



Staff Report

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Item #:

TO: Mayor and City Council

THROUGH: Steve Powers, City Manager

FROM: Norman Wright, Community Development Director

SUBJECT:

First phase of the Our Salem project

Ward(s): All Wards

Councilor(s): All Councilors

Neighborhood(s): All Neighborhoods

Result Area(s): All Result Areas

ISSUE:

Shall the City Council direct staff to proceed with the next phase of the Our Salem project, including community visioning and updating the Comprehensive Plan?

RECOMMENDATION:

Direct staff to proceed with the next phase of the Our Salem project, including community visioning and updating the Comprehensive Plan.

SUMMARY:

The City of Salem has completed the first phase of the Our Salem project, a multi-year project to update the Salem Area Comprehensive Plan (Comprehensive Plan). This phase included an analysis of the city's existing conditions and future scenarios for how Salem could grow under current policies through 2035. The first phase also included Salem's first community greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions inventory.

The complete results are included as Attachment 1: Report Card and Attachment 2: GHG Inventory. High-level results are provided below, with more details described later in this staff report.

- **Report Card:** Based on an analysis of existing conditions and future growth projections, it is unclear if Salem is heading in the right direction if it continues to grow and develop as it has

in the past. Specifically, Salem looks to be heading in the right direction in a few areas analyzed (e.g., average wages are expected to increase) but the wrong direction in a few others (e.g., Salem's tree canopy is expected to decrease). By and large, though, questions remain as to whether Salem is growing in a way the community desires. This is due in part to Salem's lack of many adopted targets related to growth.

- **GHG Inventory:** Salem's residents, businesses, employees, and visitors produced roughly 1.6 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent (CO₂e). That equates to roughly 9.59 metric tons of CO₂e per capita, which puts Salem near the middle of the pack when compared to other Oregon cities. The largest source of emissions in Salem is from transportation (e.g., vehicles), which made up more than half of all emissions. The second largest source was electricity generation.

The results from the first phase of the Our Salem project will inform the next phase, community-wide visioning. This visioning will allow the City to better understand how the community wants to grow and to determine what changes are needed to achieve the community's vision. Staff plans to start the visioning this summer.

FACTS AND FINDINGS:

Project Background and Overview

The City Council funded the Our Salem project in 2017. The funding followed the strategic planning process when the community identified the need to develop a vision for growth and development. Salem's portion of the urban growth boundary is projected to continue adding residents - roughly 60,000 more people - and jobs through 2035, but it has been unclear how and where the community wants this growth accommodated. The Comprehensive Plan, which is the City's long-range plan for future growth and development, has not been holistically updated in decades. It will be updated through the Our Salem project.

The City started the Our Salem project in the fall of 2018. The City hired a consultant team, led by Fregonese Associates, to work on the first phase of the project. This first phase focused on analyzing data related to the built environment in the Salem area (e.g., Salem's portion of the urban growth boundary).

Specifically, the analysis looked at [20 indicators](https://www.cityofsalem.net/CityDocuments/planning-for-growth-top-indicators.pdf) [<https://www.cityofsalem.net/CityDocuments/planning-for-growth-top-indicators.pdf>](https://www.cityofsalem.net/CityDocuments/planning-for-growth-top-indicators.pdf) that focused on the six result areas from the Salem strategic planning process and Council policy agendas: Welcoming and Livable Community; Safe, Reliable, Efficient Infrastructure; Strong and Diverse Economy; Good Governance; Natural Environment Stewardship; and Safe Community. The indicators, selected with community input, range from greenhouse gas emissions to housing affordability to average wages.

The analysis compared Salem today to two future scenarios for how Salem could grow through 2035 under *current* policies and zoning. The first scenario - Current Trends - assumed that current trends

of development were to continue, and roughly 54,000 more people lived in the Salem area. The second scenario - Zoning Buildout - assumed that future housing developed at the maximum densities allowed today, much more redevelopment occurred, and 93,000 more people lived in the Salem area.

The first phase of the Our Salem project also included a GHG inventory, which examined the community's impact on the natural environment. The inventory focused on emissions produced by activities inside Salem's city limits. It utilized 2016 data from utility companies, partner jurisdictions and agencies such as Marion County and the Mid-Willamette Valley Council of Governments, and others.

The inventory is meant to serve as a baseline for community emissions, which can be tracked over time. It will inform the Our Salem project, specifically the goals and policies related to the built environment, natural resources, and transportation systems.

Outreach

A 15-member [stakeholder advisory committee <https://www.cityofsalem.net/citydocuments/our-salem-stakeholder-advisory-committee.pdf>](https://www.cityofsalem.net/citydocuments/our-salem-stakeholder-advisory-committee.pdf) advised staff during the first phase of the Our Salem project. The non-voting committee consisted of two Salem City Councilors, two Salem Planning Commission members, three neighborhood association representatives, and representatives from several agencies and organizations, including Cherriots, the Salem Area Chamber of Commerce, the Home Builders Association of Marion and Polk Counties, Salem 350, and Enlace Cross Cultural Community Development Project.

The committee met twice, with both meetings open to the public. The committee provided input on what indicators should be used to measure Salem and its future growth, and it discussed draft results from both the GHG inventory and Our Salem scenarios analysis.

The City also held two public workshops. The first workshop mirrored that of the first stakeholder advisory committee meeting, with community members voting for their top indicators. The second workshop focused on the results of the GHG inventory and Our Salem scenarios analysis. Community members were also asked to provide input on the results.

In addition, the City conducted other outreach through online surveys, social media, email newsletters, and presentations at meetings of neighborhood associations and other organizations. Willamette University students also researched equitable city planning strategies to help inform the City's visioning efforts in the next phase of the Our Salem project. The student report "Prioritizing Equity and Inclusion: Updating the City of Salem's Comprehensive Plan" is included as Attachment 3.

Results: Report Card

The Our Salem Report Card describes the results of the analysis of existing conditions and future growth scenarios by assigning "grades" - colored icons - to each of the top 20 indicators. The grades reflect the data generated from the analysis and consider the City's adopted targets as well as national standards and peer city comparisons.

A green checkmark was given to indicators where Salem was generally headed in the right direction. A yellow question mark reflects areas where it is unclear if Salem is headed in the right direction. And a red “X” was given to indicators where Salem is not meeting adopted targets or seems to be moving in the wrong direction.

The following is a summary of the grades each indicator received:

- Green checkmark:
 1. Affordability (Housing, Transportation, and Energy)
 2. Infill development and redevelopment
 3. Average wage
 4. Jobs and housing balance
- Yellow question mark:
 1. Housing affordability
 2. Complete neighborhoods
 3. Proximity to parks and trails
 4. Access to frequent transit
 5. Employment mix
 6. Revenue-to-cost ratio
 7. Annual level of service (expenditures per capita)
 8. Property tax revenue
 9. Development in environmentally sensitive areas
 10. Traffic and pedestrian crashes
 11. Active transportation
- Red “X”:
 1. Walk and transit friendliness
 2. Bicycle and pedestrian use
 3. Tree canopy
 4. Greenhouse gas emissions
 5. Air pollution from travel

At the public workshop in May, meeting participants were given a “ballot” and asked to give grades - green, yellow, or red marks - to each of the 20 indicators. Most people gave the indicators similar ratings as those established by the project team. Generally, people gave a lot of yellow question marks, which indicate there are questions about whether the community is headed in the right direction. There was also confirmation that Salem may not be moving in the right direction when it comes to bicycle and pedestrian use and walk and transit friendliness. (Both received the red ‘X’ grade from the project team.) There were a few indicators where more people tended to give lower grades than the project team had, mainly housing affordability, average wages, and development in environmentally sensitive areas.

This input will be used in the visioning phase, as the City starts to gather the community’s goals and priorities for future growth and development in the Salem area.

Results: GHG Inventory

The GHG Inventory examined the community's impact on the environment, focusing on emissions related to transportation, combustible fuel use in buildings (e.g., natural gas for cooking), water and wastewater generation, electricity generation, and solid waste. It also considered carbon removed by the urban tree canopy. The inventory did not include the emissions related to goods consumed by Salem residents (e.g., emissions from the production of clothing, food, and other goods).

The GHG Inventory found that Salem residents, businesses, employees, and visitors produced roughly 1.6 million metric tons of CO₂ equivalent. More than half of those emissions - 53 percent - was due to transportation, mainly driving. The inventory looked at vehicle trips that started or ended in Salem; it excluded those that just passed through the city such as people driving through on Interstate 5.

The high percentage of emissions from transportation was largely attributed to the amount of people who commute to Salem for jobs (more than 63 percent of the Salem workforce) and the amount of workers in Salem that drive to work (86 percent). The inventory found that Salem's transportation emissions per capita ranked among the highest when compared to other major cities in Oregon.

Other emission sources, according to the inventory, were as follows:

- Electricity Generation: 26%
 - Salem has some of the cleanest electric power in Oregon. Compared to other cities in the state, Salem's per capita emissions from energy generation is among the lowest.
- Stationary Combustion: 16%
 - The vast majority of stationary combustion emissions occurred as a result of natural gas use. The average commercial/industrial customer used nearly 10 times as much natural gas as the average residential customer.
- Water and Wastewater: 4%
 - The only source of emissions in this category was the Willow Lake Wastewater Pollution Control Facility. The main greenhouse gas it produced is methane. (The inventory noted that in the future, a new co-generation facility will convert much of the methane into energy.)
- Waste Generation: 1%
 - The vast majority of Salem's trash is sent to the Coffin Butte Landfill in Benton County and the Covanta Waste-to-Energy Facility in Marion County. It is estimated that 46,469 metric tons of solid waste was sent to the landfill in 2016, resulting in 2,376 metric tons of emissions, and 46,250 metric tons of solid waste went to Covanta, leading to net emissions of 15,744 metric tons of emissions.

The inventory also found that Salem's tree canopy absorbed 23,312 metric tons of emissions annually, roughly a 1 percent reduction in citywide GHG emissions.

Next Steps

Staff's recommendation is to start the visioning phase of the Our Salem project this summer. This includes hiring a consultant team, Fregonese Associates, to help with the visioning as well as the subsequent updating of the Comprehensive Plan. During the visioning phase, community

engagement is expected to be extensive. Staff expects to conduct outreach at community and neighborhood events, through partnering with schools and local organizations, and much more.

Eunice Kim, AICP
Planner III

Attachments:

1. Our Salem Report Card
2. Community Greenhouse Gas Inventory
3. Willamette University Report: Prioritizing Equity and Inclusion