

# Cityvision

THE ASSOCIATION OF WASHINGTON CITIES MAGAZINE

## THE LONG GAME

NAVIGATING A CHANGING CLIMATE,  
CITIES INNOVATE FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



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CITYVISION MAGAZINE VOL. 14 / NO. 3

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

**Sustainability is** one of those words that has a different meaning depending on whom you ask. For me, I tend to think first of its opposite. When someone says, “That’s not sustainable,” I know exactly what they mean. And if a city is not sustainable, we have a problem that will impact future generations. We have the important job as elected officials to ensure that the cities we know and love are sustained for years—and generations—to come.

In Washington, as the fourth most disaster-prone state in the country, we face a multitude of threats to sustain our cities, from climate change and wildfires to infrastructure failure and public health emergencies. Additionally, communities can be disrupted by economic stressors, racial inequity, crime, environmental contamination, and traffic and transportation issues—the list could go on.

Sustainability is about considering the entire picture of your individual city and determining your best course of action at the local level, while bringing partners along the way. When considering the list of threats above that challenge our sustainability, I ask you to contemplate what’s sustainable and what’s not sustainable. When you determine what conditions are unsustainable in your community, you can then begin working toward

solutions—by focusing on proactive long-term planning and preparation.

Like you, I love my city. I have established deep roots in my community. I raised my family here, I know my neighbors, and I too am working to address the big-picture problems that will sustain my community well into the future. The stories within this magazine give ideas and examples from neighboring cities about resilience and tackling the challenges we face.

This is my first *Cityvision* issue as president of AWC. Thank you for entrusting me to lead this outstanding organization. I embrace the challenge to tackle the issues facing our cities head on. Thank you for joining me.

**Rob Putaansuu**  
*Mayor, Port Orchard*

# Cityvision

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Langley Mayor  
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**WATER WISDOM.**

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# Citybeat

## Flood Endurance

Mount Vernon's expandable floodwall is a game changer for residents and businesses.

DEVON O'NEIL

**S**OME PLACES ARE GEOGRAPHICALLY disadvantaged when it comes to natural disasters. An island in Hurricane Alley, for instance, or a city on the San Andreas Fault. For generations, Mount Vernon, a 36,000-person agricultural hub known for its spinach seeds and tulip festival, could have been on that list. That's because the Skagit River runs through downtown Mount Vernon and often floods, sometimes with devastating results.

It wasn't so long ago that the city's primary defense consisted of hundreds of residents spending two days stacking 150,000 sandbags, then hoping the water wouldn't breach the top. But in 2019, Mount Vernon celebrated the long-awaited completion of a 1.36-mile-long floodwall designed to end the city's fear—and the crippling business impact—of floods. The city presented its design to the Federal Emergency Management Agency before starting construction, and FEMA agreed to remove Mount Vernon's downtown corridor from the flood plain once the wall was finished. Almost overnight, some businesses saved as much as \$12,000 a year in flood insurance.

It cost Mount Vernon \$32 million over 15 years to build the wall; the city received funding from more than a dozen sources ranging from state capital and stormwater grants to trail grants (the project includes an 18-foot-wide promenade along the wall). The custom design involves an earthen dike beneath a stacked wall of "stop logs" that can be assembled in around eight hours and are supported by

CONTINUED ON P.10 ►



# Testing the Waters

The city of Airway Heights leverages partnerships to weather a contamination crisis.

DEVON O'NEIL

**KEVIN ANDERSON WAS SITTING** in his office one morning in May 2017, when a civilian worker from the nearby Fairchild Air Force Base arrived with a question that would upend life in Airway Heights. A number of chemicals used in firefighting foam during training exercises on the base since the 1970s had seeped into the groundwater and been found in wells nearby, the worker said. While he didn't believe the chemicals had moved as far north as Airway Heights, he asked permission to take some water samples.

Anderson, Airway Heights' public works director, said sure. Then he started Googling the chemicals, which are known

colloquially as PFAS (short for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) and can lead to health problems when ingested. "I'd never heard of them before," Anderson recalls, "and I've been in the water industry for decades." The Air Force's tests showed elevated PFAS levels, meaning Airway Heights' water was contaminated. The city immediately shut off its wells and issued a press release. "From that moment on, for the past five years, we've been dealing with this problem one way or another," Anderson sighs.

At the time, Airway Heights, a rapidly growing city of 11,000 just west of Spokane, purchased about half its water from

the City of Spokane—a max of 1,500 gallons per minute. Airway Heights struck a deal to obtain more from an aboveground emergency connection that Spokane built. "It was totally jury-rigged, but it got us up to about 2,000 gallons per minute," Anderson says. "Which is significantly less than our peak amounts."

As Airway Heights did what it could to manage its water deficit, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, which operates under the CDC, conducted a study in 2019, testing PFAS levels in the blood and urine of 330 city residents. It found readings up to 56 times higher than national levels; the longer a subject had lived in Airway Heights was correlated with higher PFAS contamination levels.

Spokane has supplied almost all of Airway Heights' water since 2017, but a new, permanent solution could be near, ending a contentious legal battle. The Air Force, which acknowledged that its firefighting foam contaminated the water, proposed

**"FOR THE PAST FIVE YEARS, WE'VE BEEN DEALING WITH THIS PROBLEM ONE WAY OR ANOTHER."**

installing sophisticated filters on city wells to fix the problem. Airway Heights prefers to drill a new well outside the contaminated area and is preparing to fund it if the Department of Defense won't. An environmental analysis is underway to ensure any new wells wouldn't impact the Spokane River. How it all ends remains to be seen.

Additionally, the city, along with many others, has sued the federal government to recover financial losses due to the contamination, which Anderson says for Airway Heights will exceed \$40 million dollars.

Amid all this, Airway Heights still must cover annual water costs beyond the fixed sum it receives as remediation from the Air Force, which does not account for population growth. It's a tall order for a small city. That's why, when asked what lessons he's learned from the ordeal, City Manager Albert Tripp cites "the importance of partnerships," then rattles off the names of state and federal legislators who have helped keep Airway Heights' water flowing.



# CAN-DO CANOPY

SpoCanopy—a collaboration between City of Spokane Urban Forestry and The Lands Council—is working to increase Spokane’s urban canopy by planting free street trees in low-income neighborhoods with low canopy coverage and disproportionate environmental disparities.

# 79,000

Total number of **inventoried street trees** in Spokane

# \$4.4M

Annual **benefits** accrued by these trees (including energy savings, stormwater inception, etc.)



**Average canopy cover** in Spokane



Average canopy cover in the city's **most affluent neighborhoods**



Average canopy cover in the **most ethnically diverse/lowest-income neighborhoods**



Average canopy cover goal for **all neighborhoods** by 2030

# 200

Number of street **trees to be planted** via the program in 2022

**Cost to residents** who commit to watering and pruning street trees:

# \$0

Source: City of Spokane/The Lands Council

TOOL  
KIT

## CITIZEN VOICES, CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Shoreline seeks to engage underrepresented community members while updating its climate action plan.

DEVON O'NEIL

**AT A TIME WHEN** communities around the world are reckoning daily with a changing climate, perhaps it's not surprising that the city of Shoreline's 2013 Climate Action Plan (CAP) was deemed "out of date" less than a decade after it was released. Greenhouse gas emissions in the city have decreased by only 5 percent since 2009, and with a growing population, city officials decided it was time to update management strategies to protect the city's future.

For most municipalities, the process of engaging the community to craft a new plan would be relatively straightforward. But Shoreline's growing diversity presented a unique challenge to Environmental Services Program Manager Cameron Reed and his colleagues, who sought to engage not just the city's established voices, but also those who might not have been heard in the past.

Shoreline, a coastal city 12 miles north of downtown Seattle with a population of about 56,000, has always been a bedroom community with a largely white population. Its record of inclusion—or, as it were, exclusion—is checkered. Some of its neighborhoods included racist covenants when they were built in the 1950s, Reed says. Since 1990, however, almost all of the area's population growth has come from non-white ethnicities. Thirty percent of the city's residents are now people of color, and nearly half of all Shoreline School District students are youth of color. Immigrants come from across Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa, as is reflected by messaging on the city's website; one can read instructions about how to review documents in 11 languages, from Khmer to Amharic to Tagalog.

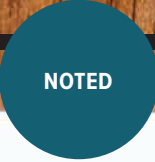
"The city has been making more explicit our commitment to better serve our community by focusing on equity and social justice," Reed says. In the case of the CAP, that meant reaching out to residents on a topic about which their opinions were not previously sought. Reed oversaw a process that included four online workshops, where about 40 locals broke into smaller discussion groups; public outreach posters at libraries and senior centers; the creation of an 11-member climate advisory group; and two substantial surveys that drew about 300 responses. The city also worked with a local high school's climate justice club, since "we identified youth as being more vulnerable to climate change and bearing more of the consequences based on how we act," he adds.

All told, Reed estimates the city heard from more than 700 residents about the plan, which the city council will review this fall. Shoreline aims to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 60 percent in eight years, mostly by shifting to electric heat pumps, electric vehicles, and more fuel-efficient public transportation. Residents helped set priorities when it came to potential new policies and programs. "Anything that included financial assistance was very popular," Reed says. "People love incentives."

Solutions were evaluated for equity and related criteria like cost of living and economic feasibility. Though a lot of feedback came from traditional voices, the process proved a noble starting point. "It takes time to build that trust," Reed says. "We want to empower people and let them know they can weigh in."



For more information:  
[shorelinewa.gov](http://shorelinewa.gov)



## ENGROSSED SECOND SUBSTITUTE SENATE BILL 5126

### Chapter 316, Laws of 2021

#### WASHINGTON CLIMATE COMMITMENT ACT

##### NEW SECTION. Sec. 8. CAP ON GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS.

(1) In order to ensure that greenhouse gas emissions are reduced by **covered entities** consistent with the limits established in RCW 70A.45.020, **the department** must implement a cap on greenhouse gas emissions from covered entities and a program to track, verify, and enforce compliance through the use of compliance instruments.

(2) The program must consist of:

(a) **Annual allowance** budgets that limit emissions from covered entities, as provided in this section and sections 9 and 10 of this act;

(b) Defining those entities **covered by the program**, and those entities that may voluntarily opt into coverage under the program, as provided in this section and sections 9 and 10 of this act;

(c) **Distribution of emission allowances**, as provided in section 12 of this act, and through the allowance price containment provisions under sections 16 and 17 of this act;

(d) Providing for **offset credits** as a method for meeting a compliance obligation, pursuant to section 19 of this act;

(e) Defining the compliance obligations of covered entities, as provided in this act;

(f) Establishing the authority of the department to enforce the program requirements, as provided in section 23 of this act;

(g) Creating a **climate investment account** for the deposit of receipts from the distribution of emission allowances, as provided in section 28 of this act;

##### NEW SECTION. Sec. 23. ENFORCEMENT.

(9)(a) No city, town, county, township, or other subdivision or municipal corporation of the state may implement a charge or tax based exclusively upon the quantity of greenhouse gas emissions.

(b) No state agency may adopt or enforce a program that regulates greenhouse gas emissions from a stationary source except as provided in this chapter.

(c) This chapter preempts the provisions of chapter 173-442 WAC.

Starting in 2027, businesses, including fuel suppliers, natural gas and electric utilities, and waste-to-energy facilities, that generate more than the statutory amount of GHGs must comply with the law; railroads must comply by 2031.

The Department of Ecology must establish the first cap of overall carbon emissions allowed statewide and implement the program by January 1, 2023.

The program covers about 75% of statewide emissions. Exempt businesses include agricultural emissions and aviation and marine fuels. Landfills were removed from the program after the passage of HB 1663.

The CCA allows businesses to cover a small portion of their emissions with offset credits. Entities can receive credits by funding projects that reduce, remove, or avoid GHG emissions—or they can buy them on the secondary market.

The Climate Commitment Act (CCA) caps and reduces greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) from Washington's largest emitting sources and industries.

Once the cap is set, Ecology will issue 'emissions allowances' equal to the cap. Ecology will reduce the cap each year to meet the emissions reduction limits for 2030, 2040, and 2050. As the cap is lowered, fewer allowances will be available every year.

Every year, emitting businesses will purchase their emission allowance through Ecology-run auctions or through a secondary trading market. Some entities will receive no-cost allowances. Businesses will need to reduce their emissions or buy costlier allowances.

Proceeds from the CCA allowance auctions must be invested in critical climate projects focused on improving clean transportation options, increasing climate resilience in ecosystems and communities, and addressing issues of environmental justice and health inequity.



THE QUESTION

WHAT DOES SUSTAINABILITY MEAN FOR YOUR COMMUNITY?



Sustainability is the legacy we create for all to thrive. It is the intersection of lands stewarded for resource protection and recreation; fair wages; affordable childcare; a stable commercial and industrial base; affordable housing; top-flight education and skill training; access to health care including behavioral health; expanded transit options; arts and cultural offerings; and services delivered efficiently and cost-effectively. All this is for our current residents and the generations yet to be born.

—MARK KULAAS  
Councilmember, Wenatchee



Sustainability is a promise to future generations that their survival is our priority. Our grandchildren's children should feel proud of the choices we make today. We can restore balance by protecting water, ecosystems, local food systems, and the carbon cycle. We can invest in green infrastructure, housing for all, active transportation [bicycling and walking], and each person's ability to meet their own needs and pay it forward to the next generation.

—DANI MADRONE  
Councilmember, Olympia



Sustainability goes beyond protecting our environment for future generations - it's ensuring Kirkland remains a place to live at all ages and stages of life. Sustainability means constructing new housing in high-performing, clean-energy buildings located near schools, parks, shops, and services. It means providing transit, greenways, sidewalks, and trails to provide more ways to comfortably ride, walk, and roll. It means thinking through every decision to align with our Sustainability Master Plan.

—JAY ARNOLD  
Deputy Mayor, Kirkland

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- Oct 19 | Effective Local Leadership
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- Budgeting with an Equity Lens

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AWC's Cities on Tap events are returning in-person with that energetic and informal atmosphere we've missed. Connect with other city leaders across the state as you prepare for the 2023 legislative session.

- Sept 29 | Everett (in partnership with Snohomish County cities and towns)
- Oct 3 | Port Orchard
- Oct 10 | Wenatchee
- Oct 18 | Ridgefield
- Oct 27 | Spokane Valley
- Nov 2 | Online

CLIMATE ACTION BENCHMARKS:  
A PATH FORWARD  
OCTOBER 25 | ONLINE

Explore strategies to help cities meet the ambitious legislative benchmarks for local climate action and mitigation.

# There's no time like the present.

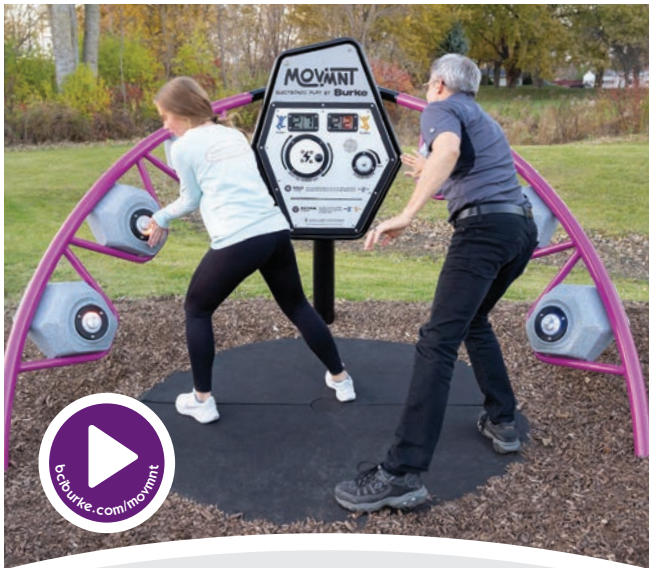


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## Citybeat

### Flood Endurance *continued from page 5*

vertical braces. “We have prepared for what we would say is a 100-year-flood elevation, plus four feet,” says Mayor Jill Boudreau, who championed the fund-finding efforts and oversaw most of the construction.

Simply keeping the water out of downtown is one thing. But allowing businesses to remove the threat from their overhead—both in terms of finances and stress—was another entirely. As Boudreau says, before the wall, “there were a lot of barriers to economic development here.” Now, more than 100 businesses are open downtown.

“It’s been a catalyst and a game changer,” says Ellen Gamson, executive director of the Mount Vernon Downtown Association. “Older buildings are being purchased and renovated at a faster rate than before the floodwall went in. It’s a safer investment for folks.”

Gamson, like many in the community, has her own flood story. In 2007, she became part owner of a used bookstore downtown. One night, during a low flood threat, she stopped in to pick up a couple of books. To her alarm, a storm drain had backed up and blown a cap off a pipe, inundating the store. Water was still gushing out of the pipe, so like Hans Brinker, the Dutch boy who saved a city by plugging a leaky dike with his finger, Gamson shoved her fist inside and called 911. She lost hundreds of books, but the shop stayed open and Gamson accepted the risk as a cost of doing business.

**“IT’S BEEN A CATALYST AND A GAME CHANGER. OLDER BUILDINGS ARE BEING PURCHASED AND RENOVATED AT A FASTER RATE THAN BEFORE THE FLOODWALL WENT IN. IT’S A SAFER INVESTMENT FOR FOLKS.”**

Last November, when the river approached historic flood levels, Gamson, like everyone else, held her breath. Mount Vernon had deployed its wall in the past, but this was its first serious test—and the first time that city officials installed the extra four feet of stop logs. To everyone’s relief, it held up. Gamson couldn’t help but notice that many Skagit Valley locals who had stacked sandbags for decades came down to observe the wall in action. “There was almost a tangible sense of giddiness in the air,” she says.

This fall, the city is scheduled to break ground on its next capital project: a state-of-the-art, four-story library commons built with Passive House sustainable architecture (a design standard that dramatically increases the energy efficiency of a building). The project includes a 140,000 kW solar array and the state’s largest publicly accessible electric vehicle charging station. Boudreau says the venture will cost about \$53 million. She already has secured 17 funding sources and is hot on the trail for more.



For more information:  
[mountvernonwa.gov](http://mountvernonwa.gov)

# Cityscope



Q&A

## Water Wisdom

Langley Mayor Scott Chaplin on leveraging a career in sustainability to protect the city's shoreline from being swallowed by the rising tides.

INTERVIEW BY EMILY ALHADEFF

Langley Mayor  
Scott Chaplin

### Your sustainability credentials in local government go pretty far back.

In the 1980s when I worked for the city of Ann Arbor [Michigan], which had a city council that was very supportive of energy efficiency improvements, we put together a list of everything that would save energy and pay for itself within seven years. That included switching out all the light bulbs, putting in more insulation, changing the heating and ventilation systems, and putting solar hot water on the city's swimming pool. We paid for it using municipal bonds, and

the city has saved several million dollars since then because of that project.

### Then in the 1990s, you spent seven years as a researcher at the Rocky Mountain Institute in Snowmass, Colorado.

They are quite famous for their energy efficiency work to help individuals, businesses and governments. They showed that the cheapest way to get new energy was not nuclear power, coal or gas, it was saving the energy we're already

CONTINUED ON P.12 ►



wasting. They hired me to look at water the same way they had been looking at energy. I went on to help write a manual for the EPA on water efficiency for municipal utility managers and then consulted for numerous communities on water conservation and efficiency. I got interested in composting toilets, rainwater, and gray water, and I wrote quite a bit about that back in the day. Now it's coming full circle.

**In 2009, after spending six years as a trustee in Carbondale, where you ran a retail store focused on sustainability, you moved to Whidbey Island. Twelve years later, the city council appointed you mayor.**

**How did that happen?**

I hadn't really planned on being the mayor. I had been on the city council back in Colorado, and much of my career was in government work. A few days after I filed for a seat on Langley's council, the mayor stepped down early, and a friend said, "Scott, you should just put your hat in for the mayor's position." I was like, 'You know what, it's a good time to do it.' Because [I knew] I would have a very supportive city council.

**Langley's tagline is "The Village by the Sea." How does sustainability factor into the city's tranquil public image?**

Back in 2020, a group of local youth activists called United Student Leaders (USL) worked with the city on a workshop on sea level rise, which involved participation from the Swinomish Tribe's Climate Change Initiative and looked specifically at the Langley coast. It was very well attended and



Mayor Chaplin at sea level with members of Langley's Climate Crisis Action Committee.

**“I HOPE WE CAN RESTORE ALL OF OUR CREEKS TO WHAT THEY ONCE WERE: THE WORLD’S GREATEST STORMWATER MANAGEMENT SYSTEM AND HABITAT FOR FISH.”**

there were a lot of great ideas generated. A year later, after USL addressed the council and asked the city to take immediate action, we declared a climate emergency and established the Climate Crisis Action Commission, which has been putting on workshops and promoting innovative policies.

**Is Langley threatened by rising sea levels?**

We really are quite vulnerable along our shore. In fact, we've had two landslides on a private homeowner's property just in the last six weeks. We have a small slide that's happening along First Street, which is right in front of the water and is partly on city property. If it goes, it could take a chunk of our First

Street, which could potentially cut off boat trailer access to our marina and turn First Street into a one-lane road, or worse.

**What has the city done to prevent that from happening?**

In the '70s, the shoreline erosion had been coming up closer to the core of our downtown, and the city declared an emergency and got funding to put in a huge sea wall. Now, after about 50 years, it's finally beginning to fail. We're just beginning the discussions of whether we do managed retreat, which is a bit of a buzzword these days.

**What does that mean?**

Managed retreat is not allowing

new development in critical areas that are on a bluff or a shoreline or where the sea level is reasonably predicted to encroach upon. We have one development that is being built near sea level. That'll probably be the last one.

**What other environmental work is Langley doing?**

We are looking to do a very comprehensive watershed analysis of our community to assess how water flows through our environment and out to the sea. One element is looking at three creeks that run through Langley. They all used to have salmon running back in the day, but they've all been covered over with culverts and other things at various points. We're working with the Tulalip Tribes tribes to daylight a portion of one. I hope we can restore all of our creeks to what they once were: the world's greatest stormwater management system and habitat for fish.

BY THE NUMBERS

# Langley

Cityvision takes the measure of a small coastal city confronting sea level rise and climate change.

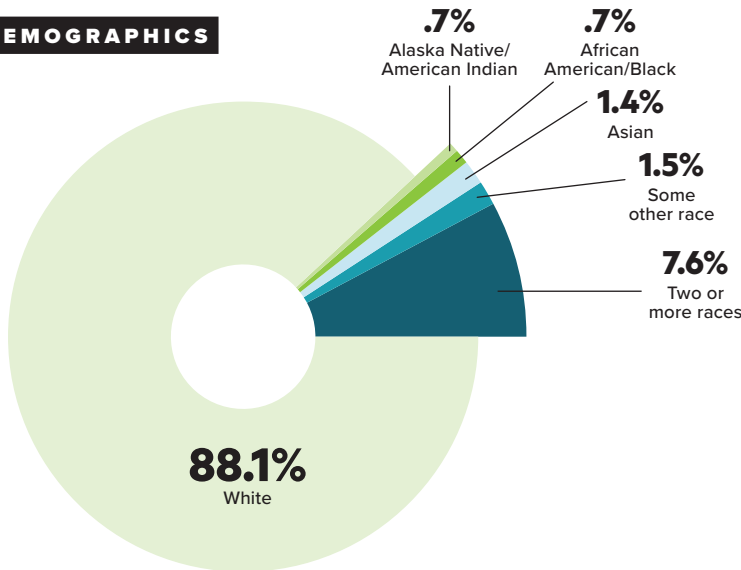
## POPULATION

POPULATION DATA FROM THE 2020 US CENSUS, UNLESS OTHERWISE INDICATED

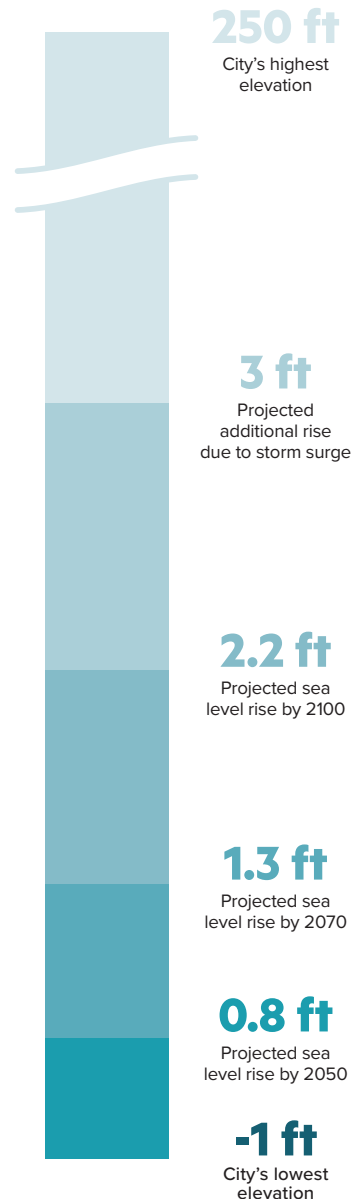


SOURCES: CENSUS.GOV

## DEMOGRAPHICS

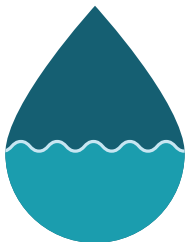


## SEA CHANGE



## WATER LOGGED

- 1.73 mi** Total length of the city's shoreline
- 1.48 mi** Length of shoreline that is built out
- 1.44 mi** Length of the city's seawall
- 1975** Year the seawall was built




**300 gal**  
National daily average water consumption per household


**113 gal**  
Average amount of water consumed per day per Langley household

SOURCE: CITY OF LANGLEY

## SOLAR CHARGE



- \$1.2K** Average annual residential electricity bill
- 6 TONS** Carbon dioxide generated, per home, in producing this electricity
- 743** Number of housing units/homes in Langley
- \$1.2K** Price of a green burial space at Langley Woodman Cemetery
- \$0** Permit fee for a small (less than 15kW) roof-mounted residential solar system



SOURCE: U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, CITY OF LANGLEY

SOURCE: CITY OF LANGLEY

Raymond Mayor Dee Roberts and  
Pacific County Emergency Management  
Agency Director Scott McDougall





# FLOOD

## OF INNOVATION

**THREATENED BY CHANGING TIMES AND RISING TIDES, TWO RURAL COMMUNITIES FIND COMMON CAUSE IN RETOOLING NATURAL-RESOURCE-BASED ECONOMIES. BY TED KATAUSKAS**

January 3, 2022, was supposed to be an auspicious day for Dee Roberts, and it was, in more ways than one. That first Monday of the year marked the first day of her first term as the mayor of Raymond, an economically challenged historic timber town of 3,000 on the banks of the Willapa River near the mouth of Willapa Bay. It also marked the onset of one of the most significant flooding events that north Pacific County—no stranger to wild weather—has ever experienced.

“It has been an interesting day in Pacific County,” the Pacific County Emergency Management Agency (PCEMA) posted on its Facebook page that afternoon. “At 9:25 a.m., the Pacific County Emergency Management Agency was alerted by the [National Weather Service] that the tidal anomaly for today was going to be much greater than originally expected ... Raymond and South Bend are the cities most vulnerable to tidal overflow flooding. ... Sand and sandbags were made available in both cities. Schools, transportation, and public safety agencies were consulted, and contingency plans were put in motion.”

The unusual ocean upswell, following an overnight downpour, submerged a stretch of Highway 101, closing the main artery that links both communities. In South Bend, a sister city of 1,600 six miles downriver from Raymond, Roberts was still five months away from retiring as that city’s clerk/treasurer (a post she held for 24 years). While her mayor’s office in Raymond sat empty, she stoically helmed the clerk’s desk at South Bend’s city hall, artfully multitasking the needs of both communities. She checked in with her staff in Raymond between answering phone calls from

concerned South Benders and posted urgent public service announcements on the city’s Facebook page: “There is water over the road at Highway 101. PLEASE be careful! There are logs in that water and people are driving through the water and hitting the logs. JUST STAY HOME UNTIL THE WATER RECEDES!”

By evening, the tide went out, taking the floodwaters with it, and life returned to normal in Raymond and South Bend. For exactly three days.

On January 6, unseasonably warm temperatures sent a torrent of snowmelt thundering down hillsides and into the Willapa tidal basin. While a downpour of biblical proportions soaked the valley for 12 hours, westerly winds gusting up to 70 mph kept the high tide from retreating. In both communities, businesses and schools closed while residents sheltered in place behind sandbagged doors. South Bend, closer to the bay and lower on the floodplain, bore the brunt of the storm—transforming the city’s primary north-south thoroughfare, Central Avenue, into a river.

At city hall, one block east of Central Avenue, Roberts moved the city’s computer servers and boxes of paper files off the floor, made arrangements to sandbag the building, and updated South Bend’s Facebook page, advising residents to evacuate, where to shelter pets, and where to get bottled water. Then she drove to Raymond to take stock of the situation there (flooding was minimal) and returned to South Bend to meet with that city’s mayor and Pacific County’s emergency manager. Again she drove back to Raymond, and back to South Bend, and back and forth until the day was done.



“At one point, I just sat in my car because I was like, ‘I don’t even really know where I’m supposed to be right now,’” recalls Roberts, who retired from her clerk/treasurer post in South Bend in May and now works full time as Raymond’s mayor. “I was just overwhelmed. I was beside myself.”

South Bend police officers, wading through waist-deep water in the streets, went door-to-door to check on residents while the city’s public works crew made a valiant stand with the custodial staff at the local high school, where pumps ran nonstop for 36 hours behind a berm of sandbags to shunt water away from the school’s pinewood gym floor, which had been replaced at great cost after being destroyed by a similar flood in 2015. “We managed to keep enough water at bay to save that floor, and we did what we could to make sure everybody was warm and safe and dry,” says South Bend Mayor Julie Struck. “Nobody was in danger of losing their life, but property damage for a few folks was significant.”

In all, eight families were displaced, and 98 properties were flooded, with damage estimates approaching \$1 million. “That’s not insignificant in a small community, especially in an economically challenged community,” notes PCEMA Director Scott McDougall, a former EMT/firefighter from Raymond. In South Bend, the median household income (\$44,000) is 55 percent of the state median, and 23 percent of the population lives below the poverty line.

Then barely a week after the flood, on January 15, 2022, a volcanic eruption 6,500 miles across the Pacific in Tonga triggered a tsunami warning, which ended up only producing a ripple locally, but rattled an already shaken community.

“Things were finally settling down and then the tsunami warning comes and I’m thinking ‘Oh my God, what else is going to happen?’” Roberts recalls. “Nothing happened, thankfully. I guess the last thing I can expect in my term may be an earthquake.”

That’s actually a worry that keeps Scott McDougall up at night.

“The vulnerability for the community could be significant if there ever was a large event,” he says, evoking the Good Friday Earthquake of 1964, which produced a 12-foot wave that inundated Pacific County’s Seaview community 40 miles south on the Long Beach Peninsula. “The biggest threat we face from a tsunami would be from a Cascadia Subduction Zone event, which would happen right off our coast. And that would have a devastating impact up and down the length of the Long Beach Peninsula.”

In preparation for such an event, and for the increased severity and frequency of flooding accelerated by sea level rise and climate change, the City of South Bend already has identified two sites in the hills, within walking distance of downtown, where it plans to install shipping containers cached with emergency rations, water,

tents, cots, and other supplies to sustain the city’s displaced population. The school district has likewise developed a contingency plan with 14 homeowners who live up in the hills, each designated as a safe haven for a particular classroom should a major flood happen during school hours. Modeling self-sufficiency during and after a calamity is a page from the PCEMA’s playbook.

“One thing we need to do as local leaders is redoubling our ability to reach out and educate the community so that they are prepared to be resilient, rather than expecting somebody to come and just remove the problem,” stresses McDougall.

## NATURAL DISASTER MITIGATION

Practically speaking, Struck and Roberts don’t have many options when it comes to fortifying their cities from future flooding, other than developing contingency plans and preaching a mantra of self-sufficiency in preparing for the worst.

“There’s not much we can do to control Mother Nature,” concludes Mayor Struck, who notes that South Bend has experienced

two major flooding events since she became mayor in 2014 and recalls only one major flood prior to that since she was a child. “We are not naïve. Should a major catastrophic event happen, it will probably not be localized, and we will not be the first to receive help. We’re anticipating a week to two weeks before we get help into the area if it’s a widespread tsunami event. ... Our focus must be on making sure the infrastructure, the leadership, and supplies are here to help people through those difficult days immediately following an event. Saving life and limb is most important. And we’ll deal with the houses afterward.”

As for potential infrastructure solutions to mitigate

the impact of future floods, Struck says the only remedy she can imagine would be converting all of Central Avenue into a dedicated concrete stormwater channel.

“Something like that would cost mega-millions, and there’s no way we can fund it,” she says, noting that South Bend residents are already hamstrung with one of the state’s highest utility rates, shouldering a third of the \$30 million cost of building an Ecology-mandated state-of-the-art shared wastewater treatment plant. (The city of Raymond is paying for the other two-thirds.) Another option would be to elevate the most flood-prone homes, but the only assistance Struck could find was a federal program for extremely low-income homeowners that would provide up to \$35,000 per project, a fraction of the total required.

“So where does the rest of the money come from?” she asks. “The suggestion [of the funding agency] was that these folks take

**"THERE'S NOT MUCH WE CAN DO TO CONTROL MOTHER NATURE. WE ARE NOT NAIVE. SHOULD A MAJOR CATASTROPHIC EVENT HAPPEN, IT WILL PROBABLY NOT BE LOCALIZED, AND WE WILL NOT BE THE FIRST TO RECEIVE HELP. WE'RE ANTICIPATING A WEEK OR TWO WEEKS BEFORE WE GET HELP INTO THE AREA IF IT'S A WIDESPREAD TSUNAMI EVENT."**

—JULIE STRUCK, SOUTH BEND MAYOR

out loans, but they're living month-to-month and that's just not doable. A lot of them don't even have flood insurance because they can't afford it. So, it's a tough situation."

## LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

In Raymond and South Bend, the ebb and flow of tides (and economic prosperity) has been a way of life since the communities were founded in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as commercial hubs dedicated to the harvest and processing of what seemed to be a limitless bounty of old-growth timber from the Willapa Hills and fish and shellfish from Willapa Bay.

In its earliest days, Raymond, famously, was built on stilts—seemingly hovering five feet above the tidelands with pedestrians navigating a 2,900-foot-long labyrinthine network of elevated wooden sidewalks and bridges as they went about their business. For more than a century, Raymond boomed with sawmills humming 24 hours a day and filling Willapa River steamships and Northern Pacific Railway locomotives with lumber to fuel the growth of San Francisco and cities on the East Coast, as well as in South America and Hawaii.

South Bend shares a similar backstory; its early fortunes were tied to timber, but also revolved around canneries packing oysters, salmon, and crab. The boom times ended abruptly for both cities in the 1980s and '90s, as overharvesting and environmental regulations drastically curbed logging and shuttered Raymond's sawmills, with the last, the Pacific Hardwoods sawmill at the Port of Willapa Harbor, idling in 2017. Additionally, ocean acidification and the 2015 ban on a pesticide once used to control a species of oyster-killing shrimp have upended the fragile ecosystem of Willapa Bay, which produces 25 percent of the nation's oysters, threatening the viability of an industry that is Pacific County's largest employer, as well as South Bend's identity and status as the "Oyster Capital of the World." Just as acute has been an erosion of the local workforce in both communities as an exodus of graduates from South Bend High School who—unable to imagine a future for themselves in the Willapa—leave the area and never return.

But times are changing.

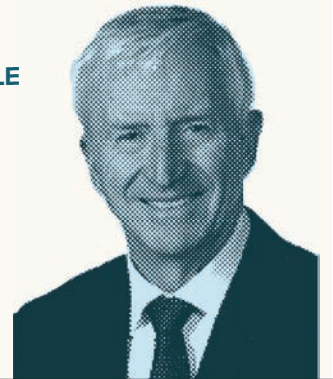
"When I went to school, everybody was taught to leave, and if you didn't leave and you stayed here, you were considered a failure," says Kathleen Nisbet Moncy, who graduated from South Bend High in 2003, and after earning a marine biology degree from the University of Hawaii at Hilo, returned to work at her family's oyster farm near South Bend, where she's now COO. "It's all about teaching kids how to thrive in their hometowns."

To that end, the Nisbet family's Goose Point Oysters, which employs 90, welcomes fourth graders from the local elementary school for a daylong field trip where they work every station at the processing plant, and in the summer the company recruits and hires students from South Bend High School to harvest and process oysters. "Connecting with our schools and making sure we are building good people and giving kids the resources to be successful here I think will move us forward," says Nisbet Moncy. "That and bringing in new technologies and equipment to further evolve the workforce locally."

An example of just that can be found at the Port of Willapa Harbor, which soon expects to create Washington's first Energy Innovation District on the site of the shuttered Pacific Hardwoods mill, a 40-acre parcel of port-owned land on the outskirts of Raymond.

## DISASTER PLANNER Q&A ROBERT EZELLE

*Robert Ezelle, director of the Washington Military Department's Emergency Management Division, on what every city needs to do now to be prepared for the worst.*



### **You like to say 'All disasters are local.' Can you unpack that a bit?**

The people impacted by disasters are those on the ground where the disaster is happening. The response to the recovery is truly being driven by the affected communities and local leaders. And then they are supported by the county, state, and federal governments as they do their response and recovery activities.

### **You also like to say, 'Disaster response is no place to begin exchanging business cards.' What do you mean by that?**

Emergency management and response and recovery are largely relationship driven. You need to make sure you have established connections with county and state emergency management so that you know and trust each before the disaster happens. Then it's just a matter of putting those partnerships to good use to serve the needs of the community when something unimaginably bad happens.

### **What type of disasters should city leaders be preparing for that**

### **often get overlooked?**

Incidents involving hazardous materials—small spills all the way up to larger ones—are a daily occurrence across the state and are largely under the radar. Also, there are low-frequency, high-consequence geologic hazards. Nobody in the state is immune from these. We had a landslide back in the 1800s that blocked the Columbia River, and we will have a magnitude six or seven earthquake every 50 years or so in western Washington. And then there's the ticking time bomb off the coast—a magnitude nine [earthquake], that will severely damage infrastructure across western Washington. While eastern Washington may not be hit with shaking hazards that will damage buildings and infrastructure, there will certainly be impacts across the state that we have to prepare to deal with.

### **Is it correct that Washington is one of the most disaster-prone states in the U.S.?**

In terms of federal declarations, we've had 119 federal declarations since 1956. That puts us num-

CONTINUED ON P.19 ►



Port of Willapa  
Harbor Manager  
Jim Sayce at  
the shuttered  
sawmill that soon  
will become the  
state's first Energy  
Innovation District.

**"SUSTAINABILITY IS ABOUT BRINGING THE CONSEQUENCES OF YOUR ACTIONS, AND SOLUTIONS, HOME TO WHERE YOU LIVE. IT FORCES YOU TO THINK ABOUT EVERYTHING YOU DO TO BETTER THE ENVIRONMENT FOR YOUR FRIENDS, FAMILY, AND COMMUNITY."**

—JIM SAYCE, PORT MANAGER

Funded in part by \$1.5 million the state Legislature earmarked in 2018, the pilot project will demonstrate the principles of industrial symbiosis—using waste generated by one industrial process to fuel another adjacent operation.

Initially, the Port envisioned a plant that would convert sawdust into pellets as fuel for pellet stoves, with an adjoining greenhouse that would capture excess heat from massive rotary driers to cultivate mushrooms. As the price of the imported liquefied natural gas that would fuel such a facility skyrocketed, another solution emerged. A Hoquiam-based specialty woods manufacturer proposed retooling the plant's kilns to run on cheaper, more reliable electricity to dry high-quality alder prized by guitar makers and other artisans, and practice "total wood utilization"—packaging shavings from the milling process as bedding for animals, and turning compressed dried sawdust into bio-block logs as sustainable alternatives to firewood.

"We have a site, we have buildings to rebuild and upgrade, and we'll be turning and burning in a few months," says Port Manager Jim Sayce, who adds that the first phase of the project expects to create 35 new local jobs, paying \$20 per hour.

For Sayce, who commutes 90 miles a day to and from work and recently traded in his gas-guzzling truck for a Mustang Mach-E electric car, the plant's conversion, coupled with his personal choice to switch from gas to electricity, was something of an epiphany.

"I've tied my transportation to where I live in a remarkable way, going from gas produced in Saudi Arabia or the North Slope of Alaska, to electricity generated by the Columbia River. Sustainability is about bringing the consequences of your actions, and solutions, home to where you live. It forces you to think about everything you do to better the environment for your friends, family, and community."

Adds South Bend's Julie Struck, "Sustainability is all about carrying on into the future. You're going to have to deal with crises from time to time. But how you deal with them during and after they occur will make the difference between your community going forward or your community collapsing."

**INNOVATION AND REINVENTION**

Around the time Dee Roberts was elected as Raymond's mayor late last year, Sayce hired the Center for Sustainable Infrastructure

ber four—behind California, Texas, and Oklahoma.

**As far as the frequency of disasters in Washington, what is the trend?**

We're seeing almost exponential growth in total declarations. From 1956 to 1965, Washington reported six declarations. From 2006 to 2015, we had 61. Most of that is related to fire.

**To what extent can we say that this increase is climate driven?**

I think it is almost certainly climate driven, because we're seeing an increase in severity of fire behavior caused by hotter and drier-than-normal summers. And this is not just here in Washington. There's a nationwide trend of fire seasons getting drier, hotter, and worse. And we're seeing more and increasingly damaging winter storms across the country.

**Are certain communities more vulnerable to disasters than others, depending on their geographic location?**

If you're in eastern Washington, you're going to see a lot more fire impact than you will in western Washington. But western Washington is still vulnerable to fire, so you can't discount the hazard. If I had to make a generalization as to who's most vulnerable, it'd be those communities that are not prepared and haven't looked at the hazards and taken the steps to prepare for them.

**What are the key steps to being prepared?**

You've got to know your hazards and have plans

and procedures in place for how you're going to deal with them. You need to make sure your people are trained and ready to respond to an event, and that you're building relationships with partners in your community. We all have room to improve when it comes to putting the appropriate amount of focus on disaster recovery and being prepared to lead a community, a county, or a state through recovery from a major event.

**How do you think about sustainability in terms of emergency management?**

I look at it through a bit of a different lens. Preparedness is something that may not necessarily rise to the top of everybody's priority level. But it immediately catapults to the top when something happens. And so to me, sustainability is making sure that you keep emergency management and your responsibilities and the responsibilities of your staffs focused on what they need to be doing in an emergency. Skills atrophy. Make sure you exercise them regularly.

**Any points you'd reiterate to local electeds?**

The hard work needs to take place before an incident or disaster happens. It's not something that you can neglect and hope to pick up on the fly when things go sideways. We at the county, state, and federal levels are here to support the local jurisdictions when bad things happen. Partner with us, and build the relationships, before bad things happen.



The cities are studying the feasibility of restoring this abandoned railroad swing bridge as a landmark crossing on the Willapa Hills State Park Trail.

(CSI), an Olympia-based infrastructure innovation think tank guiding the Port's Energy Innovation District project, to draft a blueprint for a sustainability-driven rebirth of north Pacific County's economy. In December 2021, a steering group of 33 local leaders (including Roberts, Struck, and Nisbet Moncy) representing 24 local, regional, and state organizations, businesses, and agencies began meeting regularly to brainstorm about what a sustainability-driven reinvention of the local economy might look like. CSI released its final report, *Reimagining the Willapa*, in late July.

A summary of CSI's recommendations that accompanies the report addresses an elephant in the room by redefining a loaded term: "The Willapa region has had its fair share of tensions between natural resource industries and environmental protections. As 'sustainability' is often used to mean environmental sustainability, local skepticism around the term is understandable. But true sustainability requires that its three components are each sustainable: economy, environment, and community. ... By embracing full triple-bottom-line sustainability as beneficial, the community can leave behind outdated tensions between industry and environment, both in reality and outside perception."

Likewise, *Reimagining the Willapa* contains three sustainability-driven economic development initiatives, dubbed pillars, each with prioritized action items. Action items in the first pillar—dedicated to growing long-term and sustainable natural resources jobs—include fostering innovation in the local shellfish industry and supporting the evolution of the Port of Willapa Harbor's Energy Innovation District.

In the second pillar—supporting resilient infrastructure development—action items include meeting critical housing needs by renovating Raymond's historic American Legion Building with 12 apartments and assistance services for veterans (an \$8.5 million project with \$3.5 million in funding commitments), and supporting the work of a Raymond-based nonprofit targeting vacant lots and abandoned homes for affordable housing redevelopment.

The third pillar—promoting recreation and locally made food and products—recommends fostering the 2024 completion of the 56-mile Willapa Hills State Park Trail by developing a campground

at the trail's terminus in South Bend and establishing a Willapa Creative District, including an idled processing plant that would be converted into an artisan market akin to Raymond's Alder + Co., an always-humming shopping destination with 74 stalls showcasing the bounty of Pacific County makers and food purveyors.

In South Bend, where the rallying cry of "trail ready in 2024" has galvanized a community still recovering from the January floods, the natural-resource-focused sustainable economic development strategy outlined in *Reimagining the Willapa* promises to be nothing less than transformational.

"We have not made a presentation to the funding agencies at this point, but if this goes through, it could be a game changer for us," says Mayor Struck.

Just up the river, Raymond already seems to be on the cusp of a renaissance thanks to an influx of newcomers who began arriving, and staying, even before pandemic-freed office workers from Portland and Seattle began seeking out and relocating to bucolic places like the Willapa.

"There's an influx of young energetic people who love this community and want it to thrive and be sustainable," notes Mayor Roberts. "They're more interested in seeing it become an entity unto itself rather than looking for that big ticket business to come in and make us whole. ... We are trying to capitalize on what we already have, and not create something different that would take us away from our roots."

For Roberts, the most critical action item in *Reimagining the Willapa* isn't the trail completion, but a push to create more housing and also to install charging stations for electric vehicles. After that comes a new city hall and firehouse. Such are the ambitions of a first-term mayor. But the Raymond community believes in her ("Dee gets stuff done," says Jeff Karnatz, a lavender farmer and 2017 transplant from Arizona who runs Alder + Co. "She has the foresight, and she knows how to move with the times.")

How does Roberts think about her mayoral legacy? "If nothing else I'd like to see Raymond better off than it was when I stepped in." That was the day Raymond and South Bend confronted calamity, and together persevered.

# Citywise



“

Whether they drive, take the bus, ride a bike or walk, everybody wants to feel safe crossing the street, road, or highway. They want clean air to breathe.

— CITY 101 P. 22 ▶

”

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**26** WHAT CITY LEADERS NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THE *WEST VIRGINIA V. EPA* RULING

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# ACTIVE ENDEAVOR

Creating a sustainable, equitable active transportation system that works for all of us

BARB CHAMBERLAIN, WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

## Equitable Investment

The monetary and human cost of serious/fatal crashes in Washington across all modes is enormous—over \$14 billion a year in medical care, emergency services, lost income, and traffic congestion. If a “crash tax” was imposed at the pump to recover these costs, it would add an extra \$4.73 to every gallon of gas we purchased. Making roads safer by embracing active transportation initiatives promises to yield a significant return, but first there needs to be an investment.

In March, the state legislature did just that when it approved Move Ahead Washington, a \$17 billion transportation package that includes:

- \$586 million over 16 years for an expansion of WSDOT’s Safe Routes to School and Pedestrian/Bicyclist Program
- \$50 million over five years for Connecting Communities, a WSDOT pilot program seeking to identify projects that close active transportation gaps
- \$216 million over 16 years for the agency’s School-Based Bicycle Safety Education Program
- \$317 million for 43 community pedestrian/bicyclist projects WSDOT will prioritize based on benefits to overburdened communities
- A Complete Streets design directive; effective July 1, 2022, WSDOT will coordinate with cities and towns on all agency-funded projects (totaling \$500,000 or more) to develop designs that mesh with local active transportation plans and facilities



### OFTEN WHEN I TALK

about active transportation and mention the value of a complete bike network, someone raises a hand and says, “But not everybody rides a bike.” Here’s the thing—not everybody drives either. Building systems that assume everyone can drive has produced places that make it hard to do anything else. If we want a more sustainable future and cities and towns that serve everyone who lives, works, or visits there, we need transportation that works safely and comfortably for all of us. The good news is that investments in active transportation make things better for everyone because almost everyone uses it at some point. Even if you drive everywhere, you still need to cross the street or get from a parking spot to your destination on foot.

In Washington state, approximately 25 percent of the population doesn’t drive. Some are too young, such as a school-age child whose parent adds to morning or afternoon traffic congestion if they don’t find it safe for their child to walk to school. Some have a disability, which means they can never drive. Others are too old to drive safely; they’ve entered what the American Automobile Association refers to as their “driving retirement” years. (That conversation with my dad didn’t go so well. He had only one definition of transportation independence, so it vanished. I’m planning ahead for myself!)

But those who do get behind the wheel need and deserve streets that give them design cues to drive appropriately for an area’s mix of people, modes, and destinations. A design that invites drivers to go fast through a place where children are on their way to school or where people are crossing to get to a bus stop is a design that provides the wrong information. Offering places for people to walk and pedal; setting

**"WE KNOW FROM NATIONAL RESEARCH THAT MORE THAN 50 PERCENT OF THE PUBLIC IS INTERESTED IN RIDING A BIKE. THEY JUST WON'T DO IT UNLESS THEY FEEL SAFE. WE ALSO KNOW THAT OVER HALF OF ALL TRIPS TAKEN IN 2021 WERE LESS THAN 3 MILES—ABOUT A 15-MINUTE BIKE RIDE, AND MANY WERE A HALF-MILE OR LESS!"**

the right speed limits; and supplying design cues so that drivers go at safer speeds helps us all get to our destinations safely.

When we improve facilities for walking and bicycling, we create a great positive feedback loop. We know from national research that more than 50 percent of the public is interested in riding a bike. They just won’t do it unless they feel safe. We also know that over half of all trips taken in 2021 were less than 3 miles—about a 15-minute bike ride, and many were a half-mile or less!

Imagine now that your town has accessible, well-maintained sidewalks and a continuous bike network that doesn’t drop riders into heavy, fast traffic with a sign that says, “Bike Lane Ends.” This kind of complete, inviting system makes riding feel safer—and it is safer because exposure to a potential crash is reduced. If a store on Main Street installs racks for a dozen bicycles in a parking space that used to hold only one vehicle, more people will



walk or pedal. This leads to cleaner air and water (fewer particles shed from car brake linings and tires) and improves health and healthy habitats.

Creating a positive feedback loop like this is good for cities. It's what the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) heard when we conducted outreach across the state. Whether they drive, take the bus, ride a bike or walk, everybody wants to feel safe crossing the street, road, or highway. They want clean air to breathe. They want enjoyable downtowns and livable neighborhoods.

WSDOT's Active Transportation Plan (ATP), published in December 2021, introduces critical concepts for the agency and its partners to work on together and create and connect walking and cycling facilities across jurisdictional boundaries, just as we did for driving. This includes addressing the disproportionately high number of serious and fatal crash rates in areas with higher rates of poverty or that are more racially and demographically diverse—exactly the places where more people rely on alternate modes of transportation. Those statistics aren't a coincidence; they're an outcome of decisions made over many years.

The ATP's goals—connectivity, opportunity, participation, partnership, and safety—are compelling goals for every city or town. WSDOT looks forward to partnering with community leaders to create complete, comfortable transportation networks so everyone can get where they need to go in a cleaner, greener, healthier, more sustainable, and equitable future.

*Barb Chamberlain, a former Idaho state legislator, is the director of the Washington State Department of Transportation's Active Transportation Division. Prior to joining WSDOT, she served as chief strategic officer of Cascade Bicycle Club and Washington Bikes.*

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## Essential Info

A CAP may include elements such as energy, sustainability, or others consistent with a community's vision and unique circumstances. The CAP will likely reflect the forecast for growth and future greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and it should link transportation and land use. Preparing CAPs is an emerging field of planning in Washington and across the nation.

### **CAPs typically incorporate the following elements:**

**Adaptation:** Preparing for disaster events such as fires, floods, landslides, and sea level rise and developing overall emergency management preparedness

**Mitigation:** Reducing greenhouse gas emissions

**Community involvement and engagement:** Resident participation and stakeholder involvement

**Other issues and considerations:** Environmental justice, economics, finance, education, health, and others

# THINKING CAP

Considering a climate action plan? Here's a guide to best practices in local government.

AWC STAFF



### **NE CLIMATE**

sustainability tool utilized by many cities is a Climate Action Plan (CAP). The elements of a CAP can be incorporated into other city plans, policies, and codes, such as comprehensive plans or emergency management plans. Looking for ideas? Check out this snapshot of real CAP examples from Washington cities and counties responding to climate change using science-based information to craft policies.

### **Bainbridge Island**

The City of Bainbridge Island adopted a CAP that includes mitigation and adaptation elements and addresses energy, transportation, buildings, the natural environment, and more.

### **Bellingham**

In 2007, Bellingham adopted a Climate Protection Action Plan with emission reduction targets. The city completed its initial milestones and updated the plan in 2018 with new emission reduction targets for 2030 and 2050.

### **Everett**

The City of Everett adopted a climate change element in its comprehensive plan and adopted a CAP with specific strategies to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

### **Kirkland**

Kirkland adopted a Climate Protection Plan and joined the King County-Cities Climate Collaboration (K4C), a group of cities within the county coordinating efforts responding to climate change. Kirkland's work includes GHG inventory, strategies to reduce GHG emissions, and other measures.

### **Resilient Methow**

This collaboration differs from others because it originated from community efforts to address adaptation and mitigation issues in the Methow River watershed. It encompasses Mazama to Pateros, including the cities of Twisp and Winthrop.

### **Olympia**

The City of Olympia has long recognized that a small amount of sea level rise greatly increases the probability of flooding in the downtown core, potentially affecting public infrastructure. Olympia updated its planning for sea level rise, publishing the Olympia Sea Level Rise Response Plan.

### **Seattle**

Seattle maintains an Office of Sustainability & Environment and works in several areas related to climate change, building and energy, equity and environment, and food policy programs. Seattle updated its climate strategy to address pollution from transportation and buildings.

### **Tacoma**

Tacoma adopted an Environmental Action Plan (EAP) and a resolution directing investments to meet target goals. EAP measures include GHG emission reductions and other elements such as health, local environment, equity, transportation, energy, and affordability.

*Note:* This is not an exhaustive list. Check out AWC's *Climate Resilience Handbook* at [wacities.org](http://wacities.org) to read more case studies that include local partnerships, counties, and tribes. You can also find information about how to adopt a CAP and elements to consider during your city's CAP development or update.





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# PARADIGM SHIFT

What cities seeking to reduce greenhouse gas emissions need to know about the Supreme Court’s recent ruling against the EPA’s Clean Power Plan

LISA SORONEN

*This article was adapted from the National League of Cities CitiesSpeak blog with permission from the author.*

**I**N ITS RECENT RULING, *West Virginia v. EPA*, the US Supreme Court held 6-3 that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) lacked the statutory authority to issue the Clean Power Plan (CPP). Here’s what you need to know about the ruling, and how it may—or may not—inhibit a local response to the climate crisis.

## WHAT’S IN THE CLEAN POWER PLAN

Per the Clean Air Act, the EPA may develop air-pollution standards for new and existing power plants that reflect “the best system of emission reduction” (BSER). Before the CPP, when EPA regulated under this provision of the Clean Air Act, it required existing power plants to make technological changes—like adding a scrubber—to reduce pollution.

In 2015, EPA released the Clean Power Plan, which determined that the BSER to reduce carbon emissions from existing

power plants was through “generation shifting.” This entailed shifting electricity production from coal-fired power plants to natural gas-fired plants, wind energy, and solar energy. Operators could do this [generation shift] by reducing coal-fired production; buying or investing in wind farms or solar installations; or purchasing emission credits as part of a cap-and-trade regime.

The goal of the CPP was to reduce the share of national electricity generation from coal by 2030 to 27 percent, down from 38 percent in 2014.

## WHAT THE COURT RULED

The Court, in an opinion written by Chief Justice Roberts, held that generation shifting exceeds EPA’s authority under the Clean Air Act because Congress didn’t give EPA “clear congressional authorization” to regulate in this matter. “As a matter



of ‘definitional possibilities,’ generation shifting can be described as a ‘system’—‘an aggregation or assemblage of objects united by some form of regular interaction’ capable of reducing emissions. But of course, almost anything could constitute such a ‘system;’ shorn of all context, the word is an empty vessel. Such a vague statutory grant is not close to the sort of clear authorization required by our precedents.”

The EPA had to show it had “clear congressional authorization” to adopt the CPP, because the Court applied the major questions doctrine. This doctrine applies, according to the Court, in “extraordinary cases”—cases in which the “history and the breadth of the authority that [the agency] has asserted,” and the “economic and political significance” of that assertion, provide a “reason to hesitate before concluding that Congress” meant to confer such authority.

The Court opined this is a major questions doctrine case because “[i]n arguing that [the relevant provision of the Clean Air Act] empowers it to substantially restructure the American energy market, EPA ‘claim[ed] to discover in a long-extant statute an unheralded power’ representing a ‘transformative expansion in [its] regulatory authority.’ It located that newfound power in the vague language of an ‘ancillary provision’ of the Act, one that was designed to function as a gap filler and had rarely been used in the preceding decades. And the Agency’s discovery allowed it to adopt a regulatory program that Congress had conspicuously and repeatedly declined to enact itself.”

Justices Kagan, Breyer, and Sotomayor dissented. They argued that “The ‘best system’—full stop—no ifs, ands, or buts of any kind relevant here” is a broad congressional authorization. “The parties do not dispute that generation shifting is indeed the ‘best system’—the most effective and efficient way to reduce power plants’ carbon dioxide emissions.... A key reason Congress makes broad delegations like Section 111 [of the Clean Air Act] is so an agency can respond, appropriately and commensurately, to new and big problems. Congress knows what it doesn’t and can’t

## Goal Oriented

### What was CPP’s goal?

According to the EPA, the plan aimed to reduce carbon pollution from the nation’s largest source—power plants—while maintaining energy reliability and affordability.

### Why was the CPP created?

Power plant carbon pollution causes soot and smog that harm health and worsen climate change. Climate change is one of the greatest environmental and public health challenges and affects all Americans’ lives—from stronger storms and longer droughts to increased insurance premiums, food prices, and extended allergy seasons. Reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from power plants and driving investment in clean energy technologies are essential steps to lessen the impacts of climate change and provide a more certain future for our health, our environment, and the next generation.

### What is the “major questions doctrine”?

The doctrine overrides agency interpretations of authority in “extraordinary cases” due to the “history and the breadth of the authority that [the agency] has asserted.” Due to the “economic and political significance,” Congress must clearly delegate authority to the agency.

know when it drafts a statute; and Congress therefore gives an expert agency the power to address issues—even significant ones—as and when they arise.”

### IMPACT ON CITIES

This decision provides a limit on federal agency authority only. Nothing in the Court’s opinion stops local governments—or states for that matter—from using their legal authority to try to reduce greenhouse gases. According to a recent American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE) blog posting, 20 of the 38 large

cities that ACEEE follows are “on track to achieve greenhouse gas reductions in 2050 in line with global benchmarks.” Cities’ progress matters significantly because according to ACEEE, urban areas currently account for more than 70 percent of greenhouse gas emissions globally.

Fortunately, cities aren’t going to have to do it alone. Numerous red and blue states are taking steps to reduce greenhouse gas. And experts point out that EPA has numerous tools in its toolbox to regulate emissions for power plants and other greenhouse gas emitters. Finally, while the Supreme Court’s decision likely means the Biden administration’s replacement for the CPP will be more modest than it prefers, it is likely to still act.

The National League of Cities (NLC) and the United States Conference of Mayors (USCM) joined together in an amicus brief in *West Virginia v. EPA* supporting the Clean Power Plan and issued the following statement from Clarence Anthony, NLC CEO and executive director, and Tom Cochran, USCM CEO and executive director:

“Local leaders are on the front lines of battling the climate crisis—but we can’t do it alone. Today’s announcement represents a major step back in our fight to keep our communities safe from the devastating effects of the climate crisis, including stronger and more frequent natural disasters, extreme temperatures, negative public health effects, and more. Many cities, towns, and villages will continue to work to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, but today’s decision leaves us working uphill against this threat.”

*Lisa Soronen has served as executive director of the State and Local Legal Center and has worked for the National School Boards Association and the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, and has clerked for the Wisconsin Court of Appeals.*



# Cityscape



The Elwha River flowing through a breached Glines Canyon Dam in 2014.

## River of Hope

Lessons learned from a historic dam removal project on the Olympic Peninsula

**IN THE EARLY 1900S**, the Elwha and Glines Canyon dams were built to generate hydropower to fuel the growth of Port Angeles. Marvels of engineering—the Elwha towering more than 100 feet, the Glines Canyon nearly twice as high—the dams were built without fish passage, blocking the natural river-to-sea-to-river migration pattern etched into the genetics of eight species of anadromous salmon and trout. While Port Angeles prospered, the Elwha River fishery—the economic and cultural lifeblood of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe—suffered as stocks plummeted, some to near extinction.

On September 17, 2011, after decades of negotiation and planning, dignitaries representing cities, tribes, and state and federal agencies (including Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar) gathered at the Elwha Dam five miles from the river's mouth. On Salazar's command, a backhoe with a gold-painted scoop bit into concrete, initiating the largest dam removal project, and one of the most ambitious ecosystem restoration partnerships in US history.

Within six months, the Elwha Dam was gone; eight miles upriver, the Glines Canyon Dam followed in 2014. For the first time in more than a century, the Elwha River flowed free, from its headwaters in the Olympic Mountains to the Strait of Juan de Fuca.

Nearly a decade later, salmon and trout are returning to upper Elwha spawning beds in numbers not seen for generations, with chinook populations surging on the river's lower reaches.

"One of the biggest messages in my mind is that the Elwha is a river of hope," says Olympic National Park Chief Fisheries Biologist Sam Brenkman, who has been involved with the dam removal project for more than 25 years. "It's really a story of the reawakening, the rebirth of this river during a period when there's not a lot of exceptionally positive environmental stories out there."

As for the moral of this story: "Each generation inherits a new baseline with resources," notes Brenkman. "Our grandparents saw a superabundance of fish, then the next generation sees less and less and less. Well, we're heading in the opposite and positive direction with Elwha. I call it an 'inverse shifting of baseline.' It's another hopeful concept."

It's also the ultimate goal of local leaders in places like Raymond and South Bend, once resource-rich rural communities seeking cultural and economic revival through partnerships and audacious innovation. **C**

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