# 5 Environment

## 5.1 Introduction

The Environment Element of the Gig Harbor Comprehensive Plan is integral to ensuring long-term ecological health and resilience for the city by addressing these requirements through detailed, coordinated goals and policies. The overall intent is to support the well-being of current residents and future generations and incorporate a systems approach to planning and decision-making that can protect natural resources, conserve key habitats, and restore ecosystems.

To these ends, this element sets forth detailed goals and policies to be implemented through development regulations, environmental programs, and partnerships with community environmental groups. It emphasizes the importance of respecting the natural environment by maintaining harmonious relationships between urban development and ecological systems. Key strategies include protecting tributary drainage systems, enforcing buffer zones along streams, safeguarding floodplains, and preserving wetlands. The element sets expectations to mitigate the impacts of urban development on environmental quality or public health. This element will also work in conjunction with the future Climate Element to coordinate environmental protection with climate change mitigation and adaptation.

Gig Harbor shall engage in regular consultation and collaboration with the Puyallup Tribe of Indians, the Squaxin Island Tribe, and the Nisqually Indian Tribe to protect and restore natural resources, including water, fish habitats, and forested areas, which hold cultural, ecological, and economic significance to these Tribal Nations. The City shall work to integrate Tribal resource management practices into local conservation efforts, ensuring that Tribal knowledge and traditions are considered in environmental protection plans.

## 5.2 Goals and Policies

- **EN-1 Respect the natural environment and maintain a harmonious relationship with the built environment.**

  EN-1.1 Implement and enforce performance and development standards in areas which are subject to moderate and severe environmental hazards.

  EN-1.2 Enhance water and wetland resources through the promotion of state and local programs to enhance the Puget Sound watershed.

  EN-1.3 Protect perennial streams, ponds, springs, marshes, swamps, wet spots, bogs and other surface tributary collection areas from development or alterations which would alter or impede natural drainage capabilities or contaminate surface water.

EN-1.4 Maintain and restore riparian buffer zones for all streams and wetlands to allow for the free flow of surface water and to protect surface water quality.

EN-1.5 Protect alluvial soils, tidal pools, retention ponds, and other floodplains or flooded areas from development which would alter the pattern or capacity of the floodway, or interfere with the natural drainage process by prioritizing Low Impact Development for stormwater control and soft armoring over hard armoring on shoreines.

EN-1.6 Provide control zones and performance standards for development around retention pond dams and along the tidal beaches to protect against dam breaches, severe storms, and other natural hazards or failures.

EN-1.7 Protect soils with extremely poor permeability from development to prevent surface and groundwater contamination erosion of natural drainage channels, overflow of natural drainage systems, and other hazards.

EN-1.8 Maintain performance standards for existing septic sewage drainage fields, especially in areas which are prone to septic field failure, and evaluate long-term strategy for incentivizing property owners on septic systems to connect to the city's sewer system.

EN-1.9 Protect areas with high water tables from uses which contaminate ground water.

EN-1.10 Limit development on soils with very poor compressive strengths, like muck, peat bogs and some clay and silt deposits.

EN-1.11 Maintain performance standards for development in areas with shallow depths to bedrock or bedrock escarpments, particularly in areas with landslide hazards.

EN-1.12 Protect soils with poor compressive strengths on steep slopes with shallow depths to bedrock, impermeable subsurface deposits, or other characteristics which are susceptible to landslide or land slumps.

EN-1.13 Enforce performance standards governing development on moderate to steep slopes with soils, ground covers, surface drainage features, or other characteristics susceptible to erosion.

EN-1.14 Preserve, protect, and restore wetlands to achieve no net loss of wetland area and wetland functions, enhance habitat for anadromous fisheries, and promote restoring and protecting the health of the Puget Sound ecosystem.

EN-1.15 Protect, maintain and enhance fish and wildlife conservation areas to promote their natural geographic distribution and avoid the fragmentation of a species' population into smaller, isolated groups.

EN-1.16 Conserve and restore native shoreline vegetation where new development or uses are proposed to maintain and enhance shoreline ecological functions and processes.

- **EN-2 Conserve natural resources and preserve and enhance wildlife habitat to maintain our ecological heritage and steward a healthy future for coming generations.**

  EN-2.1 Rural agricultural lands should not be included within the Urban Growth Area.

  EN-2.2 Forest lands of long-term commercial significance should be excluded from the Urban Growth Area, with lands containing commercially valuable timber considered for conversion to non-forestry uses in accordance with the Forest Practices Act (Chapter 76.09 RCW), while prioritizing sustainable land management practices and mitigating environmental impacts during conversion.

  EN-2.3 The City should continue to recognize mineral extraction operations on limited sites and allow their continued operation while managing their compatibility with urban land uses.

  EN-2.4 Maintain standards for the development and conservation of natural open space areas and wildlife habitat, using clustered development patterns and other land use mechanisms.

  EN-2.5 Protect wetland areas with prime wildlife habitat characteristics through the use of site retention ponds, natural drainage methods and other site improvements.

  EN-2.6 Protect wooded areas with prime woodland habitat characteristics using buffer zones, common areas, trails and paths, and other innovative concepts to conserve and increase woodland habitats.

- **EN-3 Incorporate environmental suitability and the protection of ecological functions into land use management.**

  EN-3.1 Allocate high-density urban development to lands suitable for supporting urban uses that minimize environmental risks and impacts from severe environmental hazards.

  EN-3.2 Incorporate environmental concerns into performance standards, with requirements for project approvals that minimize environmental hazards and public nuisances.

- **EN-4 Establish performance standards governing noise, air, light, glare and other operating characteristics of uses that may impact the public.**

  EN-4.1 Require new development to minimize or mitigate noise impacts, particularly along major highways like State Route 16, airport approach areas, and other essential public facilities, and adopt regulations for achieving and maintaining acceptable noise levels.

  EN-4.2 Support development, land uses and management practices which reduce air pollution, increase the use of renewable energy, and discourage wasteful use of fossil fuels.

  EN-4.3 Maintain stormwater performance standards to prevent water contamination and erosion of surface water drainage channels and reduce stormwater volumes and velocities.

  EN-4.4 Coordinate with local and state agencies in promoting public education on the proper use of fertilizers and pesticides.

EN-4.5 Maintain performance standards for the dumping of wastes, trapping of greases and other byproducts which can be carried into the stormwater drainage system.

EN-4.6 Maintain performance standards governing the emission of carbons, gases and particulates, and the creation of smoke, dust and other polluting byproducts that degrade air quality.

EN 4.7 Promote the use of Low-Impact Development (LID) practices in all new construction and redevelopment to minimize stormwater runoff, protect water quality, and preserve natural hydrological systems, while supporting sustainable growth and resilient infrastructure.

► **EN-5 Implement and regularly update the adopted Climate Action Plan, ensuring alignment with community goals, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and enhancing climate resilience through measureable ations and ongoing monitoring**

EN-5.1 Develop and maintain an inventory of greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled to support climate action strategies.

EN-5.2 Implement energy-efficiency improvements for city-owned properties.

EN-5.3 Work to transition from fossil fuel use to renewable energy sources for city assets, including the city fleet.

EN-5.4 Promote energy-efficiency improvements and use of renewable energy sources for new and existing commercial and residential buildings and private vehicles in the community.

EN-5.5 Coordinate climate change planning with future planning and development processes to prepare for impacts that could threaten public safety or property and degrade the environment.

EN-5.6 Collaborate and share information with local, regional, state organizations and business groups, and participate in regional efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change.

EN-5.7 Provide community education and outreach on the causes and potential impacts of climate change and initiatives coordinated by the city to address these issues.

EN-5.8 Ensure that efforts to alleviate climate change impacts address the equity and social justice implications of climate change.

EN-5.9 Encourage consolidation of alternative renewable energy opportunities by promoting shared installations, streamlining permitting processes, and fostering partnerships between public and private sectors to maximize access on municipal properties, public buildings, and community spaces.