species.

Wildfire, Smoke, and Air Quality

Sector Nexus: Health & Well-being; Emergency Management; Water Resources; Buildings & Energy; Ecosystems		
Existing Policy Trends	Existing Policy Gaps	Policy Opportunities
<p>Current policies...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on managing vegetation buffers, preserving surface water supplies, and protecting communities from overall hazards by partnering with organizations such as the U.S. Forest Service and regional agencies to address air quality concerns. Support the continuation of the Walla Walla County Community Wildfire Protection Plan updated in 2024. Include emergency protection initiatives to ensure a clean supply of water during wildfire events. Discuss siting emergency service facilities to maximize ease of access and minimize response time but doesn't go into detail about what emergency service areas or events are priority. Adopt the International Wildland-Urban Interface Code. 	<p>Current policies...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not address the negative impacts of poor air quality and smoke on vulnerable groups, including children, the elderly, individuals with heart or lung conditions, pregnant people, and those lacking sufficient shelter or who are required to be outdoors for extended periods. Lack robust policy to educate the community about potential fire starters and emergency evacuation measures and routes. Do not have adequate measures to reduce sedimentation in streams following wildfires, which could lead to increased landslide and flooding risks. Do not adequately consider the vulnerability of energy infrastructure to wildfires. 	<p>Improve or add policies to...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Prioritize at-risk community members for actions that mitigate wildfire smoke, including providing personal protective equipment and filter fans or incentivizing infrastructure updates (e.g., HVAC updates and MERV 13 filters for air intake) for facilities that serve high-risk populations. Develop a comprehensive, communitywide wildfire education program to build wildfire resilience by educating residents on preparedness and prevention strategies, enhancing emergency response capabilities, promoting fire-resilient landscaping practices, fostering fire-adapted communities. Strengthen partnerships with energy utilities to improve the safety and resilience of energy infrastructure, particularly in wildfire-prone areas. Analyze how the municipal water system maintains adequate pressure during a major wildfire event (e.g., multiple structures burning).
<p>Key Considerations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The City of Walla Walla can collaborate with local clean air agencies or nonprofits to ensure that residents have access to clean, filtered air in their homes and workplaces, and to provide adequate protective equipment for outdoor workers. As wildfires continue to worsen, Walla Walla needs to expand resources and education around preparation and prevention to reduce the risk of property damage, building loss, and threats to human safety when wildfires occur in the area. 		

Drought

Sector Nexus: Water Resources; Emergency Management; Agriculture and Food Systems; Ecosystems

Existing Policy Trends

Current policies...

- Address the management of surface water supplies for firefighting efforts.
- Have not explicitly factored in climate change in the City’s current water demand forecast.
- Have a goal to reduce water loss by 1% per year and include water conservation measures such as school outreach, customer education, and landscaping initiatives (xeriscaping demonstration, irrigation timers, etc.).

Existing Policy Gaps

Current policies...

- Lack a comprehensive drought management strategy that integrates key elements of preparedness, resilience, and response, particularly in light of the anticipated increase in the frequency and severity of dry spells.
- Lack specific information on water loss due to drought in Mill Creek.
- Are limited in addressing drought impacts on agriculture and food systems in the City of Walla Walla.
- Lack robust public awareness or education campaigns on water conservation methods.

Policy Opportunities

Improve or add policies to...

- Continue to improve water use efficiency and infrastructure to adapt to future climate conditions.
- Construct and maintain new water-storage systems (e.g., large cisterns, water towers, and reservoirs) to provide back-up water supplies during droughts and support climate resilience.
- Enhance groundwater sustainability by capturing excess surface water during periods of surplus and intentionally recharging aquifers to ensure long-term water availability and ecosystem resilience.
- Expand public awareness and education on water conservation and efficiency.
- Protect and restore shrub steppe and other arid ecosystems to increase resilience to fire, drought, and invasive species.

Key Considerations

- Coordinate with the City of Walla Walla’s **Watershed Resiliency Master Plan** to support efforts focused on Mill Creek’s water safety, supply, and long-term sustainability.
- The City of Walla Walla **Water Systems Plan** includes key strategies, goals, and programs to promote water efficiency, public education, and sustainable landscaping practices.

Extreme Precipitation and Flooding

Sector Nexus: Buildings & Energy; Zoning & Development; Ecosystems; Agriculture & Food Systems; Emergency Management; Health & Well-being; Transportation

Existing Policy Trends

Current policies...

- Limit development in known flood hazard areas unless projects ensure long-term structural integrity, mitigate ecological impacts, and avoid increased risk to life and property.
- Protect the hydrologic functions of floodplains by limiting the use of structural flood hazard reduction measures.
- Include general community protection measures such as debris and sediment management, as well as vegetation and development controls, all focused on safeguarding against various hazards, including flooding.
- Include development of a Disaster Debris Management Plan to manage debris during a disaster incident.

Existing Policy Gaps

Current policies...

- Lack inclusive engagement and outreach strategies for people within frequent flood areas or within the 100-year floodplain.
- Are limited in how flooding impacts long-term social, economic, and environmental resilience, such as impacts on housing, livelihoods, and local ecosystems.
- Minimally emphasize enhancing the adaptive capacity of both infrastructure and communities, such as through sustainable land use planning, nature-based solutions, or climate-resilient building codes.
- Do not explicitly detail strategies for addressing extreme precipitation beyond general flood management.
- Lack consideration of flooding impacts on roadways, particularly the need for elevated, flood-resistant sidewalks and roads.

Policy Opportunities

Improve or add policies to...

- Consider climate change, including extreme precipitation, increased winter streamflow, and other impacts, in floodplain management planning.
- Restore floodplains and connectivity to improve the resilience of streams and rivers and reduce flood risk.
- Map transportation infrastructure that is vulnerable to repeated floods, landslides, and other natural hazards, and designate alternative travel routes for critical transportation corridors when roads must be closed.
- Conduct education and outreach to those who live or work in future flood zones.
- Require the design and construction of commercial and residential buildings and their surrounding sites to reduce and treat stormwater runoff and pollution.
- Establish and/or protect riparian buffer zones to mitigate flooding by improving water retention and reducing runoff, while also promoting biodiversity and enhancing habitat for local wildlife.
- Implement erosion control measures and promote sustainable land management practices on private and public construction sites.

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| | | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Integrate sustainable soil health practices to effectively manage flood risks and support agricultural productivity in the Walla Walla region.• Develop and implement policies to enhance the measurement of stream flow and integrate accessible technology for flood management. |
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Key Considerations

- The City of Walla Walla has improved watershed health through work with the **Basin Watershed Committee** and other partners. The City should continue collaborating with these groups for effective and equitable flood planning, especially within the Mill Creek channel. The City recently secured a **FEMA Hazard Mitigation grant**, which will support the evaluation of strategies to protect critical water infrastructure and prioritize watershed resilience against various natural disasters.
- The City of Walla Walla adheres to the 2022 **Walla Walla County Flood Response Plan (FRP)**.
- Forge strong partnerships with Ecology to advance Managed Aquifer Recharge (MAR) initiatives.

BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTATION

To successfully implement climate policies and enhance climate resilience, the City of Walla Walla must address barriers that may impact both immediate and long-term efforts. While there are challenges to overcome, Walla Walla's approach can be shaped by both local priorities and strategic solutions that ensure a balance between climate resilience and community vitality.

- **Public Awareness and Buy-In:** Many community members may be unaware of the importance of expanding the city's climate initiatives, making alignment between local government and the community essential. Overcoming this barrier requires thorough community engagement, meeting residents where they are, and clearly communicating how these climate policies can protect them from potential hazards—both those that have experienced and those they may face in the future. Educational programs and workshops will be crucial in raising awareness about climate initiatives, promoting understanding of climate risks, and highlighting the benefits of sustainable practices, ensuring that residents are informed and actively involved in shaping their community's climate resilience efforts.
- **Competing Priorities:** Some of these climate policies are more important to address to certain community members than others. With that, there tend to be competing priorities for residents and City staff. Many of these policies will require significant resources and time to complete, so it will be crucial to prioritize projects and issues based on their climate impact and the level of support from the community and City staff.
- **Ineffective Policies and Restrictive Code Requirements:** There can be potential barriers when policies are not specific enough to effectively address the issues they aim to solve. As these policies and goals are developed, it is important that they align with existing code requirements to support the success of the Climate Element policies.
- **Funding:** The City of Walla Walla can integrate climate initiatives into existing projects and programs, and seek local, state, and federal funding opportunities. However, limited funding availability may negatively impact the ability to fully implement some of these initiatives. Projects like enhancing flood protection, expanding green spaces, and improving water infrastructure may involve upfront costs, but proactive investment can lead to substantial long-term savings.
- **Capacity:** The City of Walla Walla can collaborate with key partners whenever possible to expand capacity and foster greater coordination and efficiency. Addressing staff capacity challenges will be critical to ensuring these efforts are effective. Continuing to build on existing regional partnerships will be an effective way to strengthen regional climate resiliency efforts.
- **Infrastructure and Future Demand:** With moderate population growth anticipated and changing climate conditions expected, the City of Walla Walla will need to integrate forward-looking, climate resilient, infrastructure into design plans. This will require planning for growth in a way that anticipates climate impacts, and ensuring that new and existing systems, such as water infrastructure, public safety, and emergency management, are set-up for future City conditions.

NEXT STEPS

By identifying trends, gaps, and opportunities in existing plans, this policy assessment will help inform the City's draft Climate Element. The consultant team will collaborate with the City, the Climate Policy Advisory Team, and the community to develop policies that integrate the opportunities outlined in this memorandum, community input, and key findings from baseline assessments, such as the climate vulnerability assessment.

This climate policy assessment process also revealed the following observations for consideration in developing the City of Walla Walla Climate Element:

- **The Climate Element can serve as a central resource to reaffirm the existing resilience and mitigation policies established in the Comprehensive Plan**, while also referencing the City's ongoing updates to several key climate-related documents and plans.
- **Findings from the Climate Impacts Summary and Climate Vulnerability Assessment will be essential to incorporate into Climate Element resilience policies**, ensuring greater specificity and relevance in addressing climate risks, vulnerabilities, and adaptive capacity. Current City policies do not fully reflect the projected impacts of extreme heat, drought, variable precipitation, and wildfire in the City of Walla Walla.
- **Many opportunities exist to address the needs of vulnerable and frontline communities in addressing climate change.** For example, the Comprehensive Plan should tackle health, transportation, and utility concerns related to expected extreme heat, smoke, and flooding events, especially for those who are disproportionately affected by climate-related risks.