

July 8, 2022

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Land Use Committee  
**From:** Lish Whitson, Analyst and Yolanda Ho, Lead Analyst  
**Subject:** Resolution 32059: Climate Change in the Comprehensive Plan Update

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On July 13, the Land Use Committee (Committee) will discuss and may vote on Resolution 32059, which would state the City's intent to incorporate responses to climate change as part of the next major [update to the Comprehensive Plan](#). The City recently launched its process to review and update the Comprehensive Plan in response to State mandates. This Resolution would lay out an approach to incorporating climate change into the Comprehensive Plan update consistent with Washington State House Bill (HB) 1099, which was considered by the State Legislature this year.

This memorandum briefly describes the Comprehensive Plan update process, Seattle's current policies regarding climate change, and the proposed Resolution.

### Comprehensive Plan Update

Under Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA), Revised Code of Washington (RCW) [36.70A](#), the City is required to develop a 20-year plan for growth. City actions must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. If the City takes actions or adopts regulations that are inconsistent with the Growth Management Act or Comprehensive Plan, those actions may be appealed to the [Growth Management Hearings Board](#) (GMHB). Similarly, if the City neglects to adopt plans or regulations required under the GMA, the City's lack of action may be appealed to the GMHB. Under the worst case scenario, development regulations or other acts inconsistent with the Comprehensive Plan may be invalidated by the GMHB.

The plan includes a number of required elements, such as land use, transportation, public facilities, utilities, and housing. The City may include elements and topics that are not required under the GMA, including an environment element.

The GMA requires the City to update and extend the timeframe of its plan every ten years. The next required update of the plan is due by the end of 2024. The first step of that process was the adoption of new estimates of growth by King County (see [Resolution 32048](#)). With the new growth estimates, the City is exploring a range of alternatives to accommodate that growth. At the July 13 Committee meeting, the Committee will receive a presentation on those alternatives and the environmental review process that will inform a preferred approach to accommodating future growth in the city.

In addition to developing an approach to growth in the City, the Office of Planning and Community Development (OPCD) and other City departments will be reviewing and updating goals and policies throughout the Comprehensive Plan. OPCD has highlighted [climate change](#), [economic development](#), [housing](#), [parks and open space](#) and [transportation](#) as some of the issues that they intend to tackle in this update.

### **Climate Change in the Comprehensive Plan**

The City of Seattle first adopted a [Resolution](#) acknowledging global warming in 1992, and the first update to the Comprehensive Plan in 2004 acknowledged that the City must reduce greenhouse gas emissions to address climate change. The current plan addresses climate change both within a Climate section in the Environment Element and in other related elements such as the Transportation, Housing, Capital Facilities, and Utilities elements. The Climate section of the plan includes goals to (1) “Reduce Seattle’s greenhouse gas emissions by 58 percent from 2008 levels, by 2030, and become carbon neutral by 2050” and (2) “Prepare for the likely impacts of climate change...”

Policies in the Climate section of the Comprehensive Plan discuss:

- expanding low and zero-emission transportation options;
- implementing growth strategies that concentrate growth in mixed-use communities;
- encouraging energy efficiency in buildings;
- reducing waste;
- encouraging the use of local and recycled goods;
- supporting local food production and consumption;
- considering climate impacts in designing infrastructure;
- prioritizing actions that reduce risk;
- focusing strategies to address climate change on the needs of marginalized people; and
- partnering with communities most impacted by climate change.

A separate section of the Environment Element focuses on Environmental Justice with a goal that “...environmental benefits are equitably distributed and environmental burdens are minimized and equitably shared by all Seattleites.”

### **Resolution 32059**

Resolution 32059 states the City’s intent to address greenhouse gas emissions, climate resiliency and adaptation, and environmental justice as part of the 2024 update. It would implement many of the requirements that HB 1099 would have placed on the City. Topics not already addressed by the Comprehensive Plan include a stronger emphasis on environmental justice and climate resiliency.

Topics to be addressed in the update under Resolution 32059 include:

- Planning for transportation investments to equitably meet forecasted multimodal transportation demand;
- Enhancing the resilience of existing natural areas, including wetlands, riparian corridors, and habitat;
- Increasing resilience against natural hazards;
- Leveraging investments in infrastructure to increase resiliency and provide co-benefits;
- Reducing environmental health disparities;
- Providing opportunities for communities that have been displaced to return to the city in healthy environments and addressing the needs of those at risk of being displaced; and
- Incorporating strategies to prevent displacement of vulnerable communities that could result from implementation of measures to address climate change and resiliency.

The resolution asks City departments to consider current science in making policy recommendations and includes several other considerations to inform the Comprehensive Plan update including:

- Analysis of climate-related trends;
- Identification of vulnerable populations and assets;
- Classification of risks, capital facilities and utilities, and community assets to identify areas of most need;
- Analysis of disparities in health, environmental burden and access to green space; and
- Identification of natural areas and infrastructure that may be vulnerable to changing conditions.

### **Next Steps**

If recommended for adoption by the Committee, the Council could consider the legislation as early as July 19. If adopted, OPCD would incorporate the work outlined above into their work plan for the Comprehensive Plan update.

cc: Esther Handy, Director  
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