



"Home of the World's Largest Cherry Pie"

City of George

Climate Change and Resiliency Sub-Element

Policy Audit

June 28, 2026



“The WA Department of Commerce climate planning grant is supported with funding from Washington’s Climate Commitment Act. The CCA supports Washington’s climate action efforts by putting cap-and-invest dollars to work reducing climate pollution, creating jobs, and improving public health. Information about the CCA is available at www.climate.wa.gov.”



1. Introduction

The Washington State Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A) requires fully planning Cities, which includes the City of George, to update their comprehensive plans on a 10-year cycle called a Periodic Update. In 2023, state legislation, HB 1181, added the requirement for including climate hazard resiliency into these City plans.

The City of George has been planning for some time now, and has many documents drafted to assess current conditions and assets, look at what the burden on those will be as the City grows, and how they will need to adapt to accommodate foreseen changes. The City's current planning documents include:

- 2025 amended 2018-2038 Comprehensive Plan
- 2023 Comprehensive Parks Plan
- 2026 Wastewater Facility Plan
- 2025 Amended Water System Plan
- Six-year Transportation Improvement Plan

In addition to the planning documents, the City also has regulation and standards to follow, which are intended to keep the City on course for achieving the goals outlined in the plans above. Those documents include:

- The City's Municipal Code
 - Critical Area Ordinance
 - Subdivision Code
 - Zoning Code
- City Developer Standards

As a part of HB 1181 requirement for incorporating a climate resiliency element into the City's comprehensive plan, these planning documents need to be reviewed for opportunities, gaps, and barriers. There may be opportunity to strengthen existing resiliency policy, add new policy where gaps are discovered, and adapt policy by identifying conditions that can inadvertently create barriers for achieving climate resiliency from the hazards identified through the climate impact analysis.

The 4 climate hazards identified as having the most impact to the City of George and its assets include: drought, extreme heat, extreme precipitation, and wildfire smoke and air quality. These hazards are the focus of this exiting policy audit.

2. Comprehensive Plan Climate Resiliency Policy

An exhaustive audit of all the City's documents would be time consuming and overwhelming for a meaningful conversation. The Department of Commerce guidance recommends identifying



between 20 and 40 measures between the City's plans to assess¹. Since the City's Comprehensive Plan's policies and goals guide the development of each additional planning document in the City, they are the primary focus of this audit. Adapting and updating the subsequent plans to be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan will occur naturally through the years.

Within the City Comprehensive Plan, there are 8 elements, or chapters covering specific City components, each with separate goals and policies. Those 8 elements are:

- Critical Areas
- Land Use
- Housing
- Capital Facilities
- Utilities
- Transportation
- Parks and Recreation
- Economic Development

Looking through the lens of the 4 main climate hazards in the following sections, policies are highlighted that already address these hazards explicitly or implicitly. Knowing what is addressed already helps identify the gaps in the City's planning for the future that need to be filled with expanded, revised, or new policy.



Drought

Through the Climate impact analysis, drought has been determined to be a concerning hazard due to its negative impacts on the following City assets:

- agriculture growing and processing
- fire control services
- law enforcement
- City public events
- parks and open spaces
- the City water system
- Shrubsteppe and wetland ecosystems
- USBR irrigation canals
- the Gorge Amphitheater and its economic impacts to lodging,
- the Port Districts industrial park
- housing.

Drought resilience is addressed in the Comp Plan primarily through water supply protection, aquifer recharge protection, conservation, and capital facility planning. The City is committed to

¹ Climate Element Planning Guidance December 2023 — Intermediate Version
IntermediatePlanningGuidance_FINAL.pdf



protect water quality and quantity in aquifers providing potable water. Critical Areas policies direct the City to identify, map, and maintain groundwater and aquifer recharge supply areas and to recognize wellhead protection areas as designated aquifer recharge areas. A policy example prohibits underground fuel or storage tanks or hazardous materials disposal within critical recharge areas unless protective measures and groundwater monitoring are provided.

Utilities and capital facilities policies strengthen drought preparedness by focusing on water rights, system capacity, and conservation. Economic Development policy calls for protecting or acquiring water rights and maintaining the ability to provide water for projected residential, commercial, and industrial needs. Utilities policy encourages conservation of water resources to delay the need for additional facilities. Capital Facilities discussions identify the need for additional water storage, a new deep well with lower nitrate levels, and improvements to respond to declining aquifer water levels, including Well #3 and #4 improvements and future water system planning.

The Table below summarizes the climate resiliency policy found in the Comprehensive Plan.

Measure	Summary	Opportunities/Gaps/Barriers
Critical Areas		
CA 1A.1	Protect groundwater from contaminants, reduce erosion contamination, and provide buffers to critical areas from these contaminants.	Water protections are good, but should evaluate contaminants (sediments/dust) being increased because of drought and dryer weather. The appearance of critical areas may change from drought events as well.
CA 1A.3		
CA 1A.6		
CA 1B.2		
CA 1C.1		
CA 1C.3		
CA 1C.4		
CA 1E.1		
CA 1E.2		
CA 1F.3		
Land Use		
LU 9A.1	Preserve open space in development	Should specify natural, shade dominant, and drought tolerant open space, so it doesn't add to water shortage issues or heat island effects.
Housing		
H 1A.3	Encourage preservation and build smaller more efficient homes. Protect homes from farming nuisances.	Lower energy usage helps reduce water usage at hydro-damns.
H 1B.1		
H 2A.3		
H 2B		
Parks and Recreation		
PR 1A.1	Preserve open space for recreation and connect them with trails and paths to promote healthy walking habits.	Need to consider outdoor uses considering droughts, and how these spaces will maintain comfort from plant shade or evaporative cooling (which is water dependent). Interior, conditioned recreation space needs to be included too.
PR 1A.2		
PR 1B		
PR 1B.1		
PR 1D		
PR 1D.1		
Economic Development		
ED 1A.2		



ED 1B.3	Assuring water is available for housing and industry, and revitalize/ create a downtown core	Looking at how to provide water to a growing population and economy, while supply is limited in a drought. How to balance these competing needs and assure revitalization plans are resilient to drought.
Utilities		
U 1B	Conserve energy when possible	Conserving energy helps reduce water use at hydro-damns but can expand the measure to conserve water directly as well.
Capital Facilities		
CF 1A.2	Capital Facilities should work to reduce hazard impacts	Add drought resilience to the measures when planning for capital facilities.
CF 1D.5		
CF 1D.8		



Extreme Heat

Through the Climate impact analysis, extreme heat has been determined to be a concerning hazard due to its negative impacts on the following City assets:

- agriculture growing and processing
- school services
- regional health facilities
- fire control services
- law enforcement
- City public events
- parks, trails, and open spaces
- the City water system
- City streets, I-90 and overpasses
- Shrubsteppe and wetland ecosystems
- USBR irrigation canals
- the Gorge Amphitheater and its economic impacts to lodging
- aged building inventory
- the Port Districts industrial park and the trucking industry
- housing
- preservation of historic sites

The Comp Plan addresses heat resilience indirectly through conservation, green building, open space, parks, pedestrian comfort, and utility reliability. Housing policy encourages sustainable or “green” building practices in residential design and construction, which can support cooling efficiency and reduce indoor heat exposure. Utilities policy encourages conservation of electrical



energy and water resources and promotes renewable energy resources, that are cost-effective and environmentally sensitive alternative technologies where practical.

Parks and land use policies also provide a heat-resilience foundation. Parks policy calls for buffer areas and sidewalks along pedestrian corridors to improve aesthetics and pedestrian safety, while they also support a trail system for walkers, joggers, bicyclists, and others. Land Use policy encourages developers to designate open space through clustering, density bonuses, shadow platting, preservation efforts, and critical areas policies. These policies can help reduce heat exposure by expanding shaded, walkable, and open-space networks.

Transportation policies encourage alternative modes of getting around, such as walking, biking, and using public transit, but heat events could discourage these uses and be a barrier to being an effective policy. The City should consider how to keep these measures effective during extreme heat events.

The Table below summarizes the climate resiliency policy found in the Comprehensive Plan.

Measure	Summary	Opportunities/Gaps/Barriers
Critical Areas		
CA 1A.1	No net loss to critical areas and educate importance of critical areas. Protect with buffers using best available science.	Extreme heat will have negative impacts to critical areas, and risk being compromised more easily.
CA 1A.3		
CA 1F.3		
Land Use		
LU 9A.1	Preserve open space in development	Should specify shade dominant and passive cooling to be useable in hotter weather.
Housing		
H 1A.3	Encourage preservation and build smaller more efficient homes. Protect homes from farming nuisances.	Integrate passive cooling methods in old and new homes.
H 1B.1		
H 2A.3		
H 2B		
Parks and Recreation		
PR 1A.1	Preserve open space for recreation and connect them with trails and paths to promote healthy walking habits.	Need to consider outdoor uses considering hotter days, and how these spaces will maintain comfort from plant shade or evaporative cooling (which is water dependent). Interior, conditioned recreation space needs to be included too.
PR 1A.2		
PR 1B		
PR 1B.1		
PR 1D		
PR 1D.1		
Economic Development		
ED 1B.3	Revitalize the commercial core	Have the core resilient to hotter weather as its being designed.
Utilities		
U 1B	Conserve energy when possible	Conserve energy using passive means for cooling.
Transportation		



T 1B	Expand on non-motorized travel and public transit	Maintain comfort from heat at paths and transit stops.
T 1G.1		
Capital Facilities		
CF 1A.2	Capital Facilities should work to reduce hazard impacts	Add heat resilience to the measures when planning for capital facilities.



Extreme Precipitation

Through the Climate impact analysis, extreme precipitation has been determined to be a concerning hazard due to its negative impacts on the following City assets:

- agriculture growing and processing
- the Community Hall building
- City public events
- parks, trails, and open spaces
- the City water system
- City streets and stormwater facilities
- I-90
- wetland ecosystems
- the Gorge Amphitheater and its economic impacts to lodging
- the trucking industry.

The Comp Plan's strongest existing precipitation-resilience policies relate to stormwater, drainage, flooding, and erosion. Critical Areas policy directs the City to allocate frequently flooded areas to uses for which they are best suited and discourage obstructions to flood flows and uses that pollute or deteriorate natural waters and water courses. They also promote preservation of natural drainage areas as an important part of the stormwater drainage system, seeks to prevent structures in areas unfit for human use because of flooding, unsanitary conditions, or other hazards, and calls for avoiding fast runoff from developed areas so pollutants are not carried directly into public waters.

Transportation and capital facilities policies reinforce stormwater resilience. Transportation policy requires road construction projects to meet or exceed the Department of Ecology's Eastern Washington Stormwater Control requirements for stormwater runoff. Capital Facilities policy establishes drainage level-of-service standards, including dry wells designed for a 25-year, 24-hour storm event and stormwater systems that retain on-site runoff from a 25-year, 24-hour storm at peak discharge rates so post-development runoff does not exceed pre-development discharge volume or rate.



The plan also links extreme precipitation resilience to erosion control. Critical Areas policy requires best construction practices, erosion control plans, and appropriate landscaping to minimize wind and water erosion from development in known erosion hazard areas. They also require development proposals in geologic hazard areas to be evaluated and, where appropriate, supported by technical studies.

The Table below summarizes the climate resiliency policy found in the Comprehensive Plan.

Measure	Summary	Opportunities/Gaps/Barriers
Critical Areas		
CA 1A.1	Protect groundwater from contaminants, reduce erosion contamination, and provide buffers to critical areas from these contaminants. Build to be free from flooding, using natural drainage, and avoid creating contaminate flows.	Protections are good but should evaluate contaminants (sediments/dust) being moved by extreme precipitation events. Increase capacity for more severe storms in these protections.
CA 1A.3		
CA 1A.4		
CA 1A.6		
CA 1B.2		
CA 1C.1		
CA 1C.3		
CA 1C.4		
CA 1D.1		
CA 1D.2		
CA 1D.3		
CA 1D.4		
CA 1E.1		
CA 1E.4		
CA 1F.3		
Land Use		
LU 9A.1	Preserve open space in development	Should specify storm water collection for future use, to assist during water shortage issues or heat island effects. Don't create insect habitat from stagnant water.
Housing		
H 1A.3	Encourage preservation and build smaller more efficient homes. Protect homes from farming nuisances.	Build to be flood resistant, on a local level. Chanel water away from causing damage, towards another use (evaporative cooling, irrigation, etc)
H 1B.1		
H 2A.3		
Economic Development		
ED 1B.3	Revitalize and create a downtown core	Build to control water flow away from damaging buildings, and public amenities, and to make use of the overflow water if possible.
Utilities		
U 1B	Conserve energy when possible	Heavy precipitation could potentially be an energy generation opportunity.
Transportation		
T 1E.2	Follow state stormwater design manual	Depending on referenced documents to be adapted to changing hazard conditions has risks.
Capital Facilities		



CF 1A.2	Capital Facilities should work to reduce hazard impacts	Add heavy precipitation resilience to the measures when planning for capital facilities.
CF 1D.6	Maintain stormwater on site	In practice, not a fully enforced policy. Need to strengthen requirements in practice.



Wildfire- Smoke and Air Quality

Through the Climate impact analysis, wildfire smoke and air quality have been determined to be a concerning hazard due to its negative impacts on the following City assets:

- school services
- regional health facilities
- the library
- fire control services
- law enforcement
- agriculture growing and processing
- City public events
- the Community Hall and Colonial Market
- parks, trails and open spaces
- I-90 traffic
- wetland ecosystems
- the Port Districts Industrial Park
- trucking industry
- aged building inventory
- the Gorge Amphitheater and its economic impacts to lodging

The Comp Plan addresses smoke and air quality indirectly rather than through wildfire smoke-specific policies. Utilities policy encourages conservation of electrical energy and water resources and states that the City will seek to maintain air quality. It continues with policy that supports development of options to reduce vehicular pollution. Transportation and parks policies that expand sidewalks, trails, bicycle facilities, and transit access also support lower vehicle emissions over time.

Current policy gaps remain regarding smoke and air quality. The comprehensive plan does not establish explicit wildfire smoke response actions, clean-air shelter strategies, indoor air filtration standards, or public health protocols for smoke events.



While regional wildfire hazards and air quality impacts are something to be prepared for, there are also local weed nuisances that can be addressed through policy before they contribute further to poor air quality. Weeds like kochia, Russian thistle (tumbleweed), and puncture vine (goats heads), are maintained by spraying and or burning. Being very combustible as they dry seasonally, they are also susceptible to accidental, uncontrolled burns that put life and property at risk. While there are codes to enforce weed control, it could be improved to be more effective, such as removing them when young and green, to reduce the fire hazard and impact to air quality they present.

The Table below summarizes the climate resiliency policy found in the Comprehensive Plan.

Measure	Summary	Opportunities/Gaps/Barriers
Critical Areas		
CA 1A.1	No net loss to critical areas and educate importance of critical areas. Protect with buffers using best available science.	Protections are good but should evaluate contaminants from smoke and dust being increased because of drought and dryer weather.
CA 1A.3		
CA 1A.4		
CA 1F.3		
Housing		
H 1B.1	Encourage preservation and build smaller more efficient homes. Protect homes from farming nuisances.	Include air quality and smoke in policies for buffers and air filtration of homes.
H 2A.3		
H 2B		
Parks and Recreation		
PR 1A.1	Preserve open space for recreation and connect them with trails and paths to promote healthy walking habits.	Need to consider outdoor uses considering smoke and air quality, and how these spaces will maintain comfort. Respirators available or educated to stay home. Interior, air filtered recreation space needs to be included too.
PR 1A.2		
PR 1B		
PR 1B.1		
PR 1D		
PR 1D.1		
Economic Development		
ED 1B.3	Revitalize and create a downtown core	Include shelter spaces to get away from poor air quality events.
Utilities		
U 1B	Conserve energy when possible	Need back-up power to run air filtration, if power grid is impacted by wildfire events.
Transportation		
T 1B	Expand on non-motorized travel and public transit	Maintain comfort from smoke and poor air quality at paths and transit stops.
T 1G.1		
Capital Facilities		
CF 1A.2	Capital Facilities should work to reduce hazard impacts	Add smoke and air quality resilience to the measures when planning for capital facilities.



3. Other Barriers

Barriers often arise when implementing new policy and measures, and though these common challenges may make the climate hazard resiliency goal more difficult to achieve, they also give a community an important reality check. Asking if a new policy feasible, or something the City can realistically implement in a reasonable amount of time, can help identify which of the common barriers exist.

Potential barriers that the City of George may face in the creation and implementation of new climate resiliency policy would include:

- Local funding constraints for new climate projects, including state and federal budget constraints and shifting legislative priorities
- Limited staff capacity
- Lack of buy-in from community members and/or Council members

If these barriers are restrictive of the implementation of new climate resiliency policy, it's important to prioritize which ones have the most impact on the community when facing limited resources, and explore ways to remove these barriers over time to allow for a more fully integrated resiliency implementation plan.

4. Next Steps

Since there are resource limitations as noted above, before jumping into creating new measures and adapting current City policy, it is important that the City goes through a Vulnerability and Risk Assessment. This process will look at the community and its current level of preparedness to address climate hazards and help guide the City in prioritizing the changes and additions needed. This assessment will reveal what the most effective policies will look like, assuring the City is getting the “best bang for its buck”, as it invests in having new policy adopted and implemented.

Once that is complete, draft policy's and measures can begin to be integrated into the City's Comp Plan, and a climate resiliency focused element added. This will be workshopped with the community for maintaining consistency with their vision of the City of George, while addressing these hazard, and particularly those having the most impact on the most vulnerable.

