

Planning Commission 2024 Annual Report



CITY OF *Salem*
AT YOUR SERVICE

Current Commissioners

Kaley Fought

Vice President

Benjamin Fryback

Lisa Heller

Joaquin Lara Midkiff

Beth Rhodes

Michael Slater

President

Marissa Theve

Jordan Truitt

(through May 2025)

Robert Vieyra-Braendle

Staff

Lisa Anderson-Ogilvie

*Deputy Community Planning
and Development Director, and
Planning Administrator*

Jennifer Halley

Administrative Analyst



Overview

The Planning Commission consists of nine members who serve as a vital advisory body to the City Council, with a broad mandate to promote the growth and orderly development of Salem. The Commission's primary role involves evaluating and recommending policies, plans, and regulations that influence land use, zoning, and urban design, ensuring that development aligns with the community's vision and long-term goals. The Commission engages in comprehensive planning processes, considering factors such as environmental sustainability, economic development, and community needs.

As mandated by the Salem Revised Code Chapter 6, the Commission is required to compile and file an annual report detailing all its transactions and activities over the preceding year. This report not only serves to inform the City Council about the Commission's efforts and accomplishments but also enhances transparency and accountability to the public. By documenting its work, the Commission provides insights into the challenges faced, the progress made in various projects, and the strategic direction for future planning initiatives, thereby reinforcing its commitment to fostering sustainable and well-planned urban development within Salem.

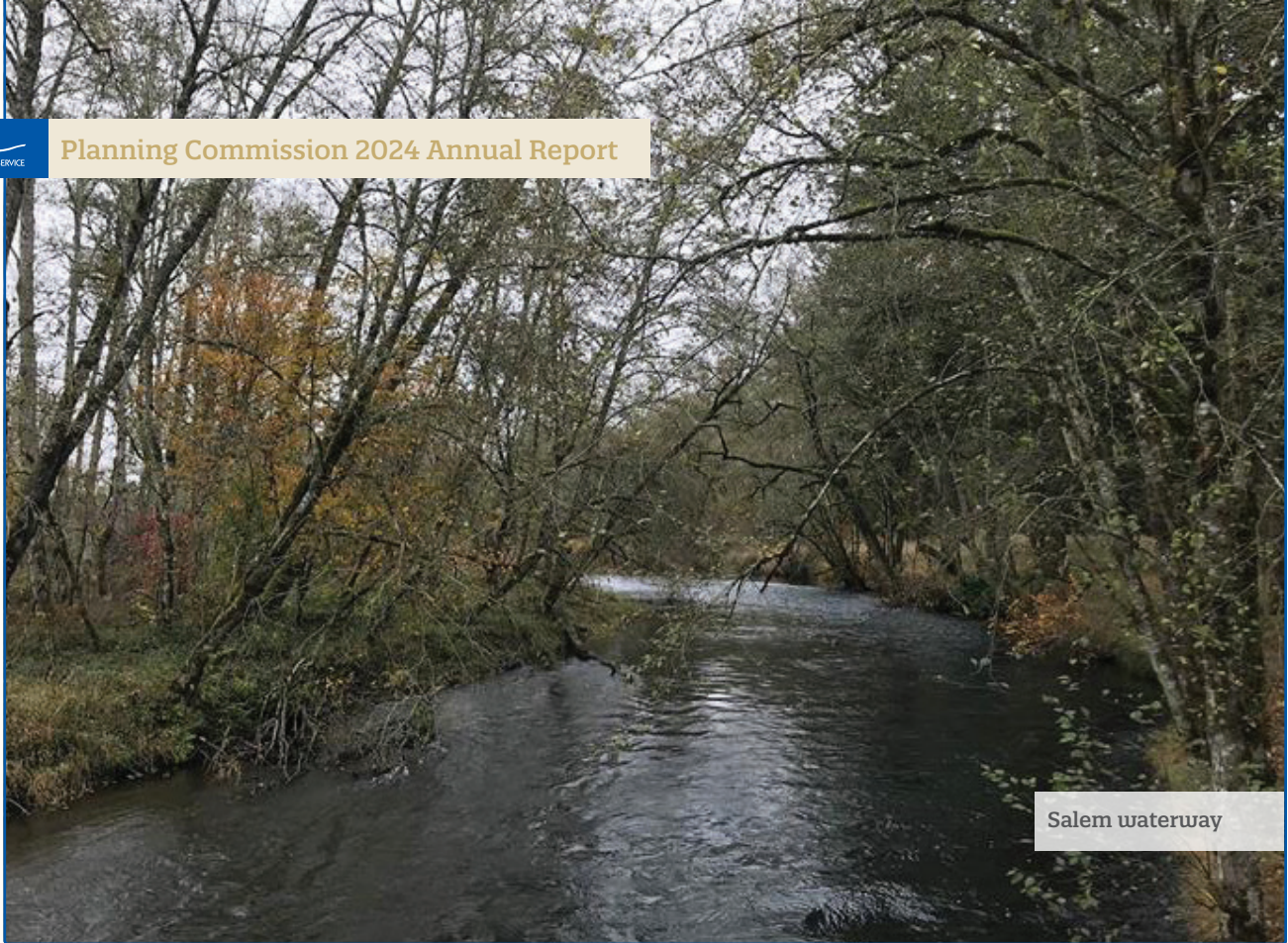
In the last year, the Commission had public hearings on four quasi-judicial land use applications and two land use appeals. Additionally, they had public hearings on housing focused updates to the Unified Development Code and had staff presentations related to on-going long-range planning projects. Lastly, the Commission updated their bylaws and created a new transportation subcommittee.

Housing Production Strategy

The City embarked on a Housing Production Strategy (HPS) in 2024. The HPS laid the roadmap for the City's promotion of housing production. It outlined a list of specific tools, actions, and policies that the City planned to implement to address the housing needs identified in the Housing Needs Analysis (HNA). Salem adopted its HNA in 2022 with the adoption of the Our Salem project. That multi-year project redesignated and rezoned enough land to accommodate Salem's projected housing needs, including land for multifamily housing.

Developing a HPS is integral in helping meet Salem's housing needs by furthering the City's efforts to encourage housing choices, access, and affordability, while promoting equity and mitigating displacement. It is intended to help the City coordinate and advance housing priorities that had been established in Salem's updated Comprehensive Plan, the State's Climate-Friendly and Equitable Communities rules, the Salem Climate Action Plan, the City's Annual Action Plan for federal funding, and other housing-related work. The Plan was adopted in May 2025 and work will begin immediately on the projects identified in the Plan.





Goal 5 – Riparian Corridor Update

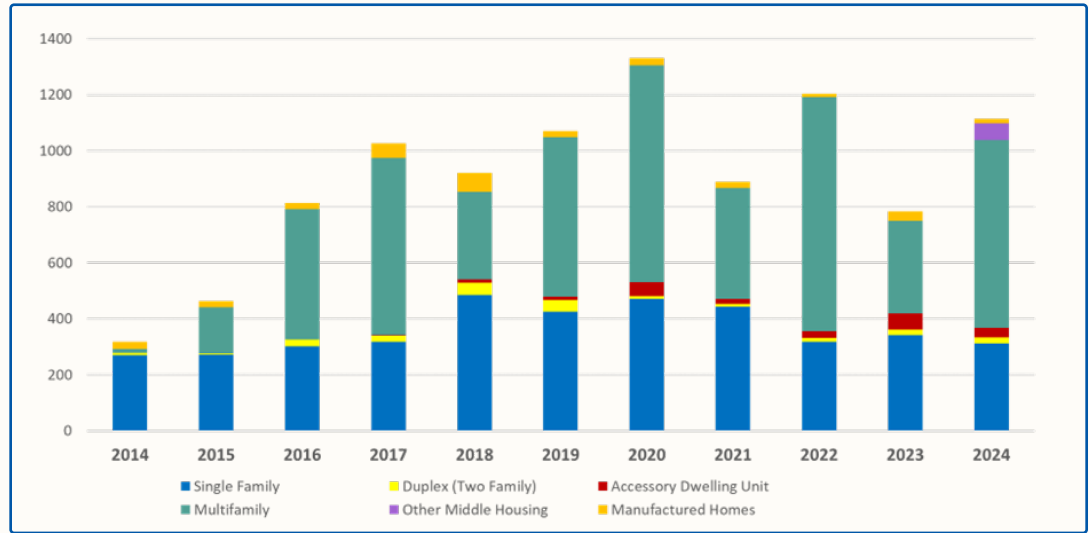
Public Works staff launched the Riparian Corridor update project last year. The project came about due to a Planning Commission request to City Council to fund this project and direct staff to inventory Salem's waterways and adopt protections for them. It is anticipated to be a two-phase project, spanning multiple years. The first phase is the inventory of our waterways which is expected to be completed in fall of 2025. Phase 2 which will be the adoption of regulations to protect the waterways and riparian corridors, is expected to start in early 2026. Commissioner Heller and Theve have been appointed to the Project's Advisory Committee. Additionally, Planning Commission will be consulted at key points of the project.



Housing Developments

Although land divisions applications and housing permits are not frequently presented to the Planning Commission for review, the Commission plays a vital role in actively overseeing the housing land supply within Salem. This oversight is primarily conducted through the examination of annual staff reports, which provide comprehensive data and insights into the current state of housing availability and land use trends. The Commission's evaluation process is particularly focused on site-specific Comprehensive Plan Map and Zone Changes, where the Commission assesses how proposed changes align with the broader goals of the City's development strategy. Additionally, the Commission engages in the review of appeals related to land use decisions, ensuring that all voices are heard and that decisions are made transparently and fairly.

Housing Development (continued)



Housing Production Strategy, pg. 140

The Commission has recognized the persistent demand for additional housing units in Salem, as articulated in the City's Housing Needs Analysis. This analysis highlights the challenges faced by the community in meeting housing demands, particularly for affordable and diverse housing options. In response to these challenges, the Commission has taken proactive measures by implementing site-specific zone changes that facilitate the development of multi-family units in strategic locations. Furthermore, the Commission has fully embraced the zone changes established in the Our Salem project, which redesignated and rezoned land to better accommodate the City's projected housing needs. Through these efforts, the Commission is committed to fostering a more sustainable and inclusive housing landscape in Salem, addressing both current and future housing demands.

Throughout 2024, the development of middle housing, encompassing duplexes, triplexes, quadplexes, townhomes, and cottage clusters, has sustained growth since its initial permitting in 2020.

4-plex on Laurel Ave NE

Land Use Applications

The Planning Commission recently conducted six public hearings to address several significant cases impacting the development landscape in Salem. One of the key cases involved a Minor Comprehensive Plan Map Amendment and Zone Change for approximately 400 acres in Southeast Salem. This proposal aimed to change the property's designation to a mix of Single Family Residential, Mixed Use, Industrial Commercial, and General Industrial, reflecting the city's efforts to diversify land use and accommodate growth. Another case was a Minor Comprehensive Plan Map Amendment and Zone Change for a 1-acre property in Southeast Salem, which sought to transition the land from Multiple Family Residential to General Industrial. Both of these cases required multiple public hearings due to their complexity, and public testimony played a crucial role in shaping the discussions. In fact, two of the three cases were appealed to the City Council, and one case even reached the Land Use Board of Appeals before a resolution was achieved.

The Planning Commission reviewed a Planned Unit Development and Subdivision proposal for creating 11 residential lots along with common open space in the Creekside area. The Commission's decision added a requirement for an additional sidewalk. Although the City Council removed the condition on appeal, the Commission's decision demonstrates their strong commitment to pedestrian safety in Salem. Lastly, the Commission held multiple public hearings on the Fairview Refinement Plan and Subdivision proposal of 100+ acres resulting in 562 residential lots, a public park and community open space. The Commission's decision responded to neighbor testimony and resulted in additional pedestrian improvements to be built by the developer.

The Commission also heard two appeals: one concerning a six-lot residential subdivision and the other regarding a Conditional Use Permit for an Adult Day Care Center. Both decisions were upheld on appeal, demonstrating the Commission's commitment to thorough review processes and community engagement. These hearings not only provided a platform for public input but also highlighted the complexities involved in land use planning and the importance of balancing development needs with community concerns.

Code Amendment Hearing

The Planning Commission held a public hearing to discuss a proposed code amendment aimed at addressing Salem’s housing needs by encouraging the development of a variety of housing types while following State rules and laws. This amendment sought to simplify the approval process for residential projects, promote small mixed-use developments, and permit middle housing on smaller lots within multifamily zones, among other changes. These proposed updates aligned with the goals and policies outlined in the updated Salem Area Comprehensive Plan, which focused on increasing housing choices and supporting mixed-use development in the Salem area. The code amendment also included updates to other parts of the Unified Development Code (UDC), with key highlights being the streamlining of the approval process, the introduction of more housing options, and the updating of standards for housing development. The amendments were adopted by the City Council in the fall of 2024.

Information Presentations

The Planning Commission sought multiple presentations to enhance their comprehension of ongoing projects and issues influencing development in Salem.

These presentations served as occasions to offer constructive feedback to the staff on various projects, refine City Council recommendations, and deliberate on legislative policies. The presentations included an in-depth overview of Urban Renewal Areas, which provided valuable insights into both ongoing projects and future development initiatives aimed at revitalizing key neighborhoods and enhancing economic growth within the city. Staff also presented significant updates on Stormwater Regulations, focusing on recent amendments designed to improve water management practices and mitigate flooding risks, thereby promoting sustainable urban development.

The Commission also engaged in a review of transportation requirements for land use applications, which are essential for ensuring that all new developments are in alignment with the City's broader transportation goals and infrastructure plans. This discussion was complemented by updates on the Salem in Motion Transportation System Plan update, which outlined the progress made to date and the strategic directions planned for enhancing mobility and accessibility throughout the city. The Commission also received a training and presentation on the Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) from Public Works Engineering staff.

Lastly, staff presented on critical FEMA regulations related to floodplains, riparian areas, and the floodplain species assessment. This underscored the importance of environmental stewardship, highlighting the City's commitment to protecting natural resources while ensuring compliance with federal guidelines. The discussions reflected a collaborative effort to integrate planning, environmental sustainability, and community needs into the city's development framework.



Bylaw updates

The Salem Planning Commission has undertaken a significant update to their bylaws to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of their operations. Key changes include revisions to the rules governing meeting locations, ensuring that gatherings are accessible and conducive to public participation. Additionally, the Commission has refined the process for calculating quorum, providing clearer guidelines to facilitate decision-making and ensure that meetings can proceed smoothly. Another important update involves the establishment of new time limits for testimony during public hearings, aimed at promoting a balanced and orderly discussion while allowing all voices to be heard. These updates reflect the Commission's commitment to transparency, inclusivity, and the continuous improvement of its governance practices.

Subcommittees

The Commission has two subcommittees to allow Commissioners to dive deeper into topics of interest. The subcommittees meet outside of Commissioner meetings and bring information to the full Commission.

Transportation Subcommittee

Members: Marissa Theve, Joaquín Lara-Midkiff, Michael Slater, and Benjamin Fryback

The subcommittee intends to align the City's transportation and planning goals, support the development of the transportation system plan, and serve as a liaison between the City's Planning Commission and transportation agencies, service providers, and advocacy organizations, both local and statewide. At the conclusion of the subcommittee, the City will have had made significant progress towards the subcommittee's goals, and the transportation system no longer acts as a barrier to development, a detriment to safety, or to the livability of the city itself.

Streams & Wetlands Subcommittee

Members: Lisa Heller, Marissa Theve, Robert Vierya-Braendle and Michael Slater

The subcommittee explores ways to balance the need for development with the need to protect the ecosystem services and habitat value of our community's streams and wetlands. Our work includes education, stakeholder engagement, and policymaking.