



Climate Resilience

Climate and Land Use Planning

Across Washington, the effects of climate change are becoming a daily reality. Heat waves like the June 2021 “heat dome” endanger the lives of people who have nowhere to retreat or who must work outdoors. Flooding – which hit parts of the state especially hard in the fall of 2021 – and sea level rise wash out roads, damage structures, and leads to landslides. Each year, wildfire season brings evacuations, health impacts from smoke, and loss of homes. We know these impacts will only increase over time, because the science shows that past carbon emissions have locked in a certain amount of warming. While the state takes on efforts to curb emissions, **planning for climate resilience is a needed addition to the Growth Management Act (GMA).**

These climate change impacts disproportionately affect Black, Latinx, and Native communities.¹ These communities are more vulnerable to the impacts of fire because they are more likely to live in substandard housing, more likely to be unhoused, and less likely to have paid time off or health insurance.

Furthermore, past land use planning and redlining practices have increased climate burden, leading to fewer trees and higher temperatures in Black and other communities of color. These factors make wildfire, smoke, heat waves, flooding, sea level rise, and other climate change impacts more severe for Black, Native, and Latinx communities.

Policy Goals

Land use planning policies that address climate change and its inequitable impacts are long overdue and critical to the wellbeing of Washingtonians. Originally introduced in 2021, a bill (HB 1099) has been brought before the legislature that would add a climate change goal for city and county comprehensive plans under the existing framework of the Growth Management Act ([RCW 36.70A.020](#)). Adding a climate change goal to GMA would be beneficial for many reasons, including 1) making planning for climate resilience and mitigation a standard aspect of local land use planning, 2) utilizing existing tools and planning under the comprehensive plan, rather than creating an entirely new tool, 3) providing guidance and technical support to local jurisdictions

Heat, Smoke, and Farmworkers

Climate change impacts have hit Washington's agricultural workers especially hard. Farmworkers are more vulnerable to extreme heat due to the nature of their work, and the temporary housing many farmworkers live in doesn't provide adequate relief from heat during non-working hours. In an August 2021 *Seattle Times* article, a United Farm Workers organizer stated that “farmworkers are as much as 35 times more likely to die from heat than any other civilian occupation.” At least one farmworker death in Washington was linked to the June 2021 heat dome.

Compounding the risk, farmworkers are also exposed to more smoke from wildfires than people who work indoors. As wildfire season becomes longer and more severe, more of harvest season overlaps with wildfire season. Temporary housing often does not provide adequate protection from smoke when workers come home from the field.



for climate resilience planning, and 4) providing funding to local communities through planning and technical assistance grants, with priority given to communities with greater prevalence of overburdened communities.

Community and ecological resiliency are included as part of this new climate change goal. The proposed resiliency subelement of the bill would protect and enhance natural assets that improve resilience to climate impacts, support social and economic elements of community resilience, and plan for natural hazards exacerbated by climate change. The resiliency subelement also outlines technical and financial resources and support for community engagement to be made available to communities in pursuit of resiliency strategies. Jurisdictions with larger proportions of overburdened communities will receive priority for these resources.

Definitions

Community resilience: a community or region's capability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from significant multihazard threats with minimum damage to public safety and health, the economy, and national security ([Colten et al., 2008, p. 38](#)).

Ecological resilience: the capacity of a system to undergo disturbance and reorganize so as to still maintain essentially the same functions, structures, and controls by not moving in a different region of the state space controlled by a diverse set of mutually reinforcing processes ([Encyclopedia of Ecology, 2008](#))

Overburdened communities (RCW [70A.02.010](#)): a geographic area where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts, and includes, but is not limited to, highly impacted communities as defined in RCW [19.405.020](#).

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ⁱ <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/07/06/wildfires-latino-threat-498273>

Race and homelessness

<https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-in-america/what-causes-homelessness/inequality/>

Health insurance disparities <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/health-coverage-by-race-and-ethnicity/>

Substandard housing <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3222490/>

PTO disparities <https://www.bls.gov/opub/mlr/2019/article/racial-and-ethnic-disparities-in-access-to-and-use-of-paid-family-and-medical-leave.htm>