



CITY OF  
**TUMWATER**

**PLANNING COMMISSION  
MEETING AGENDA**

**Online via Zoom and In Person at  
Tumwater Fire Department  
Headquarters, Training Room, 311 Israel  
Rd. SW, Tumwater, WA 98501**

**Tuesday, April 22, 2025  
7:00 PM**

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Changes to Agenda
4. Approval of Minutes
  - a. Draft Tumwater Planning Commission Meeting Minutes April 8, 2025
5. Commissioner's Reports
6. Manager's Report
7. Public Comment
8. Food System Plan Update
9. Next Meeting Date - 05/13/2025
10. Adjourn

**Meeting Information**

The public are welcome to attend in person, by telephone or online via Zoom.

**Watch Online**

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_VXSJbJZmSLeubDndF-11Kw](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_VXSJbJZmSLeubDndF-11Kw)

**Listen by Telephone**

Call (253) 215-8782, listen for the prompts, and enter the Webinar ID 858 7459 8582 and Passcode 204695.

**Public Comment**

The public is invited to attend the meeting and offer comment. The public may register in advance for this webinar to provide comment:

[https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN\\_VXSJbJZmSLeubDndF-11Kw](https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_VXSJbJZmSLeubDndF-11Kw)

After registering, you will receive a confirmation email containing information about joining the webinar.

The public may also submit comments prior to the meeting by sending an email to:

[cdd@ci.tumwater.wa.us](mailto:cdd@ci.tumwater.wa.us). Please send the comments by 1:00 p.m. on the date of the meeting.

Comments are submitted directly to the Commission Members and will not be read individually into the record of the meeting.

If you have any questions, please contact Planning Manager, Brad Medrud at (360) 754-4180 or [bmedrud@ci.tumwater.wa.us](mailto:bmedrud@ci.tumwater.wa.us).

### **Post Meeting**

Audio of the meeting will be recorded and later available by request, please email [CityClerk@ci.tumwater.wa.us](mailto:CityClerk@ci.tumwater.wa.us).

### **Accommodations**

The City of Tumwater takes pride in ensuring that people with disabilities are able to take part in, and benefit from, the range of public programs, services, and activities offered by the City. To request an accommodation or alternate format of communication, please contact the City Clerk by calling (360) 252-5488 or email [CityClerk@ci.tumwater.wa.us](mailto:CityClerk@ci.tumwater.wa.us). For vision or hearing impaired services, please contact the Washington State Relay Services at 7-1-1 or 1-(800)-833-6384. To contact the City's ADA Coordinator directly, call (360) 754-4128 or email [ADACoordinator@ci.tumwater.wa.us](mailto:ADACoordinator@ci.tumwater.wa.us).

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### *What is the Planning Commission?*

*The Tumwater Planning Commission is a citizen advisory commission that is appointed by and advisory to the City Council on the preparation and amendment of land use plans and implementing ordinances such as zoning. Actions by the Planning Commission are not final decisions; they are Commission recommendations to the City Council who must ultimately make the final decision. If you have any questions or suggestions on ways the Commission can serve you better, please contact the Community Development Department at (360) 754-4180.*

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### **Decorum Statement**

Welcome to the Planning Commission meeting. We thank you for attending.

The City Council encourages community engagement in local government and provides a variety of ways to participate.

The Chair of the Planning Commission will be responsible for conducting orderly and efficient meetings within the scheduled time. To accomplish that, the Chair will maintain order and decorum and can regulate inappropriate debate, repetitious discussion, and disruptive behavior when needed.

The Chair will recognize those that wish to speak and may limit the time allowed for individual comments. City staff will record questions and comments during the meeting. If an issue or question cannot be addressed during the meeting, City staff will address the issue or respond to the question by following up with the individual.

We respectfully request that attendees refrain from disruptions during the meeting and comply with decorum rules.

Thank you for participating.

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**CONVENE:** 7:00 p.m.

**PRESENT:** Chair Elizabeth Robbins and Commissioners Nelida Daniel, Grace Edwards, Terry Kirkpatrick, Gina Kotek, Sandra Nelson, and Brandon Staff.

Staff: Deputy Director Brad Medrud and Associate Planner Dana Bowers.

**CHANGES TO AGENDA:** There were no changes.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES:**

**TUMWATER PLANNING  
COMMISSION MINUTES  
JUNE 25, 2024:**

**MOTION:** Commissioner Staff moved, seconded by Commissioner Kotek, to approve the minutes of June 25, 2024 as presented. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.

**COMMISSIONER'S  
REPORTS:** There were no reports.

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR'S  
REPORT:** Deputy Director Medrud reported the Climate Element is undergoing legal review. The Commission is scheduled to review the element prior to preparation of incorporating the element into the ordinance in the fall. The Lands for Public Purposes Element and the Utilities Element have completed legal review. Progress is occurring on the Housing Technical Guide, but at a slower pace than anticipated. The goal is to complete the document for submission for legal review. The Commission will likely review the document at its last meeting in May to include the entire Housing Element. Staff continues to work on the Conservation Element with a goal to release the document for legal review. The Land Use Element and the Transportation Plan Element will follow.

Progress continues on the draft of the Habitat Conservation Plan with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through biweekly meetings. The goal is to finalize a draft by mid- to late-spring to release to the public. The intent is to schedule NEPA and SEPA reviews shortly thereafter.

Director Matlock is retiring at the end of May after 35 years with the City. A department celebration will be held.

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Sam Hunter joined the City as an Associate Planner in the Permit Division.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

**Chris Lester, Governmental Affairs Director, Thurston County Realtors Association,** said he lives close to Tumwater and his children attended Tumwater schools. He has been working with Deputy Director Medrud and Planner Bowers over the last several years. He offered assistance for any housing related issues as a partner within the community.

**2025 COMPREHENSIVE  
PLAN PERIODIC UPDATE –  
LAND USE ELEMENT –  
PART 1**

Deputy Director Medrud advised that the review would cover the differences between Part 1 and Part 2 of the Land Use Element and the planning focus for the element.

Part 1 is intended as a policy document for the Council, staff, and the Commission, which speaks to the importance of readability and understandability of the document. Part 2 is the technical document that reflects how growth will be accommodated in zone districts throughout the City.

Deputy Director Medrud reported the housing allocation process was completed in 2023/2024, as well as the land capacity analysis to ensure sufficient land for housing following the housing allocation process. The Department of Commerce then issued another update to its guidance and advised that the original process completed by staff did not meet new standards. Following some changes, an updated Land Capacity Analysis was completed.

Another important element changed by the Department of Commerce after the analysis was complete was an update to the guidance for completing a land capacity analysis specifically for emergency and transitional housing. The new requirement is to ensure the City had sufficient land in the City to accommodate a potential range of uses. Subsequently, the City contracted with Thurston Regional Planning Council. The analysis was completed at the end of March reflecting that the City had adequate land to accommodate those uses. The information enables staff to complete the technical document.

The Department of Commerce assigned each county a base number of required housing units within counties. Jurisdictions within each county participated in a process to allocate the housing needs by each jurisdiction through a consensus process. Housing units required to be allowed in the City and its urban growth area from 2020 to 2045 total 9,192 new units. The units are categorized into different housing types. The number determines the type of land uses the City should plan to accommodate. Because of the large need for housing for those with household incomes under 80% of the area median income, the

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type of housing to accommodate that population is multifamily versus single-family detached, which creates land use implications. The result will shift the City's landscape over time with different types of land uses.

Staff reviewed household size from the 2020 census to estimate the housing numbers to forecast a population estimate. Thurston Regional Planning Council (TRPC) completed the original estimates in 2018 for population growth based on the state forecast. Staff is utilizing the most recent census to determine the number of people per household of 2.39. Since the 1970s, the figure has declined reflecting a rate of 2.2 people per household in 2010. However, the number is beginning to increase for a variety of reasons surrounding economics and larger households, etc.

As the City is planning for both the City and its urban growth area, population and housing forecasts encompass both areas. The original housing allocation process divided the areas.

Employment estimates are from 2017. The employment forecast prepared by TRPC identifies an additional 10,000 jobs by 2045.

Chair Robbins inquired as to whether the census data includes more current employment and population estimates. Deputy Director Medrud explained that the census is completed once every ten years and is supplemented with the American Community Survey annually. Update survey data is through 2023, which were used for planning for housing and land use updates. The data includes a large margin of error especially for smaller jurisdictions. Staff is inclined to use TRPC data for both housing and land use. However, for the employment forecast, staff prefers not using census data.

Chair Robbins asked whether the forecast reflects a range rather than a specific number because of the variability in population, housing, and employment. Deputy Director Medrud advised that a specific number has been identified for housing whereas population and employment are more flexible. It is important that the City ensures there are sufficient commercial and industrial lands to accommodate the population range.

Deputy Director Medrud reviewed the structure of the Land Use Element. Part 1 of the Land Use Element – Goals, Policies, and Implementation Actions of the Land Use Element is structured similarly to Part 1 of the Housing Element. The intent of separating the goals, policies, and implementation actions from the technical information for each element is to make it easier for policymakers and the community to use the document. Introduction Chapter 1 provides

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a short background on the purpose of the Element and an explanation of how to read the Element. Chapter 2 discusses the Element's connection to the land use goals of the state Growth Management Act. Chapter 4 lists the fourteen land use goals grouped under five types of goals. The land use goals are not listed in order of priority. Chapter 5 presents each of Tumwater's land use goals, policies, and implementation actions in detail with an explanation on the importance of each goal, what City department is responsible for implementation, and the timeline of the actions. Comments are provided that discuss the source of each of the goals, policies, and implementation actions.

Deputy Director Medrud encouraged the Commission to review the document and provide feedback if information is unclear.

Similar to the Housing Element, the Land Use Element includes 14 goals that are grouped by similar categories. Deputy Director Medrud reviewed the 14 goals:

**GOAL LU-1:** Ensure the Land Use Element is implementable and coordinated with other City, neighboring jurisdictional, and regional plans. *Deputy Director Medrud explained the importance of the County-Wide Policy, which serves as a translation of the GMA at the county level for comprehensive planning. The Policy enables jurisdictional comprehensive plans within the county to align and connect. Development in the urban growth areas is addressed in the County-Wide Policy.*

**GOAL LU-2:** Ensure development occurs in an orderly and cost-efficient manner to best utilize available land and public services, conserve natural resources, protect and enhance critical areas and open space, address equity and climate change, and reduce sprawl.

**GOAL LU-3:** Ensure adequate public services, facilities, and utilities are available to proposed and existing development.

**GOAL LU-4:** Create land use patterns that increase the availability of affordable housing for all income groups. *Planner Bowers commented on the importance of ensuring housing is distributed throughout the community to avoid creating districts or barriers. Staff was asked whether the process for approving the development of several multistory apartment complexes located off Littlerock Road in the area of Walmart and Home Depot considered the goals of affordable housing and equity. Deputy Director Medrud said that at the time of the development proposals for many of the large retail stores, equity and affordable housing were not considered as the City desired retail uses with large parking areas in that area of the City.*

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*When the City changed provisions to enable five-story residential uses in the General Commercial zone, the intent was to evolve those areas into more mixed use areas to afford opportunities for people to live, work, and access retail services without using a car. The market changed after 2020. At that time, the Commission considered some changes to the code to focus less on height and more on mixed uses. The transition from policy to code to development took approximately 15 years.*

*Planner Bowers added that often the City cannot plan on changes despite code changes because there can be larger cultural shifts that are not possible to plan for or predict.*

*Commissioner Kirkpatrick noted that prior to the development of the Fred Meyer complex a large hotel with plenty of parking was located on the site. The redevelopment proposal was a commercial-to-commercial use and required no changes in codes to accommodate the development. The Fred Meyer complex served as the impetus of retail development in that area of the City.*

*Discussion ensued on the lack of large conference and meeting space within the region following redevelopment of several hotel sites that hosted large conferences in the tri-city area.*

GOAL LU-5: Ensure land use patterns support efficient multimodal transportation systems in coordination with City and regional transportation plans.

GOAL LU-6: Ensure physical limitations of the land are considered during the development process.

GOAL LU-7: Support development of all types of residential uses.

GOAL LU-8: Support development of commercial and mixed uses in appropriate areas.

GOAL LU-9: Support development of manufacturing, industrial, and warehouse uses in appropriate areas.

GOAL LU-10: Retain and enhance open space, parks, trails, and space for recreational opportunities.

GOAL LU-11: Support development of public facilities in appropriate areas.

GOAL LU-12: Provide for the location of essential public facilities.

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GOAL LU-13: Protect the Olympia Regional Airport from incompatible land uses and activities that could affect the use of airport facilities and operations while reflecting the existing urban environment adjacent to the Airport.

GOAL LU-14: Preserve and protect significant historical and cultural sites.

Deputy Director Medrud encouraged the Commission to consider how the Housing Element, Land Use Element, Climate Element, and the other elements connect or create conflicts. The 15 GMA goals are not necessarily in harmony, such as protecting the environment while promoting economic development as it can often create conflicts. The important aspect of all the Elements is how those conflicts are addressed.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick inquired as to whether the City Council supports residential uses within the area of the airport. Deputy Director Medrud replied that the Council has not addressed the issue other than through individual discussions concerning residential uses near the airport. It speaks to the balance between existing development and potential changes to the airport in the future that could affect existing development. The discussion with the Council has not occurred at this time but is planned to address issues. The issue becomes magnified when considering potential changes to the airport in terms of flights and frequency.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick recalled that during the development of the Town Center Plan, the committee disagreed on several development possibilities. The first was not allowing drive through uses, which eventually changed when the City allowed a drive through for a local bank. The second issue was whether to allow multifamily residential uses in the area.

Chair Robbins asked about the potential of recognizing partnership opportunities, such as cost-share and revenue sharing arrangements and could align with land use. Deputy Director Medrud said it is likely partnerships play a lesser role in land use development but could benefit regional efforts to address homelessness and affordable housing. Because the scope of need is so high, regional efforts are necessary to help fund and manage those types of issues as they are typically far beyond the capacity of any one city. It is also important to present a united voice when seeking funding from the state or the federal government.

Chair Robbins commented on potential partnerships to develop a convention center or other similar facilities, which speaks to land use.



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Deputy Director Medrud advised that the elements that could focus on a convention center would be the Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan or the Economic Development Plan.

Commissioner Staff asked how the City determines which historical or cultural sites are significant. Deputy Director Medrud explained that the City has a designated Historic District located around the area of the old brewery. Within the community, many sites have been designated as historic by the state. The issue is considering what sites or objects should be preserved in the future and the process for the designation and the cost-benefit tradeoff for the owner of the property.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick asked whether the statement that there is sufficient land to meet Tumwater's goals are included in the Land Use Element or another element. Deputy Director Medrud said the Land Use Element and its technical analysis addresses whether the City has sufficient land use capacity based in large part by TRPC's analysis of region-wide land capacity. Land capacity is required to be addressed within the Land Use Element.

Chair Robbins asked whether the capacity issue speaks to the need for annexation. Deputy Director Medrud said land capacity does not require a change to the urban growth area, which is established by the county. Each jurisdiction has a role to accommodate growth within existing lands. The City is planning for both the City and the urban growth area at urban levels. Chair Robbins asked whether the City would need to expand the urban growth area to accommodate growth beyond the planning horizon. Deputy Director Medrud described the intricacies involving property owners of a large parcel, as the City cannot force development of land, which speaks to the element of market choice and what lands would be developed and the financial capability of developing projects. As the City develops, the nature of development may change.

Chair Robbins recalled reading information about annexation of county islands in the Element. Deputy Director Medrud replied that during the 2016 update of the Comprehensive Plan, 15 county islands were located within the City limits. The islands ranged in size from a large subdivision to several parcels. Since then, the City annexed all the islands in one island annexation process. He added that the intent is not creating islands when annexing lands. Through the prior annexation approval process, the Thurston County Boundary Review Board often changed annexation boundaries, which in some cases created county islands.

Deputy Director Medrud asked the Commission to review the remaining policies and goals. Within the 2016 Land Use Element,

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implementation actions were addressed two ways. Unlike other elements in the Comprehensive Plan, the Land Use Element included 16 implementation actions identified in a separate section following the goals and policies. The update has moved from that model. Many of the implementation actions have been transferred to the updated Element in various forms.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick said the color formatting of the document of light blue and dark blue is confusing. It would be helpful for all policies to be of one color and associated actions in another color. Deputy Director Medrud affirmed that at this time, staff is beginning to format the document and is experimenting to ensure clear distinctions. He encouraged Commissioners to submit formatting recommendations.

Deputy Director Medrud noted that in addition to the goals, policies, and implementation actions, staff added information as to their respective origination. In many cases, the information existed while some information reflected a combination of existing and new language, as well as new language.

Chair Robbins asked about any instances where information was deleted because it was accomplished or became obsolete. Deputy Director Medrud affirmed some actions were accomplished that were not included. Staff can provide the Commission with a copy of the deleted table reflecting information that has been deleted.

Planner Bowers described some information the Commission will receive that improves the readability of the information.

Discussion ensued on the importance of the documentation to be readable and concise for the public. Planner Bower explained the difficulty of condensing goals and policies, as each goal and policy have different meanings. Feedback from the Commission assists staff in ensuring the language is specific and that goals and actions are measurable.

Commissioner Kirkpatrick stressed the importance of any references to neighborhoods to reflect neighborhoods within the current Comprehensive Plan. He asked whether “neighborhoods” would be included in the definitions. Deputy Director Medrud said the suggestion is on point because when the plan addresses neighborhoods, it speaks to the subdistricts of the City and not necessarily a residential neighborhood. Staff will ensure clarity throughout the document.

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Deputy Director Medrud said the schedule includes a briefing to the Commission on Part 2 and updated Part 1 for the Land Use Element at the Commission's June 10, 2025 meeting. The briefing will include a review of the document format. Input from the Commission will inform the format when combining the documents later in the summer.

**NEXT MEETING DATE:** The next meeting is scheduled on April 22, 2025.

**ADJOURNMENT:** **Commissioner Staff moved, seconded by Commissioner Kirkpatrick, to adjourn the meeting at 8:18 p.m. A voice vote approved the motion unanimously.**

Prepared by Valerie L. Gow, Recording Secretary/President  
Puget Sound Meeting Services @ [psmsoly@earthlink.net](mailto:psmsoly@earthlink.net)

TO: Planning Commission  
FROM: Dana Bowers, Associate Planner  
DATE: April 22, 2025  
SUBJECT: Food System Plan Update

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1) Recommended Action:

No action is requested. This is an update with the consultant about the Community Food Assessment in the process of developing a food system plan for the City.

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2) Background:

The City Council included the preparation of a City Food System Plan to address community concerns with food insecurity on the local level on the 2025 Long Range Planning Work Program.

City staff have been working with the City's consultant Rebeca Potasnik to prepare a Plan that focuses on supporting ways to access food more effectively and to consider the role of local and community-based agriculture activities, such as community gardens and local producers and processors to build a more resilient food system.

The Plan will focus on how to provide healthy food to the community, reduce food waste, and support local food processing by eliminating barriers, addressing gaps in the current system, producing solutions to implement at appropriate scale, and identifying how to maintain and update resource materials through jurisdictional and community partners.

The Planning Commission was originally briefed on the project on November 26, 2024, with a follow up on February 11, 2025, that provided an update of the community members interviewed thus far and plans for a survey to broaden outreach to more subject matter experts.

The work session on April 22, 2025, with the Planning Commission will provide a draft of the Community Food Assessment and ask Commissioners to provide input to develop goals and objectives for the plan. The General Government Committee will receive a similar briefing at their May 14, 2025, meeting.

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3) Alternatives:

☐ None

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4) Attachments:

- A. Staff Memorandum
- B. Draft Community Food Assessment

# MEMORANDUM

Date: April 22, 2025  
To: Planning Commission  
From: Dana Bowers, Associate Planner



## Addressing Food Insecurity and Access to Food: Community Food Assessment

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The City Council approved the development of a Food System Plan as part of the 2024 and 2025 Long Range Planning Work Programs. The City hired Rebeca Potasnik as a consultant to assist with the development of the Plan. The intent of the Plan is to review the current food landscape in Tumwater and create a strategy to improve objectives for the community.

Because the scope of food security is broad, the study is focusing on the following subjects:

- How to provide healthy food for all members of the community;
- Reduce food waste; and
- Support local food production and processing.

The first phase of the project is to create a Community Food Assessment which uses literature and interviews with key knowledge leaders to determine the current state of Tumwater's food system and identify needs. The next phase will provide a Food System Plan to define goals and objectives which are attainable and relevant to the scope of City code and programming. This plan will provide strategies and metrics to improve food security in our community.

The consultant will present the findings of the Community Food Assessment and will ask the Planning Commissioners for input on potential goals and objectives that will guide the strategy to improve Tumwater's food system.

### Goal Development and Question for the Commission

The next phase of this project is to develop goals and objectives for Tumwater. The goals should be grounded in supporting the work that is already happening and meeting needs identified in the Community Food Assessment.

The following questions help guide a discussion and brainstorming session about what the Planning Commission would like to see move forward as recommendations to council in this plan.

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For brainstorming, it would be the most valuable to provide any ideas you generate and avoid limiting suggestions to what is feasible or within city responsibilities. Staff and consultants can complete assessments of feasibility and strategies to accomplish the goals.

- What key challenges do you see that were not captured?
- What challenges could be alleviated by the city?
- What local regulations unintentionally hinder food production, processing, retail, or recovery?
- What changes would you like to see in Tumwater's food system?
- Have you seen practices in other municipalities that would meet Tumwater's needs?

### **Community Food Assessment**

The goal of the Community Food Assessment is to provide a summary of Tumwater's food landscape to determine the strengths already present, developments currently underway, and challenges that provide barriers to success. This work will ensure that City efforts complement the strengths of community partners and work together with them to remove obstacles.

Interviews and a survey were conducted to gather information from community leaders in the following roles:

- Local Food Producers and Processors
- Food Access and Security
- Education and Workforce Development
- Land Use and Conservation
- Public Health and Nutrition
- Food Waste Reduction and Recovery
- Food Retail and Distribution

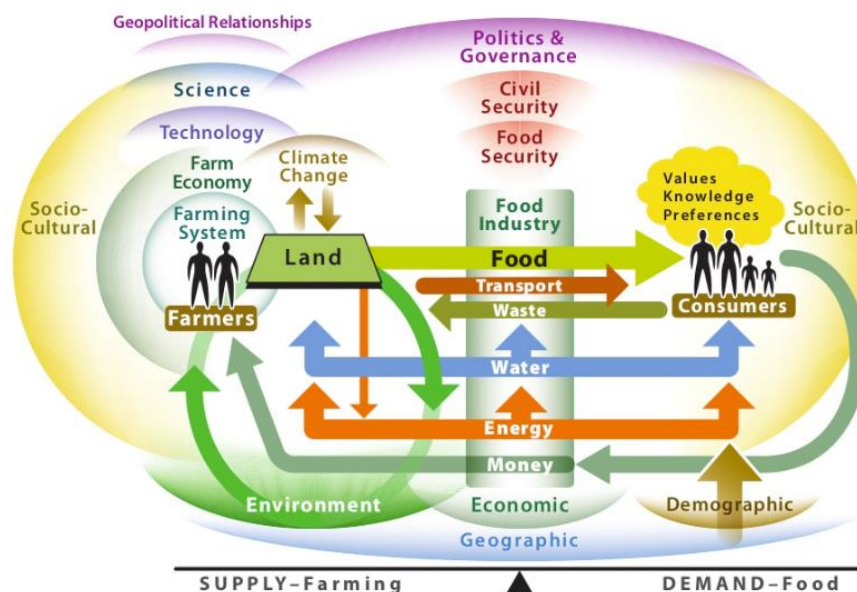
These roles define the topics that will be addressed in the report. Key developments, key challenges and current collaborations and resources will be identified for each of these roles. Knowledge leaders were also interviewed for Policy and Government and Community Advocacy and Food Justice. Since these topics are interwoven between each of the roles, they will be included throughout the report. Since many of these topics are interrelated, there are many key knowledge leaders who have roles in more than one topic area.

The Warren Family on Hoadly Loop Road SE was contacted for participation as an expert in distribution by our consultant. The family was provided with information about the project in person and have not reached out to participate in the survey or interviews.

## Overview

The food system is complex and integrates many other systems and inputs to meet the nutritional needs of people. The graphic below demonstrates the interconnected nature of the food system.

Figure 1. Food System Map – Basic Elements. Source: shiftN



When any one part of the system is in jeopardy, the other parts also decline. Issues that affect economic vitality impact the food system. Rising costs of living create pressure on households to further constrain spending. Since grocery budgets are more flexible than housing, utilities, and insurance, people with budget constraints often make choices to limit their grocery spending.

Many factors can influence the cost of food, such as water availability, gas prices, land prices, and lease rental for commercial spaces. Some of these factors can be intensified by local policies and regulations which balance many different community needs. While considering off-site impacts, the City should consider regulatory barriers that may alleviate these issues that cause lack of services for community members. This lack of service creates an issue for both producers and consumers because cattle cannot be butchered at the best time, increasing the feeding costs or reducing the quantity of meat produced for the consumer. Producers must transport their animals further to get the services they need, and it increases the cost as well.

Food security has been a topic of discussion and collaboration in Thurston County since 2007. Many efforts have grown and faded since then due to funding opportunities. In 2019-20, as organized efforts pivoted around closures and changes to service models, pop up food distribution and localized models also provided food during the pandemic.

## Processors and Producers

Producers face many challenges in our region. Fast paced development has increased the cost of farmland as demand for housing and other urban development increases. Access to water for

urban farms and gardens that may not have water rights has led to increasing costs for those who are connected to city utilities which in turn increases the cost of production. While city codes permit and protect the right to farm, there are also barriers to farming lifestyles in an urban setting. Storage for feed, waste management, and accessory uses are difficult to navigate in smaller urban spaces. While urban farms have better proximity to markets, low density development may not provide enough economic incentive to draw farms into urban spaces.

### **Access and Security**

Food insecurity has been a growing concern for many communities as the costs of living increase. Several programs like Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Programs and Women Infants and Children program that are funded federally and operated by state agencies aid families with incomes under an eligibility threshold. In some cases, these funds can be allocated for use at local food vendors like farmers markets or local grocery stores which helps the local food network increase their market and meet the rising costs of production. Free pantries and other local food assistance experienced a resurgence during the pandemic with many of them persisting and providing services to the community that have an important role in food rescue and waste reduction.

While efforts to support local food systems with federal programs are in place, education and assistance are needed to remove behavior-based barriers to fresh nutritious food. Some local vendors also have a technological and cost barrier to accepting different forms of payment, limiting only certain vendors from participating and reducing the market for those producers.

### **Retail Distribution**

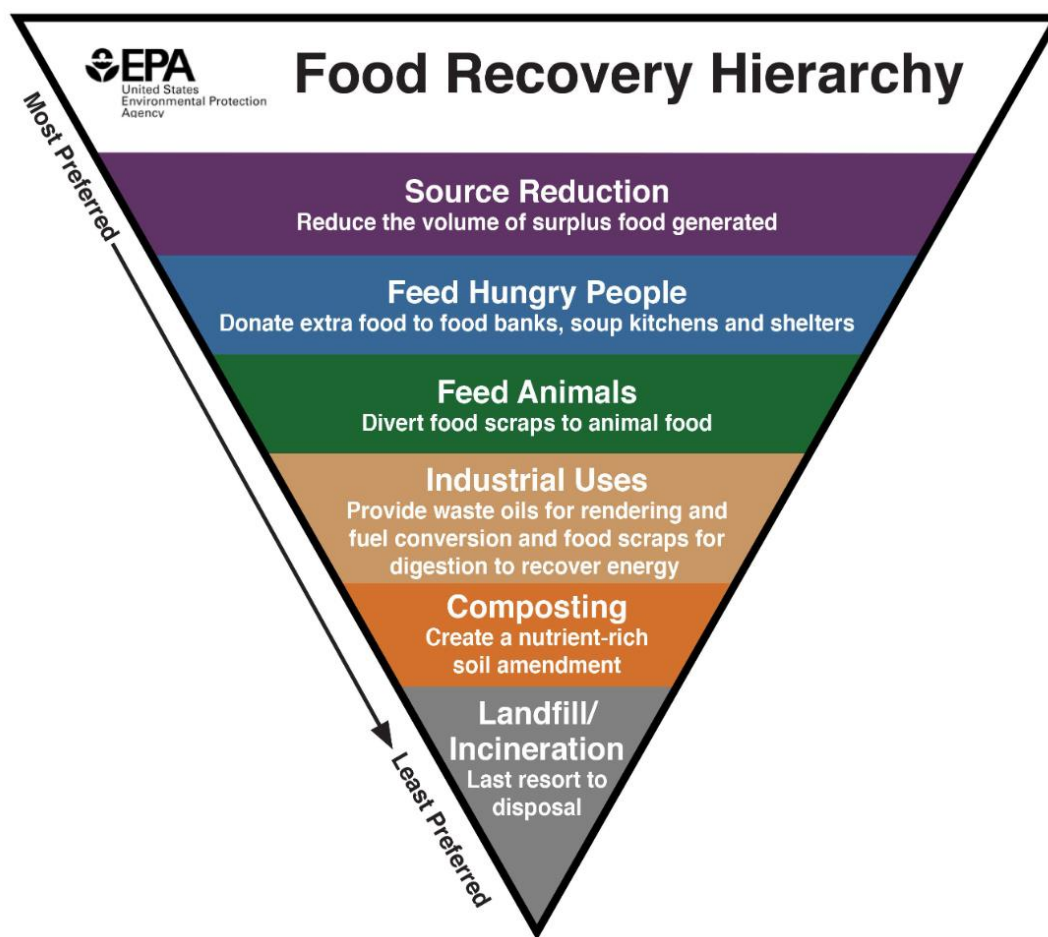
Food hubs collaborate with many different producers to combine resources from multiple different sources creating local scale markets and increasing fair prices for both the consumer and producer. These hubs extend the capacity of any one producer to provide more flexibility for the consumer, however access is still limited and not as flexible as large retailers. Some hubs that are funded with grant dollars face uncertainties as programs shift and priorities at the federal and state level change.

### **Waste and Food Recovery**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency identifies food recovery through a hierarchy that establishes the most preferred methods to least preferred methods based on effectiveness. The Food Recovery Hierarchy is included below as Figure 2.



Figure 2. Food Recovery Hierarchy. Source:EPA



Diverting food waste is a strategy for greenhouse gas emission reduction and Washington State passed mandates that start in 2022 and will phase in separation for food waste. Challenges such as packaging contamination, short meal periods and lack of cold storage often cause barriers for diverting food from the landfill to other useful ends.

### Access and Security

Food insecurity is a daily concern for low- and middle-income households. Challenges around not having resources for culturally appropriate, nutritious food, have intensified since pandemic-related food programs have expired. On the other hand, private food pantries and other mutual aid models expanded during the pandemic and have largely remained in operation. While federal food benefit systems are in place, some who need food assistance face eligibility or other social barriers. For those who are eligible for food benefits, the rising cost of production stretches food dollars thin. Other services that do not restrict eligibility such as food banks are serving more community members. More than 10% of Tumwater residents used the food bank at any Thurston County location in 2024, 61% of whom were 18-60 years old.

## Public Health and Nutrition

Health and nutrition are closely related and contribute to healthier communities. Stress from food insecurity can lead to health issues like psychosocial and academic issues, particularly in children. There are also social barriers to nutritional food like access to culturally appropriate foods, language barriers, and nutritional education.

Tumwater School District prepares and serves meals for students during the school year to make up for shortfalls and provides meals during summer months at designated school sites. In the past year, eligibility rose 3.5% for free and reduced-price lunch programs to 33.24%. With rising costs of food and a lag in federal and state funding to meet the need, school districts cover the gap in funding.

## Education and Workforce

Knowledge about how to produce, preserve, prepare, and recover nutritious food is essential to developing a thriving local food system. Efforts to restore this knowledge and prepare a workforce for the local food industry is pivotal for a sustainable system. School gardens can be an important place to start talking about nutrition as exposure to new foods can be limited to family culture and knowledge.

## Methodology

All steps of the Food Systems Plan must follow guiding principles which align with the City of Tumwater Vision and Values, which include:

- **Equity.** A food system should support food security with an emphasis on those community members that experience the greatest inequities.
- **Sustainability.** A balance between environmental health, economic profitability, and social equity creates a resilient food system that meets current food needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.
- **Stability.** All community members should have reliable access to sufficient, safe, appropriate, and nutritious food, even in the face of unexpected challenges.
- **Resiliency.** The food system should maintain its functionality and continue to provide food security and nutrition under various adverse conditions.
- **Efficacy.** The audience for the plan is the City of Tumwater, therefore, the objectives and actions in this plan will be the areas where this level of government can have the most impact.

### Timeline

The term of the project is until December 2025. Since the Comprehensive Plan periodic update is due in December, completing work on the Food Service Plan and incorporating its recommendations into the Comprehensive Plan before adoption would be ideal. The timeline below provides the project schedule, which will conclude work on the plan by September 2025.

Deliverables	Expected Completion
Community Food Assessment	April 2025
Food System Plan’s Goals and Objectives	July 2025
Food System Plan Strategies	August 2025
Food System Plan Complete	September 2025

The contractor is scheduled to present draft goals and objectives to the Planning Commission on July 8, 2025.

**City of Tumwater**

# **Community Food Assessment**

DRAFT  
April 2025

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# INTRODUCTION

The City of Tumwater is developing a Food System Plan that will address food insecurity at the local level by focusing on 1) how to provide healthy food for all members of the community, 2) reduce food waste, and 3) support local food production and processing. To develop a plan that identifies the most impactful actions for achieving these three overarching goals, it's first necessary to understand the current local environment. This Community Food Assessment provides that foundation by examining existing conditions, opportunities, and challenges within Tumwater's food system.

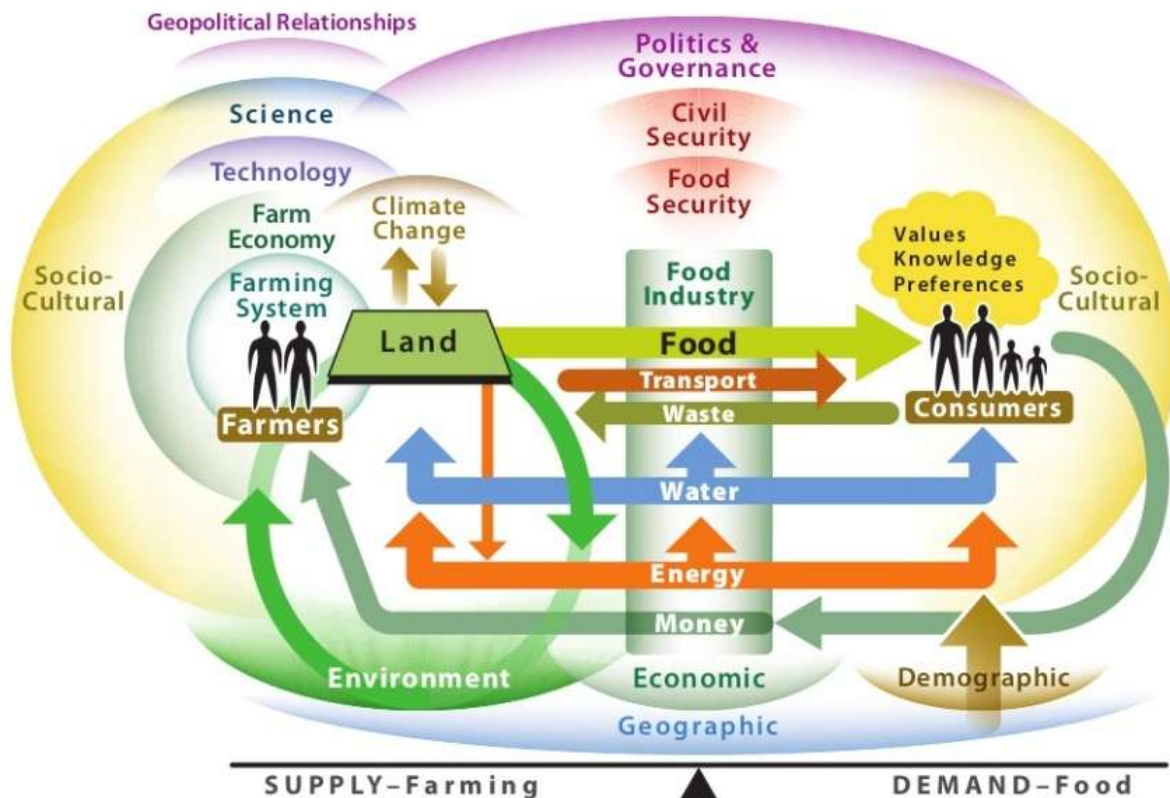
## **Methodology**

This Assessment is informed by 53 Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) that were interviewed or surveyed. A complete list of the SMEs is in Appendix A. The survey and interview questions are in Appendix B. Interviews were conducted with guiding questions, allowing conversations to follow different directions depending on the interviewee's perspective. The survey was conducted online.

The Assessment is divided into seven sector summaries, which serve as a compilation of interviews, surveys, and other relevant data— Land Use & Conservation, Processors & Producers, Retail & Distribution, Waste Reduction & Recovery, Access & Security, Public Health & Nutrition, and Education & Workforce. Each sector summary includes Key Challenges, Key Developments, and Current Collaborations & Resources. The sector summaries will be shared with the SMEs to review for accuracy. Any updates will be reflected in the final Food System Plan.

## Food System

The food system is an interconnected web of inputs, activities, and actors involved in producing, processing, distributing, consuming, and disposing of food. The graphic below, created by shiftN, illustrates the complexity and interrelationships within that system. Importantly, our modern food system does not adhere to jurisdictional boundaries, as food moves across cities, counties, states, and countries before it reaches



consumers.

In this context, the definition of “local” becomes both important and nuanced. The term can vary widely depending on the entity using it. For example, Tumwater School District’s Food Services Department uses a definition aligned with the United State Department of Agriculture, the major funder of school meals. In this instance “local” means food sourced from anywhere within Washington State. By contrast, farmers markets and food hubs often define “local” more narrowly, based on a handful of surrounding counties. These definitions can be visualized as concentric circles expanding outward, shaped by product availability and the proximity of farms, processors, and producers.

Recognizing the need for a strong and resilient food system, the City of Tumwater has incorporated discussion of the local food system into draft elements of its Comprehensive Plan update. The inclusion of a Climate Element—new as of December 2024—demonstrates a commitment to sustainability through greenhouse gas reduction and climate resilience strategies. These are essential for ensuring the long-term health and stability of both local and regional food systems. The draft Conservation Element will emphasize community collaboration to improve access to healthy, affordable, culturally appropriate, and sustainably produced food, ensuring that all community members can reliably access nutritious food.

## **Recent History of Regional Collaboration**

A resilient food system requires regional collaboration. Shared planning, infrastructure, and partnerships help local governments and community organizations make a greater impact—especially for those most affected by food insecurity. Over the past 18 years, efforts across Thurston County have brought together diverse partners with goals to build a food system that is equitable, sustainable, stable, and resilient.

**Community Food Summit (2011):** In 2007, local nonprofits—including GRuB, Thurston County Food Bank, Sustainable South Sound, Left Foot Organics, and the Gleaners Coalition—joined with The Evergreen State College (TESC) and area farmers to launch the Hunger Free Thurston County Coalition and Food Bank Growers Network. These efforts culminated in the 2011 Community Food Summit, a two-day event that presented findings from a regional food assessment and launched working groups that laid the foundation for future collaboration. Out of this event grew the Thurston Thrives Food Action Team, the Thurston Asset Building Coalition (TABC) Food Hub, and the Sustainable Thurston Food System Council.

**TABC Food Hub (2012):** The Thurston Asset Building Coalition (TABC) formed a Food Hub to strengthen the local food economy, increase access to healthy food, and promote environmental stewardship. It connects multi-sector partners to support economic stability for low-income households.

**Thurston Thrives Food Action Team (2013):** Launched by Thurston County Public Health & Social Services, Thurston Thrives used a collective impact model to address public health. The Food Action Team focused on food, nutrition, equity, and health, and developed a Strategy Map presented to the County Board of Health in 2013.

**Sustainable Thurston Food System Council (2011–2014):** As part of the *Sustainable Thurston* planning process, the Thurston Regional Planning Council convened a Local Food Systems Panel to inform its regional sustainability plan. Their 2012 White Paper built on recommendations from the Community Food Summit and led to the creation of the *Sustainable Thurston Plan* (2014). The Thurston Food System Council emerged from this process as a grassroots body tasked with advancing the plan’s food goals, though it lacked dedicated funding or staffing.

**South Sound Food System Network (SSFSN, 2016–present):** To reduce duplication and align efforts, the TABC Food Hub, Thurston Thrives Food Action Team, and the Thurston Food System Council merged to form the South Sound Food System Network (SSFSN) in 2016. Early leadership included GRuB, Thurston EDC, WA Department of Health, and Senior Services for South Sound, with participation from over 30 organizations. SSFSN is currently staffed through TABC with state support, though funding is uncertain after June 2025. Recently, the Network has experienced lower participation and a narrower focus on food security rather than broader system goals.



## SECTOR SUMMARIES

### **Land Use & Conservation**

The City of Tumwater is situated on land traditionally stewarded by Indigenous peoples through active management of oak and camas prairies—among the most biodiverse and culturally significant ecosystems in the Pacific Northwest. These prairies, shaped by generations of human-ecological relationships, support a wide array of food and medicinal plants such as camas, bracken fern rhizomes, hazelnuts, berries, and acorns from Garry oak trees. Seasonal camas harvests are not only vital food-gathering events but also moments of cultural connection. Intentional fire has been used to maintain prairie landscapes and sustain habitats for grazing animals like deer and elk. Today, just 3% of these unique ecosystems remain.

Land use decisions directly influence the foundations of a healthy and resilient food system. In Tumwater, land is under increasing pressure from the competing needs of housing, commercial and industrial growth, and environmental conservation. These decisions affect the availability of space for local food production, equitable access to green space, and the preservation of vital ecological and cultural resources. The City’s Comprehensive Plan Land Use Element will reflect an effort to balance these priorities. It includes policies supporting nearby access to healthy food in residential areas and encourages flexible food infrastructure, such as food trucks and food truck courts.

The Climate Element will advance strategies for greenhouse gas reduction and climate resilience. These are essential components of a food system that is not only sustainable but also stable in the face of environmental and economic disruptions.

### **Key Developments**

- Regenerative agriculture contributes to climate solutions by drawing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and sequestering it in the soil.
- From 2012 to 2022, Thurston County lost 27% of its farmland—shrinking from 76,638 acres to 55,943 acres—and 17% of its farms.
- Walkable urban environments and localized food supply chains enhance resilience by improving equitable access to fresh foods, reducing emissions, and supporting local economies.

### **Key Challenges**

- High farmland costs in the region create barriers for new and beginning farmers.
- The Growth Management Act prioritizes dense development and does not always readily accommodate food production in urban zones.
- Tumwater must continually navigate tensions between housing, industrial, commercial, agricultural, and conservation land use needs.

**Current Collaborations & Resources**

- **Community Farm Land Trust** preserves farmland through community ownership models, long-term leases, and easements, ensuring long-term affordability and land access for farmers in the South Puget Sound.
- **Thurston Conservation District** supports landowners with technical assistance and conservation planning that promotes soil health, water quality, and wildlife habitat.
- **Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS)** provides financial and technical support through programs like EQIP and CSP, helping local landowners implement conservation practices that build climate resilience and support sustainable agriculture.

## **Processors & Producers**

The people and businesses who grow, raise, and process food in and around Tumwater—small-scale farmers, ranchers, food processors, urban farms, and community gardeners—are the foundation of the local food system. Their efforts contribute to food access, economic resilience, and environmental sustainability. Despite operating at different scales, many face similar challenges and opportunities as they work to feed the community.

Goal #5 of Tumwater’s 2019 Economic Development Plan highlights the importance of expanding the craft food and beverage sector, emphasizing not just brewing and distilling, but also the need to strengthen connections across the supply chain—from growers and processors to markets and manufacturers.

In 2010, the Tumwater City Council amended urban agriculture regulations (Ordinance O2010-029), making it easier for residents to raise and sell food within city limits. Chickens, rabbits, bees, and miniature livestock are allowed on most residential lots, with larger animals permitted on parcels over two acres.

### **Key Developments**

- Tumwater is home to two major developments supporting craft food and beverage production: the **Craft District** on Capitol Boulevard and the **Warehouse District** on Old Highway 99. The Craft District, part of a state-funded Innovation Partnership Zone, includes Heritage Distilling, SPSCC’s Craft Brewing and Distilling Program, and retail outlets. The Warehouse District features local businesses like Matchless Brewing, Triceratops Brewing, Spud’s Produce Market, and 8 Arms Bakery.
- The **Southwest Washington Regional Agricultural Business & Innovation Park** in Tenino is beginning to open its first phase. Focused on value-added agriculture, the Ag Park supports food-related manufacturing, processing, storage, and packaging. Project partners include the Thurston Economic Development Council (EDC), City of Tenino, and Dragonwheel Investment Group with support from WSU Extension, Port of Olympia, NW Agricultural Business Center, and Thurston County.
- **Colvin Ranch** is establishing a USDA-certified meat processing facility at the Ag Park, addressing a longstanding bottleneck for local livestock producers. Once operational, the facility will serve regional ranchers with a planned capacity of up to 100 animals per week, enhancing the regional meat supply chain, improving local food access, and reducing the environmental impact associated with long-distance animal transport.
- The Tumwater School District operates a small farm at the City of Tumwater’s Isabella Bush Park through a program for high school students called **FRESH (Farm Rooted Education for Sustainability & Health)**. Since 2020, FRESH has produced over 13,000 pounds of food for students’ families and the Thurston County Food Bank. As of this writing, the program is scheduled to end in July 2025 due to the school district’s budget cuts.

### **Key Challenges**

- High farmland costs limit access for new and beginning farmers.
- Access to water remains a significant barrier for urban farms and gardens.
- Tariffs may increase the cost or reduce availability of critical farming inputs.

- Agricultural employers report difficulty hiring and retaining workers.
- Small-scale farmers often lack access to subsidies, which are typically tied to acreage or production volume, and time-intensive application processes often outweigh the benefit.
- Many processors and producers lack access to affordable cold storage, which limits the ability to scale or diversify their operations.

#### **Current Collaborations & Resources**

- **Northwest Agriculture Business Center (NABC)** provides technical assistance to agricultural businesses, including farms and food businesses in Thurston County.
- **Native Grown & Gathered** offers marketing and technical support to Native American food producers and businesses.
- **Our Community Kitchen** and **LOC-OLY Grown**, two commercial kitchens on Olympia’s west side, support small-scale food entrepreneurs with prep stations, equipment, and cold/dry storage. Our Community Kitchen also offers group purchasing opportunities.
- Tumwater currently has one **community garden** with 20 plots, located at Tumwater United Methodist Church. The Parks and Recreation Department has funding to support the expansion of community gardens in the city.

## **Retail & Distribution**

Retail and distribution are essential for strengthening Tumwater’s local food economy and improving access to fresh, locally produced food. The City’s focus on cultivating a strong craft food and beverage sector aligns with broader economic and land use goals. Tumwater’s 2019 Economic Development Plan includes fostering community-oriented retail—especially grocery-anchored centers (Goal #8)—and supporting the full craft food and beverage supply chain (Goal #5), from growers to markets.

### **Key Developments**

- Food hubs connect small and mid-sized producers with institutional and retail buyers by aggregating, distributing, and marketing local products. These services help farms access stable markets—like schools, grocery stores, and food banks—while streamlining local sourcing for buyers. The region now has two food hubs: Southwest Washington Food Hub and South Sound Fresh.
- The Warehouse and Craft Districts provide retail and distribution space for local food and beverage producers.

### **Key Challenges**

- Food costs have increased, and fresh local food is harder to access.
- The Tumwater Farmers Market is under-resourced, with limited operation and an outdated web presence.
- Federal programs like Farm to School face funding uncertainties.
- Cold storage capacity remains limited across the distribution network.
- Direct-to-consumer retailers—such as farmers markets, food hubs, and farms—face barriers to accepting EBT, including administrative burdens and technology costs.

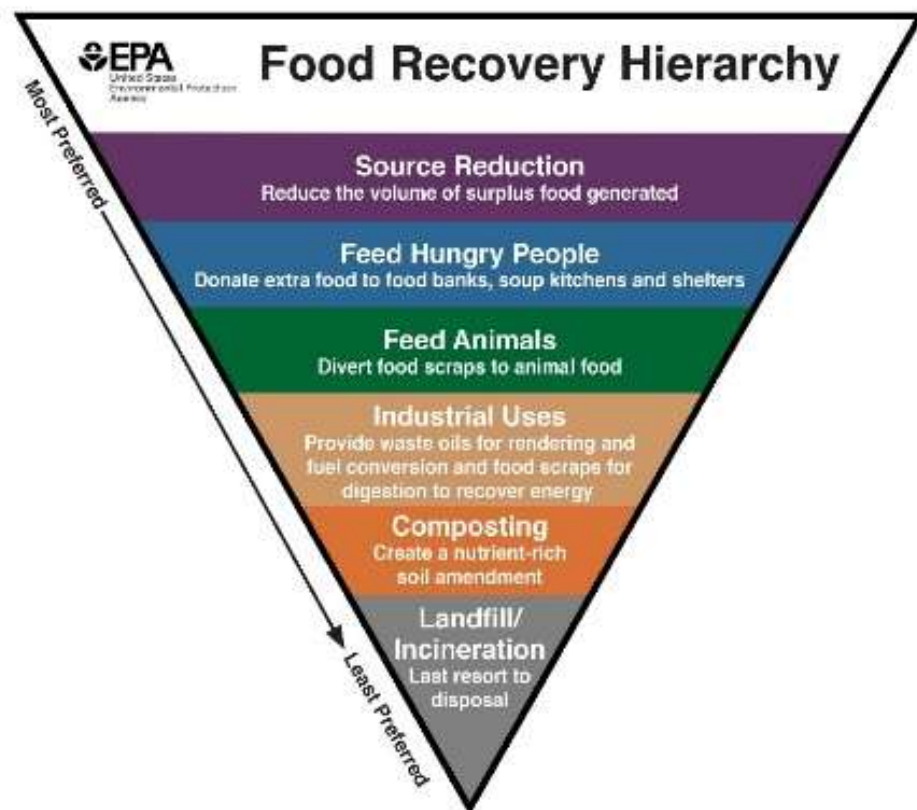
### **Current Collaborations & Resources**

- **South Sound Fresh** serves Thurston and Mason Counties from its Olympia location. It works with over 50 producers and offers an online marketplace for consumers.
- The **Southwest Washington Food Hub**, a program of the Southwest Washington Growers Co-op, supports more than 30 producers in a six-county region.
- The **Community Farm Land Trust** publishes the ***Fresh from the Farm Guide***, a free, printed and electronic regional farm map and directory connecting consumers with farms, CSAs, markets, and food banks in a four-county region.
- The **Tumwater Farmers Market** operates June–September, 2nd and 4th Sundays, at Peter G Schmidt Elementary School (11AM–3PM).
- **Farm to School**, a federal program implemented by the Washington State Department of Agriculture and regional partners, supports local food sourcing and garden-based learning. Tumwater School District does not currently participate.

## **Waste Reduction & Recovery**

Reducing food waste offers numerous benefits.

1. Lower Greenhouse Gas Emissions – Diverting food from landfills reduces methane production.
2. Resource Conservation – Preventing food waste conserves the water, energy, and labor used in production.
3. Economic Savings – Households and businesses reduce costs associated with food production, transport, and disposal.
4. Improved Food Security – Surplus food can be redirected to those in need.
5. Soil Health – Composting food waste reduces landfill reliance and enriches soil through nutrient recycling.



The food recovery hierarchy prioritizes waste reduction strategies with landfill as the last resort.

Tumwater's Comprehensive Plan Lands for Public Purposes Element will support expanding composting services as part of its public services strategy.

### **Key Developments**

- Washington's Organics Management Law (2022) mandates phased-in organic waste separation for businesses as part of the state's climate strategy:
  - 2024: Applies to businesses generating 8+ yards/week of food or yard waste
  - 2025: Threshold lowers to 4+ yards/week
  - 2026: Applies to businesses generating 96+ gallons/week

### **Key Challenges**

- Enforcement of the Organics Management Law relies on self-reporting, with no immediate penalties for non-compliance.
- Leadership changes have slowed regional coordination on food waste diversion and rescue.
- Inadequate cold storage capacity limits food rescue operations.
- Edible food is often discarded due to cost or logistical barriers when supply chains fail.
- Packaging contamination prevents some food waste from being composted.
- Short meal periods in K–12 schools lead to uneaten food and higher waste.
- Food diversion in schools often depends on individual staff initiatives rather than system-wide practices.

### **Current Collaborations & Resources**

- **LeMay Pacific Disposal** is Tumwater’s primary hauler, partnering with **Brady Trucking** and **Silver Springs Organics** for composting.
- The **Solid Waste Advisory Committee (SWAC)** advises Thurston County’s five-year Solid Waste Management Plan, which includes Tumwater.
- The **Use Food Well Washington Plan**, created under state law (RCW 70A.205.715), outlines 30 recommendations to reduce food waste and its impacts.
- The **Washington Center for Sustainable Food Management**, launched in 2024, supports statewide food waste diversion and coordinates efforts under the Use Food Well plan.
- The **Thurston County Food Bank** rescues surplus food from retailers and restaurants and operates a gleaning program to harvest excess crops from local farms.

## **Access & Security**

*Food security* means reliable, consistent access to enough nutritious, culturally appropriate food to lead healthy, active lives—without relying on emergency food or coping strategies like skipping meals or scavenging. *Food insecurity* arises when that access is limited due to insufficient resources, availability, or social barriers.

The latest Washington State Food Security Survey (WAFOOD) conducted August to October 2024 shows that food insecurity remains high among low-income households and those relying on food assistance. Groceries and housing were the most frequently cited financial hardships, with protein-rich and perishable foods (like meat, eggs, and fresh produce) being the hardest to afford. The expiration of pandemic-era support programs, combined with rising food costs, has worsened financial strain.

In 2023, 14% of Tumwater residents received **SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program)** benefits. SNAP, a federal program delivered through EBT cards, provides about \$187 per month per person in 2025—approximately \$6.16/day. Benefits are based on the assumption that households spend 30% of their net income on food, and the program fills the gap between that amount and the USDA’s low-cost Thrifty Food Plan. While the federal government covers benefit costs, states share administrative costs.

Washington State’s **Market Match** program offers additional incentives for SNAP, WIC, and Senior Nutrition participants when they buy fresh produce at participating markets and stores.

The **Thurston County Food Bank (TCFB)** does not have a walk-in location in Tumwater, but its main warehouse is located in Tumwater near the I-5/101 interchange. TCFB operates five satellite pantries in Tumwater. Some satellites use a shopping model where patrons choose their grocery items, and some use a drive-through model where patrons receive a pre-packaged assortment of groceries.

- South Puget Sound Community College (shopping model)
- Mt. View Church (drive-through)
- North Star Church of God (shopping)
- Tumwater United Methodist Church (drive-through)
- Tumwater Senior Center (shopping)

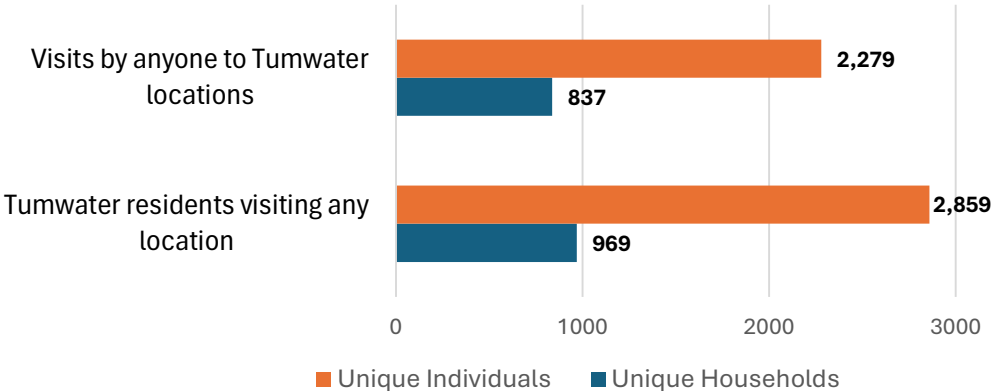
Clients receive 25–35 pounds of food per visit (including shelf-stable items, protein, dairy, deli, and produce). TCFB also offers mobile programs like USDA-funded senior boxes, home delivery, food rescue, local purchasing, and gleaning.

Tumwater’s Comprehensive Plan Housing Element will address the need for diverse, affordable housing—recognizing that high housing costs directly impact food security by limiting disposable income for food.

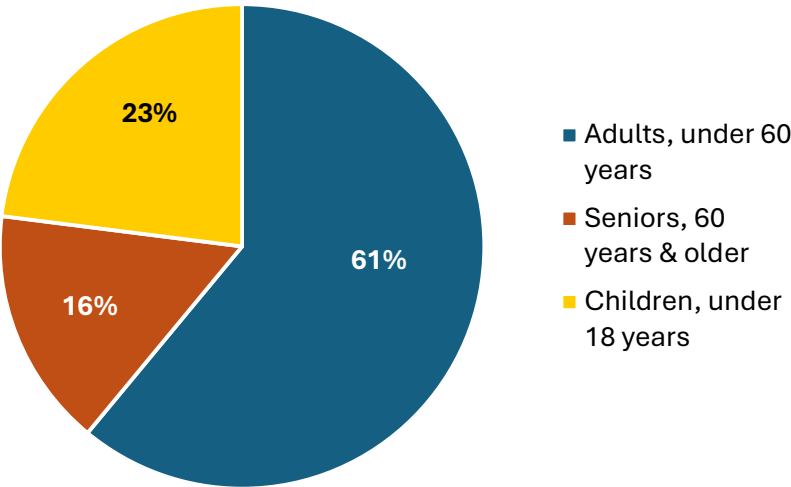


# Thurston County Food Bank 2024 Data

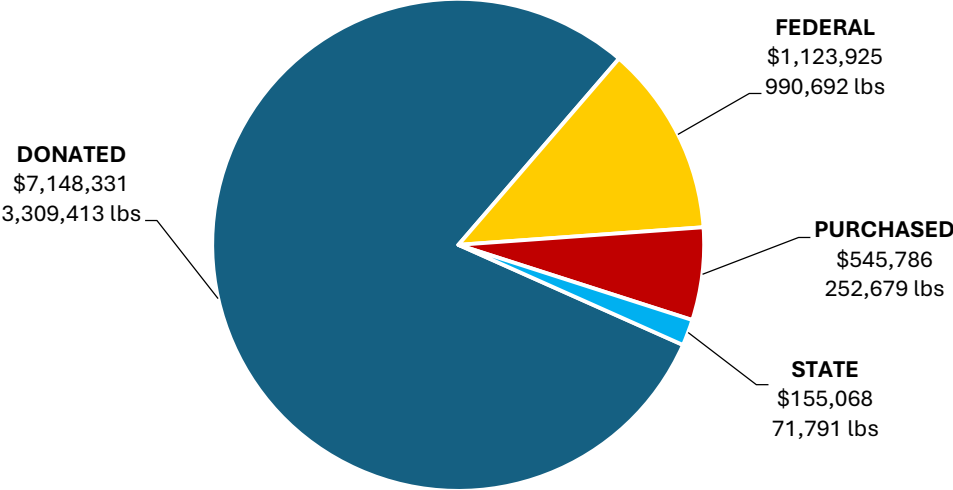
Patterns of Tumwater Patronage



Tumwater Patrons by Age



Food Sources by Value & Weight



### **Key Developments**

- SNAP's benefit formula assumes 30% of net income goes toward food, but high housing and living costs often reduce actual food spending.
- TCFB's demand is growing faster than the local population.
- Mutual aid models, like Little Free Pantries, expanded during the pandemic and continue to operate.
- Shifting federal policy priorities have introduced uncertainty around future food security funding.

### **Key Challenges**

- Rising food prices strain household budgets and food access.
- Awareness of available resources and programs is low.
- Culturally appropriate food options are limited.
- Donations from large food companies may include highly processed or near-expired items, which don't always meet nutritional or cultural needs.
- Regional food assistance efforts lack coordination.
- TCFB patrons in Tumwater report needing more staples like milk, eggs, and fresh produce.
- Limited hours, days, and locations of assistance programs can be barriers.
- Many small farms and markets face administrative and technical barriers to accepting EBT, limiting access for individuals who rely exclusively on SNAP benefits.

### **Current Collaborations & Resources**

- The **Old Town Center** provides weekday lunches for seniors at no cost or suggested donation, now prepared by **Senior Services of South Sound**. Participation increased following a federal grant. The center also hosts a monthly TCFB food distribution serving 30–40 seniors, with demand rising post-pandemic.
- The **Tumwater Senior Council** offers summer meals for seniors at Brewery Park.
- **Senior Services for South Sound** operates the federally funded Senior Nutrition Program. The program serves 2,500 clients annually with hot and frozen meals, including 400 **Meals on Wheels** participants. Meals are tailored to health needs and prioritize local sourcing. The City of Tumwater is a program partner.
- The **Olympia Kiwanis Club** runs three gardens producing over 20,000 pounds of donated food annually for TCFB.
- **Garden-Raised Bounty (GRuB)** installs free backyard gardens for low-income households and offers continued support via workshops, a seed library, and peer learning.
- **Little Free Pantries**, modeled on book-sharing libraries via a community cupboard, offer self-serve access to food and personal care items in several Tumwater locations, including Mountain View Church, Western Plaza Mobile Home Park, and an expanded version on Hoadly Loop that incorporates a popup tent.
- **Centro Integral Educativo Latino de Olympia (CEILO)** hosts monthly food distributions in high demand—often running out of food within an hour—underscoring ongoing unmet community needs.

## **Public Health & Nutrition**

Nutrition is a key component of preventive public health and contributes to healthier communities. Unfortunately, many people have limited knowledge about nutrition, cooking skills, seasonal eating, accessing or preparing fresh foods, and incentive and assistance programs. Lack of adequate food can affect physical and mental health. Children who grow up in homes without enough food are at an increased risk of illness and experiencing academic and psychosocial problems. Nutritional deficiencies and family stress both contribute to these outcomes.

The **Tumwater School District** serves approximately 3,800 lunches and 1,500 breakfasts each school day. During the summer months, it continues to provide meals, serving around 250 students daily at designated school sites. In the 2023–2024 school year, the district received \$177 per student in combined federal and state meal funding, with 97% of that funding coming from federal sources. For the 2025–2026 fiscal year, 33.24% of students are eligible for the **Free and Reduced-Price Lunch Program**—an increase of 3.5% from the previous year.

### **Key Developments**

- The Tumwater School District has experienced a 30% rise in food costs over four years. Federal reimbursements have not kept pace, and the state’s contribution varies based on the share of students eligible for subsidized meals. The district must cover any shortfalls.
- In the past 15–20 years, school kitchens have been redesigned with smaller spaces and limited equipment, shifting meal service away from scratch cooking. Today, most Tumwater schools rely on reheating and serving pre-prepared meals due to infrastructure and staffing constraints.

### **Key Challenges**

- The Tumwater School District lacks a central kitchen; each school handles its own food preparation and storage. Infrastructure limitations in individual school kitchens constrain their ability to incorporate fresh, locally sourced foods.
- Meal programs often struggle to integrate donated or rescued food while meeting nutrition standards.
- Rising food prices make it harder for people with low incomes to afford fresh, nutrient-dense, local foods.
- Language barriers limit access to nutritional information, food sources, and program details.
- Many processed foods contain increasingly high levels of sugar and sodium, which can negatively impact health and condition people’s taste preferences to crave more salt and sugar in their diets.

**Current Collaborations & Resources**

- **SNAP-Ed**, the educational arm of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), provides nutrition education and budgeting tools through partners like the Thurston County Food Bank and WSU Extension.
- **WIC (Women, Infants, and Children)** supports pregnant and postpartum parents and young children with nutrition education, healthy foods, breastfeeding support, and referrals. The program is managed by the Washington State Department of Health and receives federal funding.
- Community organizations like **GRuB** and the **Olympia Food Co-op** offer free and low-cost classes and workshops on nutrition, cooking, gardening, foraging, and preparing wild foods and medicines.

## **Education & Workforce**

Education and workforce development are essential to building a resilient and inclusive local food system. The City of Tumwater’s 2019 Economic Development Plan prioritizes growing the craft food and beverage sector by developing a Center of Excellence in partnership with local education providers. This initiative supports producers, manufacturers, and markets while creating training and career pathways. The Plan also encourages recruiting educational institutions to strengthen the city’s economic base and community vitality. Together, these goals lay the groundwork for food system education that supports local business, community health, and economic opportunity.

### **Key Developments**

- K–12 education can proactively support food security and food literacy. School gardens in Tumwater teach environmental stewardship, food origins, and seasonal eating. These programs help reduce food waste and foster appreciation for the local food economy.
- Teaching cooking and food preservation builds self-sufficiency and improves access to nutritious, affordable food.
- Workplace wellness programs, like that offered through the Southwest Washington Food Hub of which the City has participated, connect workplaces to fresh, locally grown foods and family farms to improve employee health and wellbeing and support the regional food system.

### **Key Challenges**

- School gardens often lack stable funding and rely on volunteers, including non-staff community members.
- Youth lack exposure to local, seasonal foods in school cafeterias. The Tumwater School District’s lack of a central kitchen limits scratch cooking, food preparation flexibility, and the ability to process and store local ingredients—contributing to reliance on heat-and-serve meals and restricting nutrition quality. These challenges are compounded by a federal reimbursement rate that has not kept pace with rising food costs.
- Regional farm employers face persistent labor shortages caused by seasonal work, low wages, and a lack of qualified or interested applicants.

### **Current Collaborations & Resources**

- **Pacific Mountain Region Agriculture Workforce Development Asset Inventory** is a living document maintained by WSU Thurston County Extension, detailing resources for agricultural workforce development—spanning training, capital, infrastructure, and education from K–12 to nonprofit providers.
- **QUEST (Quality Jobs, Equity, Strategy & Training)** is a regional partnership led by Thurston EDC, WSU Extension, GRuB, and others, focused on strengthening the agricultural workforce through business engagement, community outreach, and employment training.

- **South Puget Sound Community College (SPSCC)** is an award-winning, top community college which offers food, beverage arts, and hospitality programs in culinary arts, baking and pastry, and craft brewing/distilling.
- **New Market Skills Center**, located in Tumwater, provides high school technical training across 12 districts, including a Culinary Arts Program with an operating deli.
- **ASHHO Cultural Community Center**, located in Tumwater, hosts a paid, 12-week culinary and hospitality job training program.
- **FRESH (Farm Rooted Education for Sustainability & Health)** is a GRuB-inspired, hands-on program that operates a small farm at the City of Tumwater's Isabella Bush Park for Tumwater High School students, especially those facing adversity. Students earn credit and gain job skills through farm and classroom work. Since 2020, FRESH has produced over 13,000 pounds of food for students' families and the Thurston County Food Bank. As of this writing, the program is scheduled to end in July 2025 due to Tumwater School District budget cuts.
- **Enterprise for Equity, Thurston EDC**, and the **Thurston Chamber of Commerce** offer business development resources for aspiring and existing food system entrepreneurs.
- **Garden-Raised Bounty (GRuB)** is a non-profit with a small urban farm located on Olympia's west side, serving all of Thurston County and beyond. They work at the intersection of food, education, and health systems. GRuB provides career pathways and agriculture and wild foods and medicines education for youth, veterans, educators, people with low incomes, and Black and Indigenous communities.

## APPENDIX A: Subject Matter Experts

Aherlow Kasjaka	Thurston Asset Building Coalition
Alyssa Jones Wood	City of Tumwater, Water Resources & Sustainability
Amanda Musser	WSU Extension Thurston County SNAP-Ed
Amanda Romero	Thurston County Public Works
Anita de Boer	Tunawerth LLC
Annie Salafsky	WSU Extension Thurston County, Southwest Washington Growers Cooperative
Bob Gibson	Tumwater School District, Food Services
Carissa Miller	Withywindle Valley Farm
Cathy Visser	True for You Nutrition, LLC.
Chris Hyde	The Food Source Foundation
Christine Ciancetta	WA State Department of Health
Cristian Salazar	Centro Integral Educativo de Olympia (CIELO)
Daniel Amodeo-Chavez	United Way of Thurston County
Deborah Williams	Tumwater Community Garden
Diane Torres	Centro Integral Educativo de Olympia (CIELO)
Hope Springer	Thurston County Public Works
Jake Yancey	Tracking Y Ranch
Jaspar Quinton	Catholic Community Services
Jen Ownbey	8 Arms Bakery
Jennifer Colvin	Colvin Ranch
Jennifer Crain	Slow Food Greater Olympia
Judy Jones	Thurston County Food Bank
Katie Rains	Washington State Dept of Agriculture
Kim Gaffi	Consultant, co-founder GRuB
Kristen Maring	Tumwater High School, FRESH
Kyle Taylor Lucas	Tenants United at Western Plaza Mobile Home Park & Urban Indians Northwest
LeeAnn Perry	Little Free Pantry
Loretta Seppanen	Slow Food Greater Olympia and Community Farm Land Trust member
Mackenzie McCall	Farmer, South Sound Food System Network, formerly with Thurston County Food Bank
Maegan Cote	Mt. View Church
Maggie Brown	Thurston County Public Works
Margaret Garrett	Educational Service District 101
Marilyn Sitaker	WSU Thurston County Extension, Southwest Washington Food Hub
Megumi Sugihara	Everyone's Food Sovereignty Alliance
Meredith Arseneau	Educational Service District 113
Michaela Winkley	Thurston County Food Bank
Mitch Lewis	Summit Farms, Tumwater Farmers' Market
Morgan Hartline	Washington State Dept of Health
Nora White	Thurston Conservation District
Peter Epperson	Retired, formerly with regional public and nonprofit service organizations
Peter Guttchen	Formerly with Thurston County Public Works, WA Dept of Ecology
Rebekah Graham	Thurston County Food Bank
Robby Rutledge	Rutledge Family Farm

Senior Council	City of Tumwater, Old Town Center
Shawn Crimmins	City of Tumwater, Fire Department
Shelly Willis	Family Education & Support Services (FESS)
Stephanie Penland	Senior Services of South Sound
Theresa Kimball	Wild Fun Farm
Tina Sharp	Thurston Economic Development Council
Tina Wagner	Thurston Conservation District
TJ Johnson	Urban Futures Farm, Thurston Conservation District
Todd Anderson	City of Tumwater, Parks & Recreation
Treacy Kreger	Vern's Foods, Our Community Kitchen, South Sound Fresh



## APPENDIX B: Survey & Interview Questions

### **Survey Instrument**

These questions were set up as text boxes in an online survey tool. Any question could be skipped.

1. How would you describe your role in our local food system (for example: grower, distributor, processor, retailer, advocate, member of a community organization, chef, educator, waste manager, policymaker, etc.)? Please include your title and the name of your business or organization if applicable.
2. What do you think is the biggest challenge people face when trying to get local, nutritious food?
3. What unmet needs, challenges, or barriers do you see in your role or in your sector of the local food system?
4. What new issues or changes are happening in your part of the food system?
5. How do things like prices, demand, or outside markets affect your part of the food system?
6. In your view, how has climate change or climate change mitigation impacted the work you do in the food system?
7. How do you or your sector of the food system approach food-related waste?
8. How does food-related waste management impact your part of the food system?
9. What opportunities or ideas do you see for improving the way food is grown, shared, eaten or disposed of in our area?
10. Do you currently collaborate with other organizations or individuals in the local food system? If yes, please list and/or describe these collaborations.
11. Do you feel there are any current policies or practices in Tumwater that make it easier or harder to have a strong local food system? If so, please describe.
12. What new policies or practices could Tumwater implement to support a better local food system?
13. Have you seen any great ideas or successful programs in other places that you think could work here in Tumwater?
14. Is there anything else you'd like us to know about Tumwater's food system or your experiences/ideas?

## **Interviews Questions**

These questions were used as a general framework to guide conversations.

1. When you think about our local food system, what comes to mind?
2. How would you describe your role in the local food system?
3. What is the biggest barrier to accessing local, nutritious food?
4. What are some emerging issues in your sector of the food system?
5. What unmet needs, challenges, or barriers do you see in your sector of the food system?
6. How is your sector impacted by external market forces?
7. How is your sector impacted by climate change?
8. How has your sector been affected by waste management practices?
9. What are the biggest upcoming or current opportunities for improving our local food system that you know about?
10. What policies or practices are currently in place in Tumwater that hinder a thriving local food system from your sector's perspective?
11. What policies or practices could we enact in Tumwater to support a thriving local food system from your sector's perspective?
12. Are there any best practices you've seen in other places you'd like to see replicated in Tumwater?
13. Is there anyone else you think I should speak to?