

LAND USE PLANS - LOCAL ACTION

Background:

This is a new program plan with a specific focus of following land use plans in the County. Along with the County land use plan, there are ten municipalities within the County that have land use plans. These plans directly impact environmental resources, pollution, and greenhouse gas emissions; they are effectively the environmental policies of local government. These plans also impact housing, transportation, and services.

Currently, LWVTPC is not following nor communicating about these land use plans. Hence, we lack information about the key local policies that affect our environment and our wellbeing. Given their impacts on environmental and social justice, this also means we are not following important equity issues. Therefore, the purpose of this proposed work plan is to educate ourselves, our members, and the public about County and municipal land use plans in order to understand and shape local government policies regarding our natural and built environment to promote environmental and social well-being.

Other organizations like Audubon and Sierra Club are working on specific environmental issues, however, LWVTPC is in a key position to advocate with officials and local jurisdictions about land use plans. Environmental groups have a big role to play, but the League has expertise in observing, communicating and advocating on a broad range of issues. We can provide information to other organizations to identify and track land use policies that have impacts on our natural and built environment. In addition, our voice carries weight.

In 2011, LWVTPC did a [biodiversity conservation in land use study](#). It is recommended that members read the study. It is worth reiterating a key point of the 2011 study: restoration is a lot more expensive than conservation. While the study is from 2011, the loss of biodiversity, habitat, natural areas, and green spaces are even greater issues in Pierce County today. In addition, some key issues that were not dealt with in the 2011 study are water and air quality issues, as well as transportation.

Specific Scope of the Land Use Committee:

- Identify the comprehensive plans within Pierce County;
- Review them to identify gaps and opportunities to advocate for;
- Identify the schedule, process and opportunities for updates to advocate for;
- Identify and establish working relationships with organizations to collaborate with; and
- Advocate to revise and support comprehensive plans to promote our positions on the environment, affordable housing, climate change, park lands, transportation, and internet access (These are all specific positions that the LWVTPC has taken).

The Land Use Committee will be organized such that each member is responsible for:

- A specific jurisdiction;
- Being familiar with their land use plan or some portion of it;
- Providing updates to the committee and the voter;
- Identifying organizations to collaborate with and communicating with them;
- Identifying relevant contacts within government; and
- Identifying relevant regulations and proposals that LWVTPC can advocate for.

Outlook for Work:

All of the county's land use plans impact our local environment and natural resources. Given there are 11 land use plans and they are long and complicated, it is not possible for any single individual to follow them. As a group, the League can act to monitor the plans, keep its members and the community informed, and make sure our elected officials hear from us. By following the land use plans, we can advocate for our positions within the County's comprehensive land use plans.

A Land Use Committee is proposed to follow the County's comprehensive and community plan updates to advocate for protection of our natural resources, biodiversity and habitat; mitigate climate change; as well as promote our positions on affordable housing, park lands, sustainable transportation, and internet access.

It will take a significant amount of time simply to read and understand the land use plans as well as to be able to summarize and communicate about them, let alone follow how they are being implemented. This will pose a significant barrier to participation in the committee to those with limited time, as well as to those with limited interest in delving into complex regulations. This is not a project that would have immediate, tangible results. Those who participate in it will need to have the time, probably at least four hours a week, the inclination to investigate complex issues, the ability to communicate effectively about land use plans, and desire to collaborate with a diverse group of partners.

Given the complexity of land use plans and the fact that they are ongoing, this is not a one year proposal, rather it can be characterized as a first year proposal. Assuming a five-person committee, the most ambitious proposal would be to try to follow five comprehensive plans the first year: Pierce County, Tacoma, Puyallup, and Lakewood, and a community plan of an unincorporated area. An alternative for the first year program would be to focus on only on the County land use plan, with the committee members focusing on different pieces of it. In subsequent years, the committee could expand to cover the land use plans of additional municipalities.

Who will benefit from this committee depends on the commitment of the individuals within the committee to communicate and form partnerships. Regular (monthly) communication in the *Voter* and a unit meeting dedicated to land use plans would ensure that our members would be informed. Who we partner with and how we communicate with them will affect who benefits outside our membership; we need to make a commitment to identify a diverse set of potential partners, identify ways we can collaborate, communicate with them effectively, and carry out collaborations that benefit their members.

Given that land use plans affect our natural and built environment, they affect our physical and mental health, they affect the natural world and biodiversity, and they affect our economic and social well-being through housing, parks, green spaces, etc. We know that those most adversely affected by environmental, economic, and social inequities are low-income, especially BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities. We also know that local policies have tremendous impact on local wellbeing, yet there is a lack of transparency and knowledge about land use policies and their impact on our local environment and well-being. To identify the impacts of these land use plans, especially on low income and BIPOC communities, we need to understand and communicate what these plans do and how they affect us. Awareness by itself will not improve equity, but knowledge is necessary to understand how policies affect equity and what policy changes can improve it.