

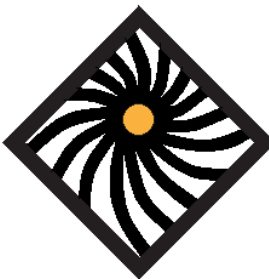


Emergency Housing and Shelters in Port Townsend: How Housing Providers and Planners can Co- Create Beneficial Regulations

2024 APA Washington Annual
Conference

Presented by Long Range
Planner Adrian Smith

October 17, 2024

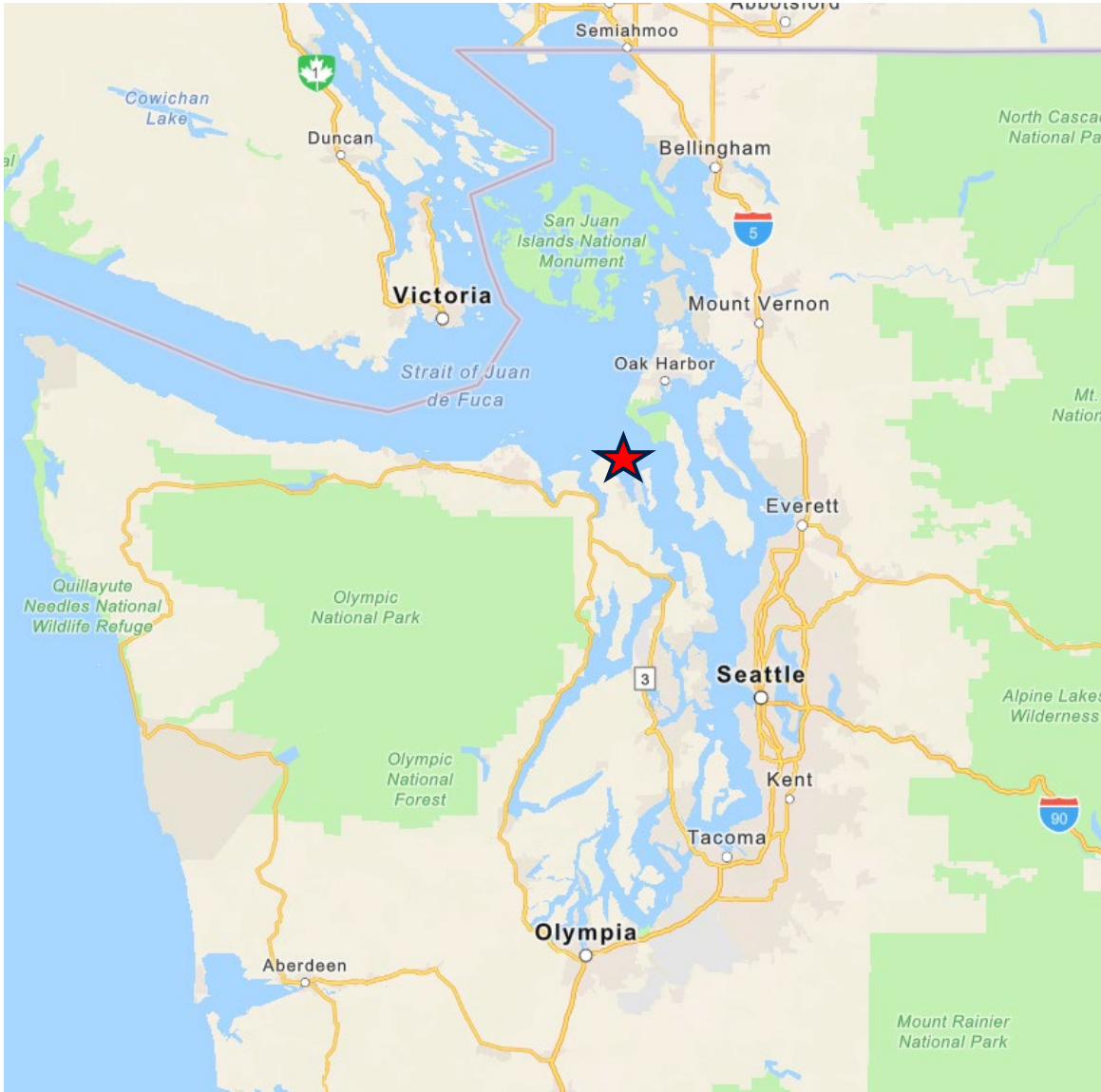


Outline

- Port Townsend Context
 - Housing Pressures in Port Townsend
 - Shelters Developed in Early COVID
 - Permitting Encampments and Wooden Tent Villages
- Port Townsend Housing Providers Contribution to 2024 STEP Code
 - Code Drafting Process
 - Collaboration with Housing Providers and Stakeholders
 - Takeaways from 2024 Annual Amendment and STEP Code Process
- Key points on STEP in Periodic Review and Annual Amendment

Port Townsend Context

- Population of 10,161
- Fully Planning City under GMA
- City Council may elect to open annual amendments every December
- 2025 Periodic Review due
- Started drafting updated STEP code in 2023



Housing Pressures in Port Townsend



High Cost of Living



Wide range of incomes



Geographic isolation



High cost of building housing (materials and workers)



All pressures increased by COVID-19 pandemic



Pandemic reduced the capacity of congregate shelters

Shelters in Early COVID

- Housing service providers pivoted to significantly increase alternatives to congregate shelters
- Nonprofit Community Build created “wooden tents,” one-room structures that are effective shelter but do not meet the legal definition of a dwelling unit
 - Essentially bedroom units
 - Shared kitchen and bathroom facilities in other structure onsite



Photos provided by [Community Build](#)

Permitting Encampments, Wooden Tents, and Villages



Service providers collaborated with City of Port Townsend and Jefferson County to establish a permitting process for tent encampments



Central issue was creating wooden tent safety requirements with the city and county building departments and East Jefferson Fire and Rescue



Photos provided by [Community Build](#)

Challenges of Permitting Encampments



Very limited staff and time during early COVID to create a permitting process for encampments.




Encampments were permitted through a temporary Conditional Use Permit, which only lasts 6 months. Costly for applicants, inefficient for everyone





The CUP process addressed the emergency but didn't align with the city's housing goals.

Solution: Write New Code

- Based on community feedback and recent legislation, Port Townsend Planning and Community Development created new code to support STEP, including wooden tent villages
- Possible for the City because we had more staff, could demonstrate that the current code was insufficient, and because we could complete the new code during an annual cycle before our Periodic Review



Port Townsend Housing Providers Contribution to 2024 STEP Code

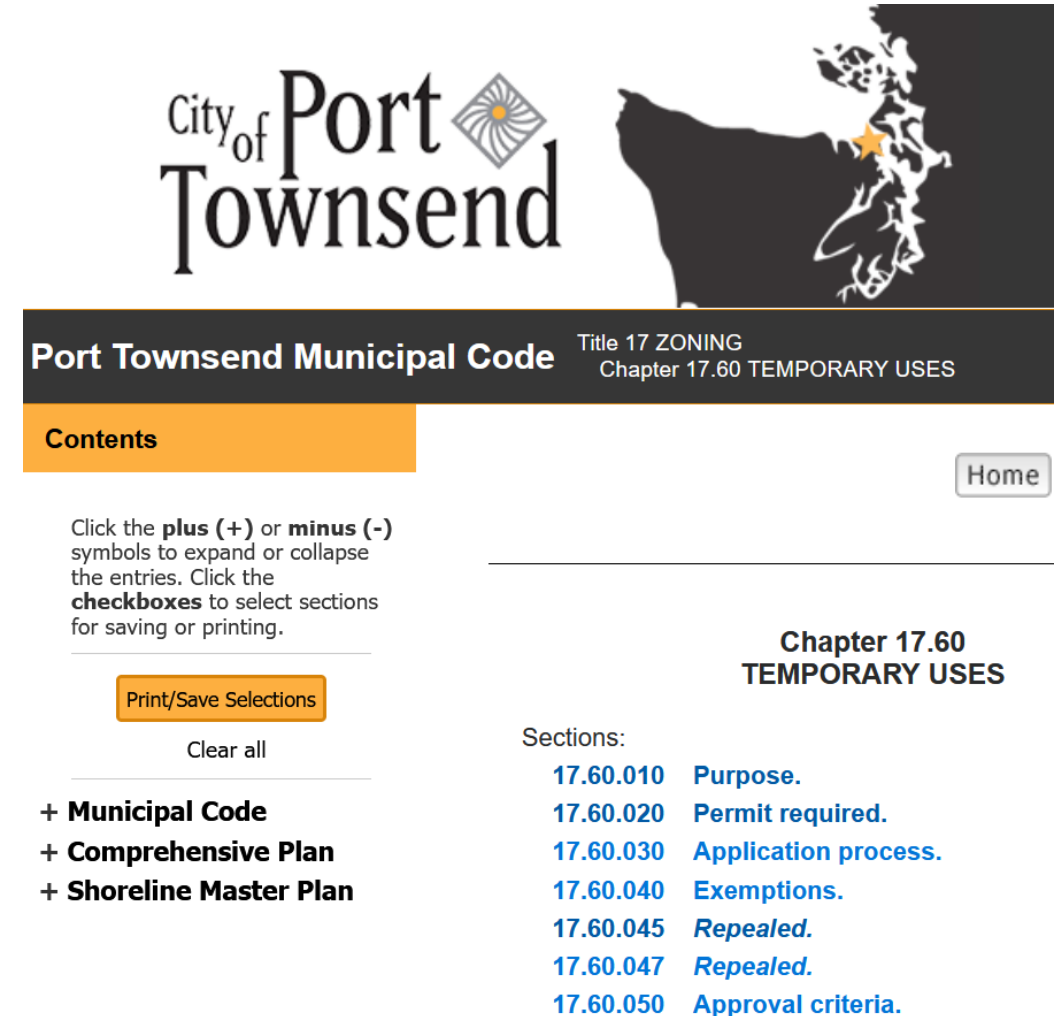


Drafting 2024 STEP Code: Current Practices

Reviewed Port Townsend Municipal Code 17.60 Temporary Uses

Compared current regulations with other jurisdictions. Focused on cities with similar population size, level of development, or geographic features.

Compared Port Townsend's current codes with RCW 35.21.683 and RCW 35A.21.360



The screenshot displays the official website for the City of Port Townsend's Municipal Code. At the top, the city's logo is visible alongside a map of Washington state with a star indicating Port Townsend's location. The page title is "Port Townsend Municipal Code Title 17 ZONING Chapter 17.60 TEMPORARY USES". A "Contents" tab is highlighted in orange. Below this, instructions state: "Click the **plus (+)** or **minus (-)** symbols to expand or collapse the entries. Click the **checkboxes** to select sections for saving or printing." There is a "Print/Save Selections" button and a "Clear all" link. On the right, a "Home" button is present. The main heading is "Chapter 17.60 TEMPORARY USES". Under "Sections:", a list of codes and their purposes is shown:

- 17.60.010 Purpose.
- 17.60.020 Permit required.
- 17.60.030 Application process.
- 17.60.040 Exemptions.
- 17.60.045 Repealed.
- 17.60.047 Repealed.
- 17.60.050 Approval criteria.

On the left side of the page, a list of expanded sections is visible:

- + Municipal Code
- + Comprehensive Plan
- + Shoreline Master Plan

Drafting 2024 STEP Code: City-County Collaboration

Joint agreement on housing and shelter definitions by Jefferson County and Port Townsend Planning Commissions.

Screenshot from the recording of Jefferson County and Port Townsend Joint Planning Commissions



Example definitions:

“**Communal structure**” means a facility for the purposes of cooking, sanitation, and bathing, intended for shared or common use, that is associated with a permitted facility and is designed appropriately for the duration of facility use, in accordance with (insert City or County Building Standards), and which meets Jefferson County Department of Health standards.

“**Safe parking**” means Vehicle resident safe parking programs allow people living in vehicles to park in off-street parking lots, which can be safer for them than parking on the street in accordance with RCW 35a.21.360.

Drafting 2024 STEP Code: Connecting with Housing Service Providers



Staff reached out to local organizations that provide shelters, transitional housing, and develop affordable and supportive housing.

Shared that we were writing new code for shelters and emergency housing. Could we meet to talk about what works and what could be better?

Drafting 2024 STEP Code: Meeting with Housing Service Providers



Several providers scheduled time to meet with staff. We talked about their mission and our shared goals for housing and shelter in Port Townsend



We also talked about what would make it easier for them to operate. What wasn't working in our current permitting process? How can city staff support them?

Drafting 2024 STEP Code: What Works and Can We Improve?



Based on conversations with service providers, advocates, and Planning Commission, staff wrote minimum specifications for successful housing and shelters. These minimum specifications built on the state's requirements.

Shared these minimum specifications with all parties for their feedback and edits.

Drafting 2024 STEP Code: Writing from Community Feedback



Drafted code based on minimum specifications. This helped staff create code that follows the law and serves our partners.

Reviewed and edited draft code with service providers, Planning Commission, and housing advocates.

Drafting 2024 STEP Code: Consistency

City staff reviewed the draft to clarify implementation and the permitting process.

- Re-confirmed building and inspection requirements
- Clarified permit types and review process
- Edited for consistency

Ensured cross-jurisdiction consistency by sharing drafts with Jefferson County Department of Community Development

East Jefferson Fire and Rescue and Port Townsend Police Department approved the draft code, confirming that they can safely provide emergency services to facilities that comply with these regulations.



Drafting 2024 STEP Code: Clarity



Returned to Planning Commission to compare goals of the amendment with edits supporting implementation

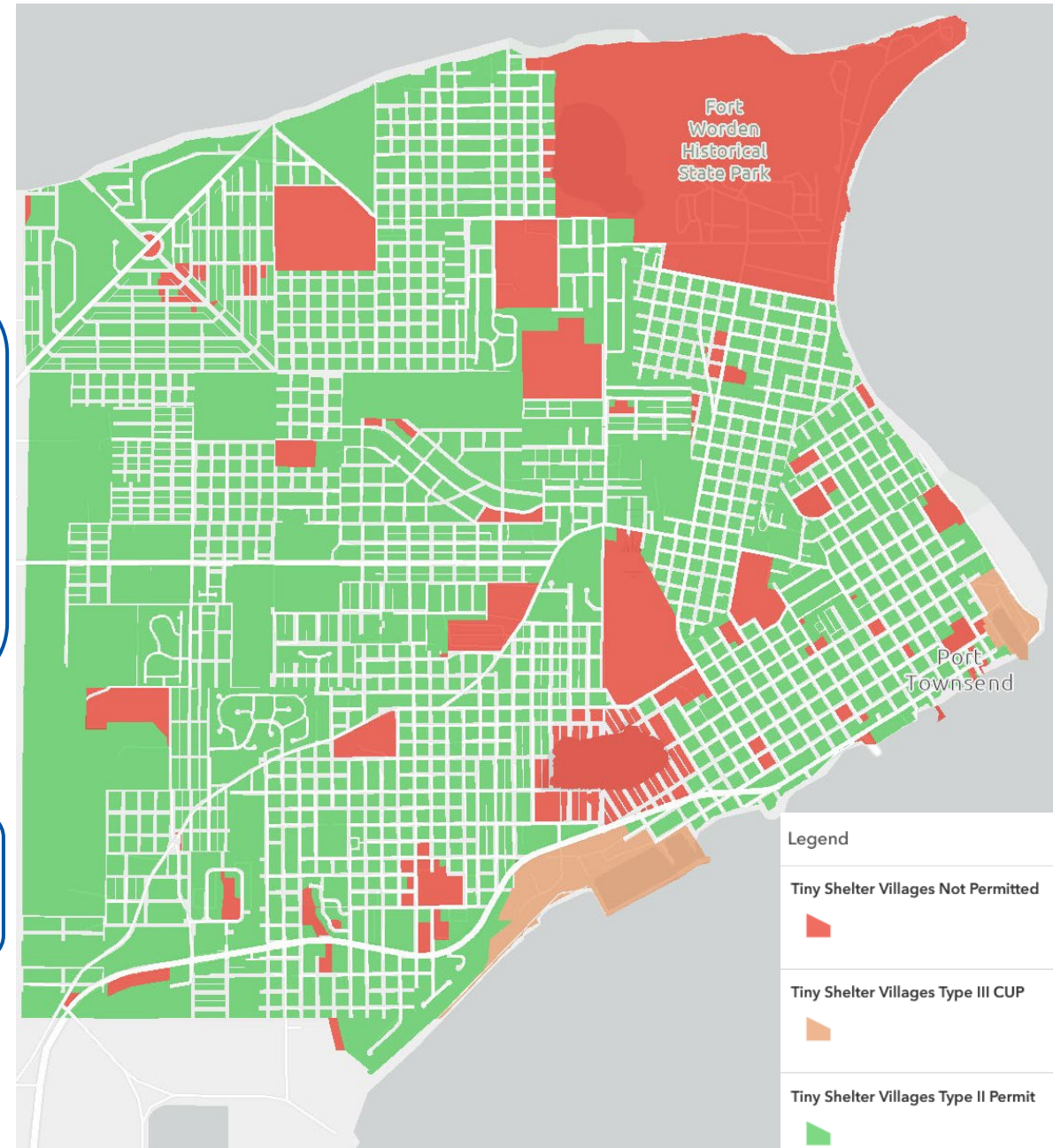
Service providers and advocates attended Planning Commission meetings to describe the process of working with staff, confirm that the edits still support our shared goals, and suggest more improvements

Completed Department of Commerce Review

Drafting 2024 STEP Code: Final Steps

Public Hearing with City Council. Service providers attended the hearing and spoke in favor of the proposal and increasing options for safe parking. Council amended the proposal to include their suggestion.

Adopted!



Takeaways from the Process and Creating the 2024 STEP Code

- Housing service providers and advocates are our applicants and allies!
- Recognizing our shared goals makes it easier to work through permitting and code editing.
- Work with neighboring jurisdictions for consistency between counties and their cities.
- Draft reasonable safety standards for nontraditional shelters that don't meet current codes, like tent encampments and wooden tents villages.
- Regulations for emergency housing and shelters alone cannot solve the lack of deeply affordable housing. STEP needs to be paired with density increases, more options for multifamily tax exemptions, and other regulations supporting transitional housing and permanent affordable housing.



Key Points on STEP in the Periodic Review and Annual Amendments



Why Port Townsend Used an Annual Amendment



Uncertainty over future of current congregate shelter



Feedback from providers and public that existing local STEP could not meet community needs



Annual amendment provided more time to focus deeply on STEP, more specific engagement



Prioritize keeping people sheltered while Periodic Review is ongoing and adequate provisions are made for other forms of STEP and permanent housing

Benefits of Updating STEP Code before the Periodic Review

Consistency for housing providers

Easier for people to access shelter

Earlier adequate provisions for shelters and emergency housing

Periodic Review can focus on making adequate provisions for transitional, permanent supportive, and other housing that is accessible to all income bands

Options for Updating STEP Code During the Periodic Review



Utilize draft codes and resources from Commerce



Focus STEP outreach to housing providers. Which organizations have already permitted shelters in your jurisdiction? Who have you seen at local housing events?



Consider code updates for shelter before your code updates for permanent housing. This can keep people sheltered and safer while you work with developers and providers to create transitional and permanent housing.



Work with your current planners to ensure draft code can be implemented

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Questions?

