Sequim Comprehensive Plan

Stakeholder Interviews: Topics & Issues

Introduction

Between March 5 and March 22, 2024, the SCJ Alliance consultant team (SCJ) conducted a series of in-person and video interviews with parties who represent community organizations, active non-profits, public agencies, land development agencies, and local businesses. Interviewees were identified by the City of Sequim as being associated with or representing interests regarding the Comprehensive Plan update. SCJ invited 49 individuals to participate, and 25 accepted.

As implied by the effort's working title, the primary purpose of each interview was to gather information pertinent to the elements within the city's comprehensive plan, priorities for improvement, and ideas for future development. The interviews provided feedback on common themes in the community, as well as ideas for creative solutions that help to develop the eventual recommendations.

The interviews typically lasted between 30 and 60 minutes, with conversational flexibility guided by each interviewee's own viewpoints and interests. As this was the first phase of gathering community feedback, many participants expressed an interest staying connected for future outreach efforts.

The following table presents the individuals interviewed, their main affiliation/association in the town, and the day they were interviewed. Subsequent sections summarize topics and issues discussed, a summary section including directive concepts, and select quotes from interviewees.

Interviewee List, Sequim Comprehensive Plan

	Interviewee	Affiliation	Interview Date
1	Beth Pratt	Chamber of Commerce	3/5/24
2	Regan Nickels	Sequim School District #323	3/5/24
3	Clea Rome	WSU Clallam County Extension	3/5/24
4	Mary Budke	Boys & Girls Club of the Olympic Peninsula	3/5/24
5	Sarah Martinez	Peninsula Housing Authority	3/5/24
6	Sharon Maggard	Serenity House of Clallam County	3/5/24
7	Steve Rodeman	Olympic Theatre Arts	3/5/24
8	Christy Smith	United Way	3/5/24

9	Rebecca Mahan	Clallam Marine Resource Committee	3/5/24
10	Randy Johnson	Board of County Commission	3/6/24
11	Mark Ozias	Board of County Commission	3/6/24
12	Wendy Sisk	Peninsula Behavioral Health	3/6/24
13	Bruce Emery	Clallam County Community Development	3/6/24
14	James Weatherly	Sequim Arts Commission	3/6/24
15	Luke Strong-Cvetich	Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe	3/6/24
16	Wendy Clark-Getzin	Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe	3/6/24
17	June Claypool	Sequim Farmer's Market	3/6/24
18	Michael Smith	Shipley Center	3/6/24
19	Gail Sumpter	Sequim YMCA	3/6/24
20	Colleen McAleer	Clallam County Economic Development Council	3/6/24
21	Julianne Campbell	Sequim Association of Realtors	3/6/24
22	Christian Meinig	Pacific Northwest National Laboratory	3/11/24
23	Darryl Wolfe	Olympic Medical Center	3/12/24
24	Noah Glaude	North Olympic Library System	3/14/24
25	Suzy Ames, Ed.D	Peninsula College	3/22/24

Topics & Issues

Conversations with interviewees brought up multiple topics, generally categorized by housing, transportation, employment, climate resilience, infrastructure, parks and recreation, and culture. Many of these were detailed as issues or challenges that must be addressed as long-term solutions. The following section lists and summarizes these, including suggestions offered by interviewees.

Topics

A mixture of housing types is needed

Many people mentioned housing as a top issue. It was stated that the lack of available housing units leads to increased costs, or residents compromise on the type of housing they might want in lieu of something they can attain. The people who move to the area with money to build a new house contribute to sprawl, and homelessness—especially amongst youth—is a significant issue. Land trusts can make it difficult to sell homes at market value, which can perpetuate poverty. Permit and hookup fees are cost prohibitive within the city, and landlord-tenant laws disincentivize the provision of more

rentals. More affordable housing options for rent and for purchase are needed, as well as increased density within the city.

Job opportunities exist for all fields, but there's nowhere to live

There is consensus amongst residents that employment and workforce housing are linked. The city cannot recruit employees without a guarantee of housing availability. Sequim youths are unable to see a future in the city due to unaffordable housing and limited career opportunities.

Money is an obstacle to furthering community improvements and progress

It was acknowledged that money is always an obstacle, but multiple bond measures to support public schools and the library have failed in recent years. The school system can be a tremendous resource for economic development in Sequim, but money is needed to initiate projects to create employer-led job training opportunities to help the city thrive. The political climate in Sequim is a challenge to future progress, especially to utilize sales taxes and other revenue sources to fund projects. The city should strategize areas for anticipated growth, require developers to appropriately fund infrastructure improvements, and create opportunities for improved public services.

People are seeking refuge in Sequim from climate change

The city has a reputation as a place to escape from climate change. The region presently experiences cooler temperatures compared to the rest of the state, and it is anticipated that there will be less severe impacts from climate change in the future. Sequim has more open, flat spaces that are easier to develop than other parts of the county, and the post-COVID phenomenon radically shifted the ability for certain jobs to work from home. Despite the increase in working from home, commuting has bounced back to pre-pandemic levels; the city needs to prepare for climate resiliency and an increase in climate refugees.

Balanced, sustainable tourism is key

A strong recurring theme was that of tourism. People are attracted to Sequim because of the natural beauty and access to recreation. Agriculture-based tourism and edu-tourism are great opportunities but won't necessarily pay living wages to the local workforce. Tourism as an economic driver needs to be sustainable, and can't be the only focus.

Tribal partnership is critical

The Sequim area is a "medical desert," with very few specialists. The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe owns and operates the Jamestown Family Health Clinic in the city, and provides services to both Tribal citizens and non-Tribal community members. The Tribe operates many other enterprises and is a key partner in economic development.

Active transportation and recreation

The Olympic Discovery Trail system provides ample opportunities in and around Sequim for hiking, camping, and snowshoeing, and it is maintained on a regional level. Cities in the area are working hard to connect their local systems with the trail network. Bicycle tourism could serve as connections to regional trails, and the number of protected bike lanes and sidewalks could be increased to promote denser, transit-oriented growth and walkability. A lack of public transit services on Sundays and evenings is an issue for non-drivers, especially young people.

Delays in permitting process are barriers to development

The permit process causes frustration for everyone involved. The city acknowledged in the past that code updates were needed to improve the process, however, it remains neither smooth nor easy. The process feels unwelcoming to projects that envision benefits for the community that serve the city's goals.

Community pride

Sequim has a rich culture and community. Throughout the year, the city has supported events, arts, and entertainment. There are a lot of locals who take pride in the city, and there are many multi-generational families and pioneer families in Sequim than in other parts of the county. The rural area bonds community members, and the large senior citizen population has many who are active in youth development (e.g., the Rotary Club). The city can benefit from bridging the gaps between the retirees and other residents.

Sequim is isolated, but opportunities exist

The Hood Canal Bridge is a geographical and psychological divide; it is both isolating and connecting. The challenges in housing and economic development, combined with the anti-growth and anti-change sentiments on the peninsula means that Sequim will need to identify and build on its natural strengths and find a way to capitalize on them. There is potential to partner with the Pacific Northwest National Laboratory - Sequim, which is doing groundbreaking research on energy productivity, and find ways to innovate and implement strategies locally.

Summary Notes

The following section coalesces all interviewee comments and their various dimensions into distinct challenges future efforts must tackle. Resolutions for some issues may evolve as part of this report's preparation, while others may take time, supported by additional engagement, future policy development, and committed action.

Universal Need

Nearly every person interviewed acknowledged the housing crisis in Sequim, and noted the fact that it is an issue that affects every person, at every income level. The lack of housing directly effects economic development, education, and opportunities for youth to remain in the city.

Building Partnerships

Based on these interviews, opportunity exists – and perhaps requires – the development of local partnerships with the city, community-based organizations, and public schools. The capacity of the city and the county to go it alone seems limited, so involving locals offers potential in terms of gaining capital, operational knowledge and insight, and lasting support. Perhaps owing to the nature of the peninsula's community, collaboration is key.

Growth is Inevitable

There is an overall consensus that the city will grow, due to recreational and tourism opportunities, climate change, and the general influx of retirees and remote workers. There is a perception that Sequim is becoming more liberal because of outsiders moving in, but there is still a strong presence of "haves" and "have-nots," with a large population of low-income workers and more unhoused high school students than one might expect.

Housing is One Piece of the Puzzle

Housing affordability is not a standalone issue, it is one piece of a larger puzzle. There isn't one magical solution; work is needed in a variety of areas, so changes are needed to make collective differences.

Notable Quotes

> *"We need good folks everywhere, but it can be overwhelming—with all the issues that we see and where we put our energy—to maintain capacity for issues."*
>
> *"I think we're going to crack the housing nut; there's good work happening, and it seems like all the right people are at the table."*
>
> *"We need to take bold action and risks."*
>
> *"We live here on purpose."*