

Listening Sessions, Round 1 Summary

City of Lacey Resilience Sub-Element



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Prepared by Raimi + Associates

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Approach

In November and December 2024, Raimi + Associates (R+A) staff conducted 3, 45-60 minute Listening Sessions with community leaders and key stakeholders as part of the City of Lacey Resilience Sub-Element community engagement process. The purpose of the Listening Sessions was to learn about local experiences with climate change and ideas for how to make Lacey more climate resilient.

The Listening Sessions were generally organized around these questions:

Experience with Hazard Impacts in Lacey

1. When and in which parts of the city have you experienced events such as heat waves, floods, storms, and/or days where the air is very smoky?
2. What negative impacts have these had on your health, home, business, or other aspects of daily life?
3. How do you get information about when these events are going to happen?
4. How do you cope when these events occur? What do you do to prepare ahead of time and to recover afterwards?
5. What is already being done in Lacey to help people prepare for and recover from climate hazard impacts ?

Your Priorities

1. Are there any barriers that hinder your ability to prepare for and recover from climate hazard events? If so, what do you think should be done to better support you?
2. What do you think are the most important community assets (like places, groups of people, community activities/qualities) to protect from the impacts of climate change?

Participants included:

- **Amanda Munoz**, Development Director, Thurston County Food Bank
- **Anthony Levenda**, Director, Center for Climate Action and Sustainability (Evergreen State)
- **Chris Lester**, County Manager, Thurston County Title Company
- **David Clark**, Program Director, Nisqually River Education Project
- **Gordon Wheat**, Board Member, Thurston Climate Action Team; Washington Physicians for Responsibility
- **Kim Piper**, Local Realtor
- **Paris McClusky**, Community Organizer, Thurston Climate Action Team

Summary of Responses

The following summary organizes the participants' comments by key themes that emerged.

Climate Hazard Impacts

Climate Change Events Experienced

Increasing intensity of storms

- Storms have been increasing in intensity over the years.
- The intensifying precipitation is paired with periods of abnormally extreme drought.

Extreme heat

- The greatest climate health risk is mass mortality from extreme heat events.
- Heat island is also a factor as urban tree canopy loss is increasing.

More frequent wildfires nearby

- More frequent nearby fires cause smoky conditions that yield dangerous air quality.
- One participant is very worried about wildfire, especially because they live next to someone with a 200-300 acre property.
- Volunteer events have had to be canceled due to wildfire smoke and poor air quality.

Changes in streams and lakes

- A significant bend in the Nisqually River has been created over the past 60 years where water leaves the delta in the bay – the water is rising towards I-5.
- Lake levels are rising and falling dramatically.

Sea level rise

- Waterfront communities are at higher risk of flooding (higher tide + very low pressure).
- One participant has experienced water getting closer to the house in the past 4-6 years.

Negative Impacts to Assets

Backup power needed

- Storms cause power outages.
- Power outages happen frequently and can be 6-7 days long.
- Back-up power, water, and sewer systems will make infrastructure much more resilient.
- Power outages heavily impact those who have gone partially or fully electric.
- Some residences do not have a reliable heat source, which can make cold weather even more dangerous.

Road closures

- Icy roads cause road closures. At the Thurston County Food Bank, they may have to shut down because employees cannot safely get to work, and delivery is more difficult.
- The flooding of the Nisqually River, which runs under the I-5, could have the greatest impact at Exit 114. I-5 is the main corridor.

Air conditioning needed

- During extreme heat events people are more likely to shelter in place than go to cooling centers. In 2021 a majority of the deaths were people at home in their beds.
- Existing homes are at risk of being heat traps. Need to be able to close off outside air rather than relying on windows for cooling (applies to wildfire smoke as well).
- Ongoing heat pump installation efforts will help with indoor air quality during smoke events. There are also programs helping people purchase air filters and air purifying systems.

Impact on buildings

- Tree limbs have fallen and damaged roofs and buildings during storms.
- The food bank is not air conditioned, so it often must shut down or cancel events due to heatwaves. Even though the food is shelf stable and there are refrigerators, it is too hot for employees.
- Flooding impacts to buildings include infiltration into HVAC systems and flooding of lower-level commercial tenant spaces.

Loss of aquatic resources and cultural foods

- Low tide and heat (2-3 years ago) devastated the shellfish population.
- Climate change impacts tribes' natural resources such as access to traditional foods. The fluctuation of water temperatures and levels impacts the salmon population and affects the tribe's ability to exercise treaty rights and cultural practices that revolve around salmon.

Important Community Assets to Protect

- **Homes** with out-of-area owners (vacant or tenant-occupied) need emergency services.
- Prioritize **critical areas and watersheds** for conservation; this will aid groundwater recharge, cooling, clean air, and clean water.
- Protect **salmon** to mitigate climate change. As a keystone species, they create a more climate-resilient watershed. How the salmon population is faring is a good measuring stick for other factors.
- **Temporary shelters and cooling stations** are important assets to protect when extreme temperatures create unsafe conditions.
- Protect the **tree canopy**. Loss has mainly been from people cutting trees down. 20% of GHG emissions in Thurston County is due to tree canopy loss (according to Comprehensive Plan).
- **Proximity to nature**

Disaster Response and Resilience

Accessing Information

Existing community information sources

- Many individuals use the weather app, Thurston County scanner, and other online information sources such as City, County, and local organizations' social media accounts to stay informed about potential hazards.
- NPR and local radio stations are commonly used.
- The food bank raises awareness for the availability of cooling stations/temporary shelters.

- School districts provide useful information to parents and families.

Community members' knowledge is limited

- Washington residents have not had to worry about climate change as much as other places in the country, so understanding of its impacts is more limited.
- Community education is lacking.
 - There is a lack of understanding and skills amongst the average community member to deal with the impacts of climate events and improve resilience.
 - A mindset shift must happen about the reality of impacts that are occurring.
- Many people lack knowledge of simple ways to improve conditions during climate events. For example, many do not have proper ventilation for their gas stove but don't know not to use it during a smoke event.

Vulnerable populations have difficulties accessing information and participating in climate planning

- Often times, equity considerations are left out of climate adaptation and resilience efforts.
- Not many people are willing to go to a Board meeting and make comments; people need motivation to participate in such active ways.
- Many seniors and other folks will not participate via online survey; they need a paper copy.
- Seniors and other groups require transportation to attend meetings.
- Working families and lower/middle class are not typically involved with neighborhood associations and other groups that can share information and conduct local outreach.

Information needs to be properly messaged

- Having information is not always helpful – there is such a thing as having too much. Many young people struggle with climate anxiety and often shut down when they receive too much information about the climate crisis. It would be helpful to pair learning with opportunities to take action so youth are not left feeling powerless against climate change.
- Notifications on weather and climate events don't necessarily tell residents if they are safe or in danger.

Emergency Response

Emergency services

- It is important to have emergency services bolstered and prepared.
- We should try a system of green, yellow, and red markers people can place outside their residences to indicate their status to emergency services. This is used in earthquakes.

Use community networks to support emergency response

- It is important to know where vulnerable populations are concentrated so resources can be sent their way.
- Neighbors need to check in on and care for each other while emergency services focus on bigger picture aspects.
- Caveat: COVID funding that was making more robust emergency preparedness possible for community organizations has mostly run out.

Emergency supplies

- Most people don't have an emergency supply of food, water, or medication.
- At Thurston County Food Bank water is a really popular item so the food bank does not have an emergency stock like they do for food (6 months). There is not a sustained source of funding for them to buy it either.

Recommendations to Increase Resilience

Zoning and building code updates needed

- Drastic changes to residential infrastructure are needed.
- Zoning and building codes in certain zones don't require updates needed for climate resilience. This makes the issue systemic.
- 38% of households are only one individual; people are spread out and isolated. A solution to this is beautifying smaller units and making ADUs/JADUs more attractive. But ADUs are cost prohibitive and often do not financially benefit the builder.

Cooling centers and shelters during freezing temperatures

- Temporary shelters when the weather is freezing are important, especially for vulnerable populations.
- Cooling centers during heat waves are important, especially for vulnerable populations.
- Students at Evergreen congregate in places that naturally serve as shelters/cooling centers, such as on-campus libraries.
- Transportation is not as robust as it could be, which ends up being a barrier to folks accessing the available cooling stations and temporary shelters.

Nature-based solutions

- There are many regionally significant projects that are currently laying the groundwork for climate resilience, such as the estuary restoration.
- There is a project working to free up the river under I-5. The end goal is to mitigate extreme flood events and increase connectivity for salmon.
- There are some experimental tree plantings happening that involve sourcing trees from Oregon instead of Washington, in anticipation that they may be more climate-adapted to the future

climate in the region. They are also bringing in non-native species that will be migrating north in the future as average temperatures continue to increase.

Increase green job opportunities

- There are many employment opportunities in climate related fields for recent grads, but more should be provided for young people who did not go to college.

Additional Groups to Meet With

Participants suggested asking similar questions of representatives from the following groups:

- Homes First
- Habitat for Humanity
- Churches
- The developer community
- Olympia Master Builders
- Nisqually River Education Project (NREP)
- Nisqually Reach Nature Center (NRNC)
- Community Action Council