Community First

Centering Community Voices in Technical Assessments Before Climate and Environmental Planning Begins

WA APA Panel Presentation
Wednesday, October 8 | 4:15PM-5:30PM

CASCADIA CONSULTING GROUP
BERK
CITY OF SPOKANE
PUGETSOUND PARTNERSHIP
Black Student Union KITSAP
City of Seattle

Welcome

Today's Goal

Empower practitioners to **center lived experiences** in climate and sustainability work from the outset, resulting in more inclusive, accurate, and community-supported outcomes.

Intended Outcomes

Attendees will leave with **practical insights**, **tools**, and **case examples** for designing equitable engagement strategies during the assessment phase—not just during planning or implementation.

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Introductions

Mary Ann Rozance
Cascadia Consulting Group
Facilitator

Alyssa Rodriguez
Cascadia Consulting Group
Presenter, Panelist

Stefanie Hindmarch
BERK Consulting
Presenter, Facilitator

KayCee Downey
City of Spokane
Panelist

Rebecca Hollender
Puget Sound Partnership
Panelist

Jewel Shepherd-Sampson
Kitsap Black Student Union
Panelist

Consuelo Crow
City of Seattle Office of Emergency Management
Panelist

Agenda for the session

Time	Presenter	Topic
5 min	Mary Ann	Introduction
8 min	Alyssa & Stefanie	Community first: Technical Assessments
10 min	KayCee Downey	Climate Risk Vulnerability Assessment & Comprehensive Plan
12 min	Rebecca Hollender & Jewel Shepherd-Sampson	Human Wellbeing Vital Signs Update
10 min	Consuelo Crow	Puget Sound Resilience Hubs
30 min	All	Panel discussion

Community first in technical assessments

Community Informed Decisions

- Community decision making
- Identifying communities

Resource Sharing

- Adaptable tools & resources
- Technical assistance

Messaging & Branding

- Keep it local
- De-jargon terms

Process

- Better practices
- Co-creating and building relationships

Transparency & Communication

- Importance of thorough and clear communications for all details
- Transparency on decision making and opportunities to influence the process

Outputs

- Reports, decisions, and policies that reflect community priorities
- Bringing together the “technical” with the “lived experiences”

Accountability

- Essential for building trust and relationships
- Expect lessons to be learned and take accountability for any feedback received.
- Report back on how changes have been implemented based on that feedback.

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Climate Risk Vulnerability Assessment & Comprehensive Plan

City of Spokane

PLANSPOKANE

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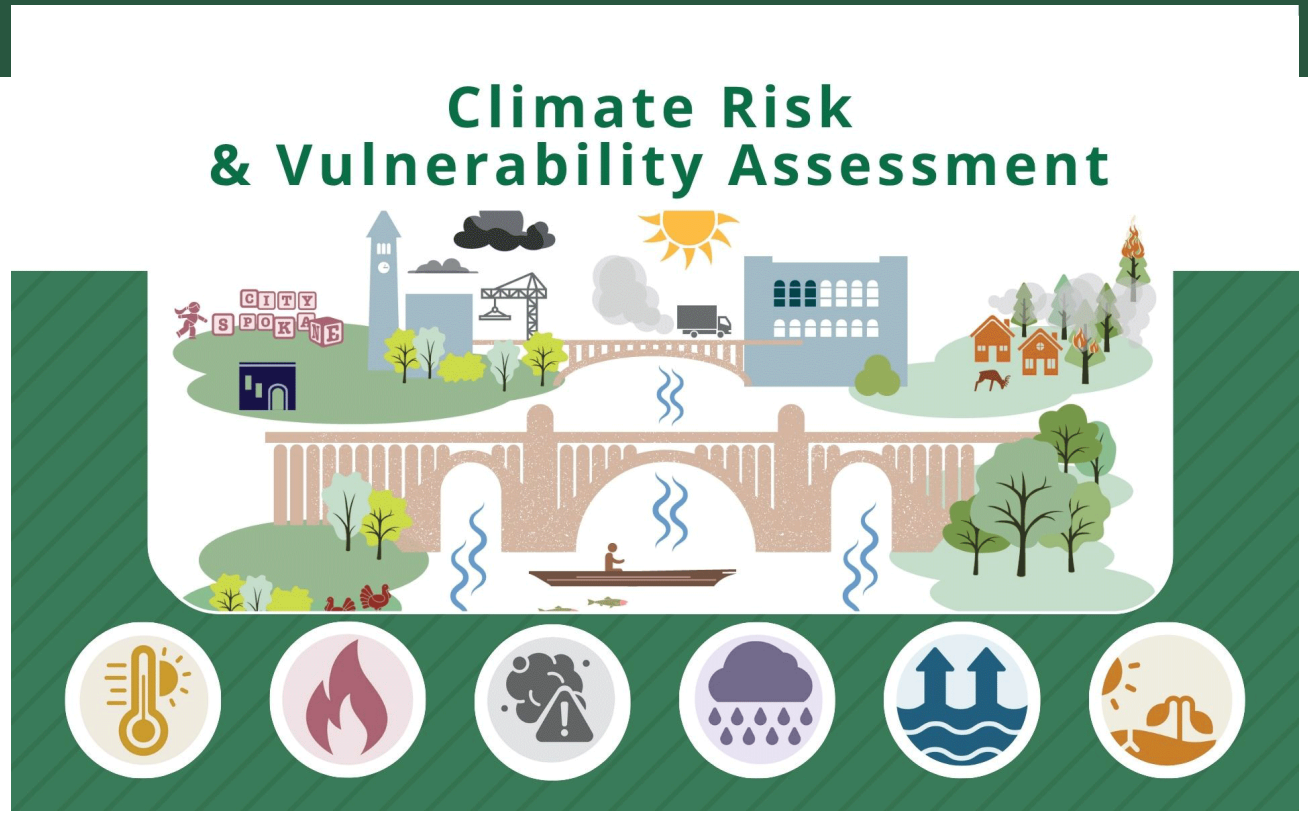
Overview

- **Goal:** Inform resiliency policies in new Climate Element of Comprehensive Plan, per GMA (HB 1181)
- Combines national, state, and local data, and diverse perspectives from a range of community members
- Assesses risk and vulnerability to:
  - Extreme heat
  - Wildfires
  - Smoke
  - Heavy precipitation
  - Flooding
  - Drought
- Emphasis on vulnerable populations & climate justice



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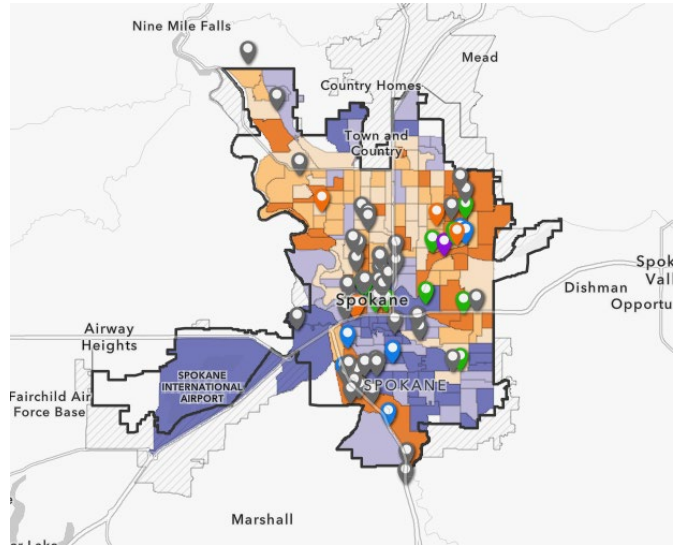
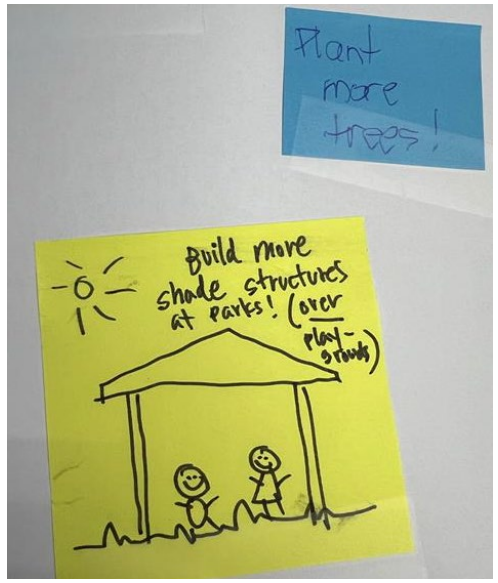
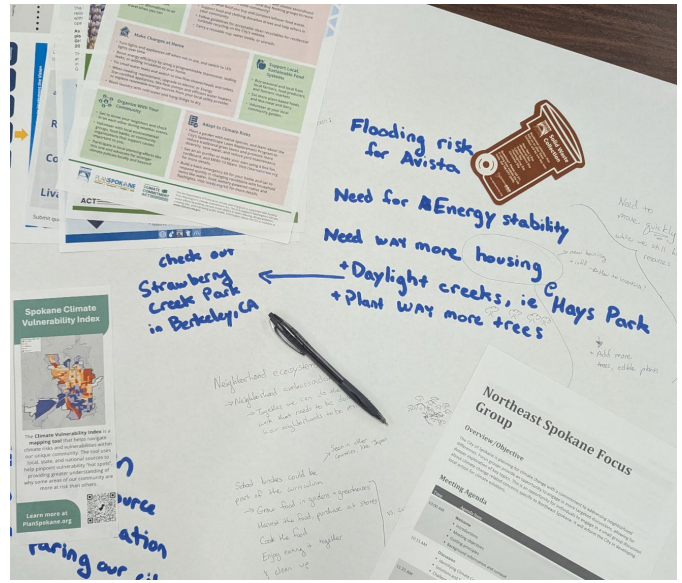
A People-Centered Approach

- **Messaging & Branding** – Consistent messaging and branding that de-jargoned climate concepts. "Keep it local, keep it hopeful".
- **Engagement -** Climate Vulnerability Index mapping, Tribal Working Group, focus groups, lived experience survey, Earth Day community workshop
- **Process** – Compensation, food, partnerships, translation, locations, tailored engagement to different groups.
- **Outputs** – Combining lived experience with numeric and spatial findings. Easy to read sector summaries. Spatial mapping tool and story map.







Key takeaways

Community input puts science and statistical trends into perspective by providing:

- **Local Understanding**
- **Contextual Relevance**
- **Human-Centered Insights**
- **Actionable Data**
- **Community-Based "Pilot Testing"**

One size does not fit all.

Developing a people-centered approach requires timeline flexibility, different ways to be involved, and being willing to adapt.

Digital tools can help.

Digital tools can help break down technical analysis so the community can provide input. Tools like spatial mapping tool and Story Map.

Story first, make connections later.

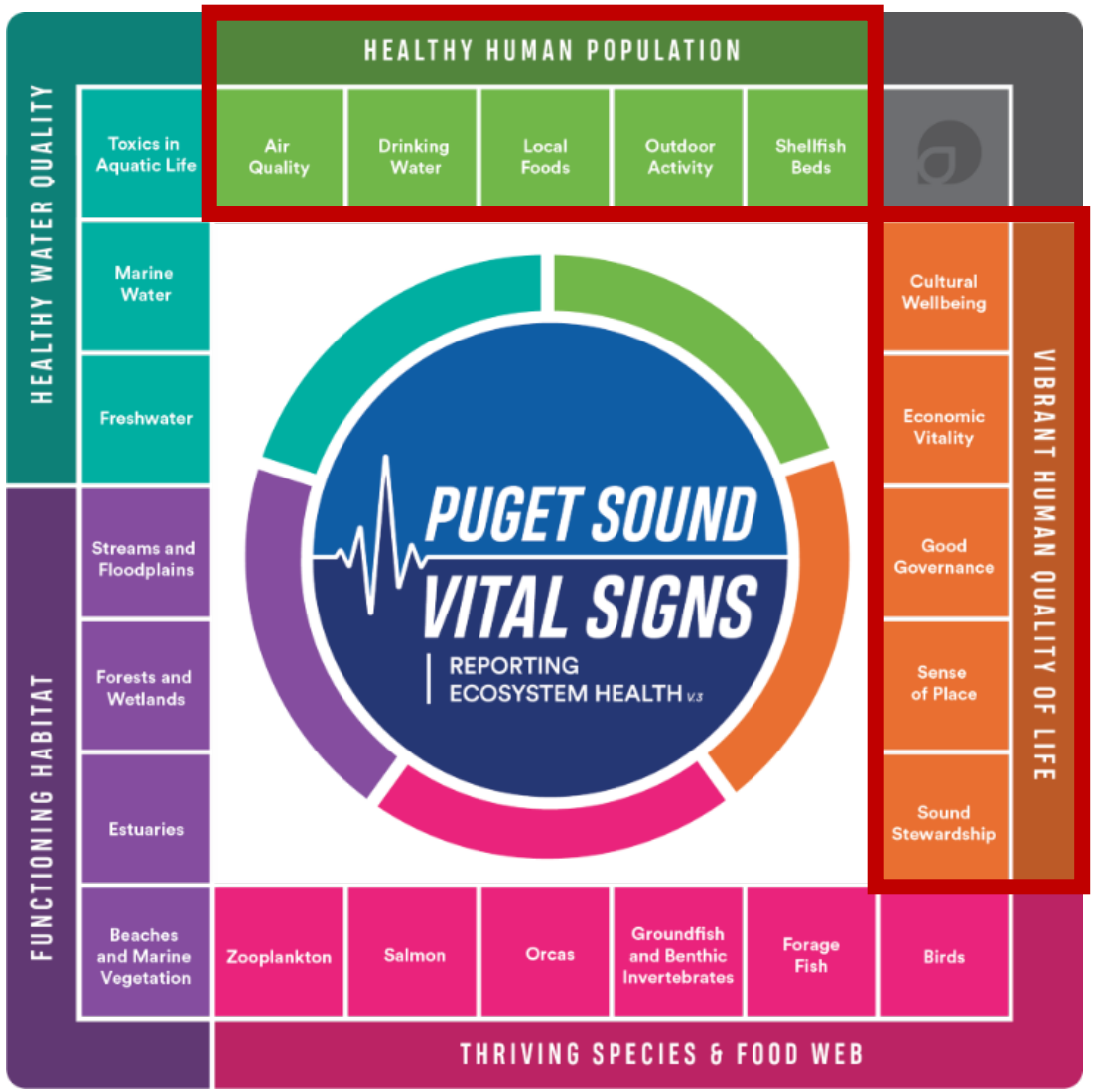
It is our responsibility, not that of community members, to make the connection between feedback and how it fits into the project.

Human Well-being Vital Signs Update

Puget Sound Partnership and Kitsap Black Student Union

Overview

- Goals: Update the Human Wellbeing (HWB) Vital Signs and Indicators so that they reflect best available science and the lived experience of communities across the Puget Sound.
- 4 community partners that co-designed workshops in Spring 2025. Phase 2 2026-2027.
  - Understand how current HWB Vital Signs resonates with overburdened communities
  - Understand additional community dimensions of HWB from overburdened communities



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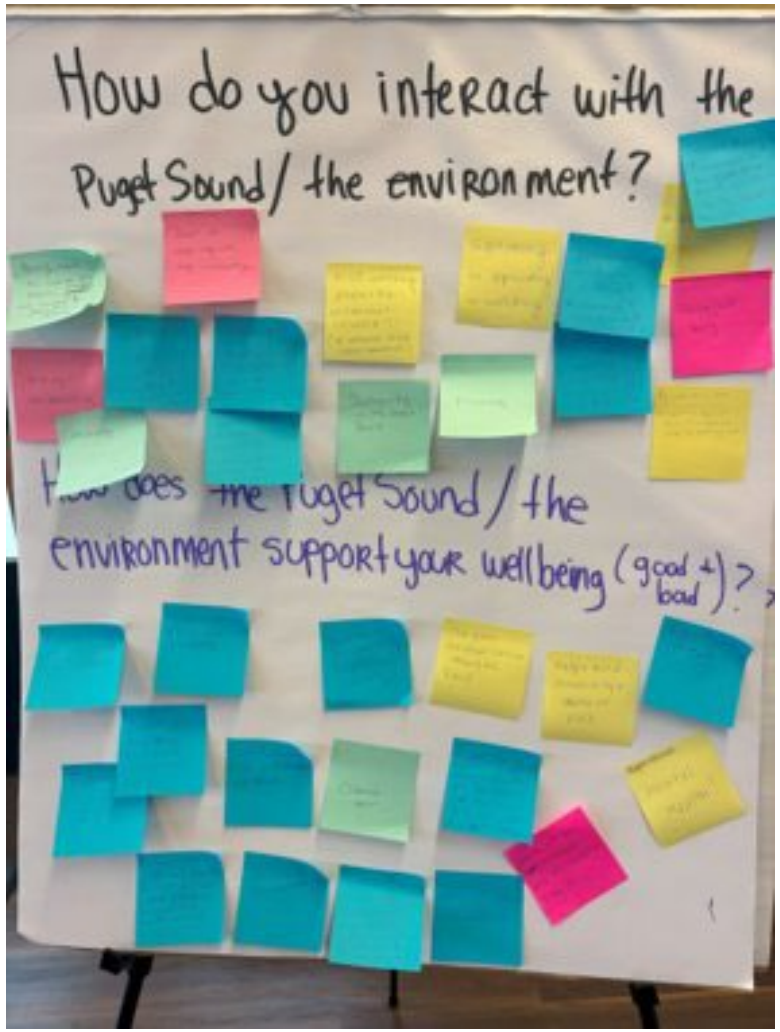
Principles and key concepts

- Meeting communities where they are at and co-designing workshops that resonated with the community.
- **Process** – One of the goals for this project is to establish trust and develop meaningful relationships with communities.
- **Transparency and Communication** – Transparent and clear communication about process and expectations essential to building trust.
- **Accountability** – Maintaining accountability and owning up to and addressing challenges along the way.



Takeaways

- Several of the Human Wellbeing Vital Signs and Indicators do resonate with communities across the Puget Sound, while others do not. Communities also identified new Community Dimensions of Wellbeing, such as Access, Community Cohesion, Safety, Health, Environmental Justice, and others.
- In Phase 2, community representatives will come together to advise the identification and development of new Human Wellbeing Vital Signs and Indicators, building on the Phase 1 workshops.
- Prioritizing relationships in Phase 1 and living into the Principles and Key Values, we are able to continue working with community partners in Phase 2.

KBSU – Belonging

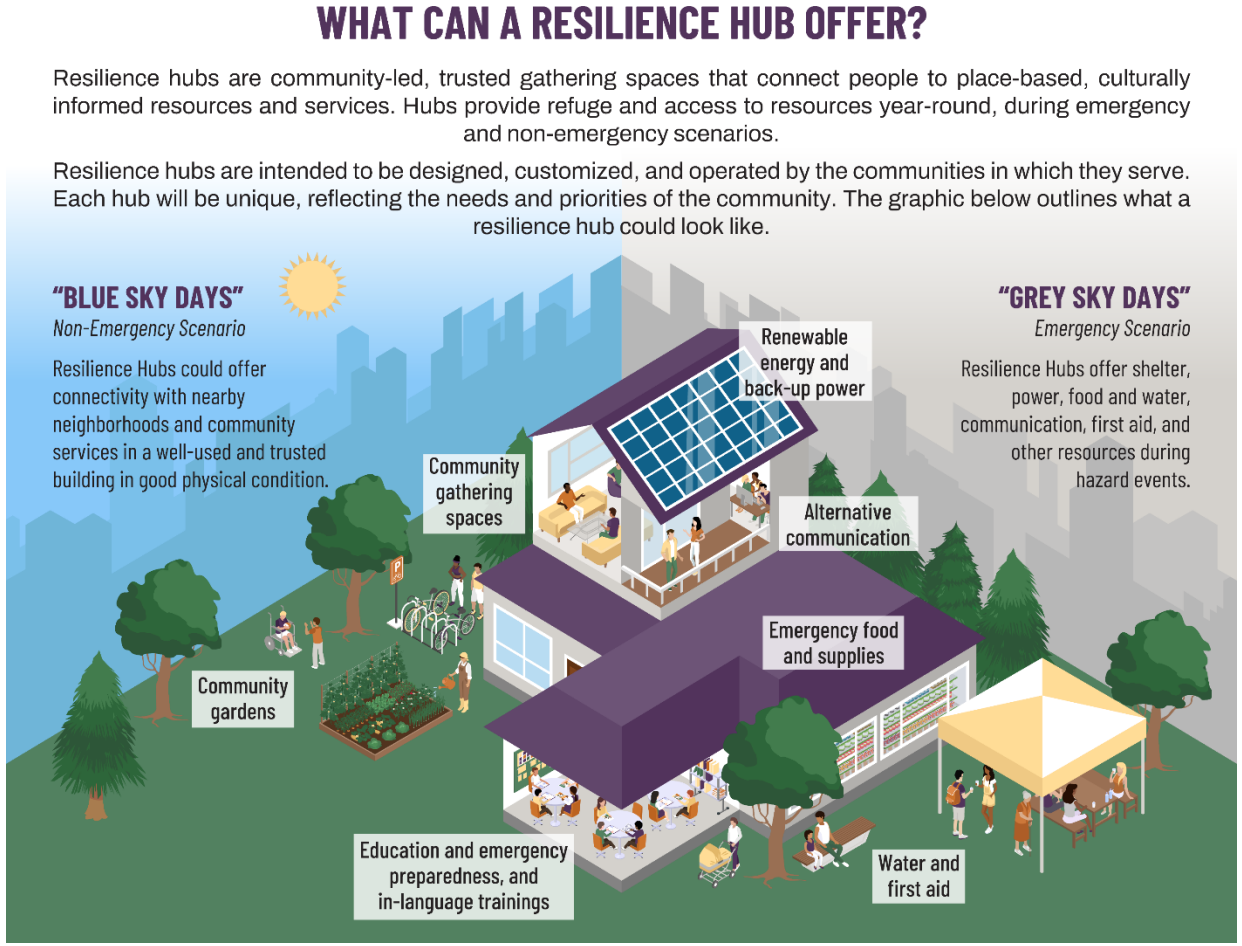
Our organization is dedicated to empowering youth in our community by providing a safe and inclusive space for young people to explore their interests, connect with others, and foster their creativity. Black Student Unions have had historical roots in Black American cultures for over 50 years. BSUs have been a safe space for students of color and allies to celebrate one another, preserve and learn culture, build leadership skills, and engage in social activism. Everyone is welcome in KBSU. Diversity is celebrated. Our staff and volunteers are passionate about helping young people realize their potential to become confident, compassionate, and successful members of society.

Regional Catastrophic Preparedness for Resilience Hubs

City of Seattle

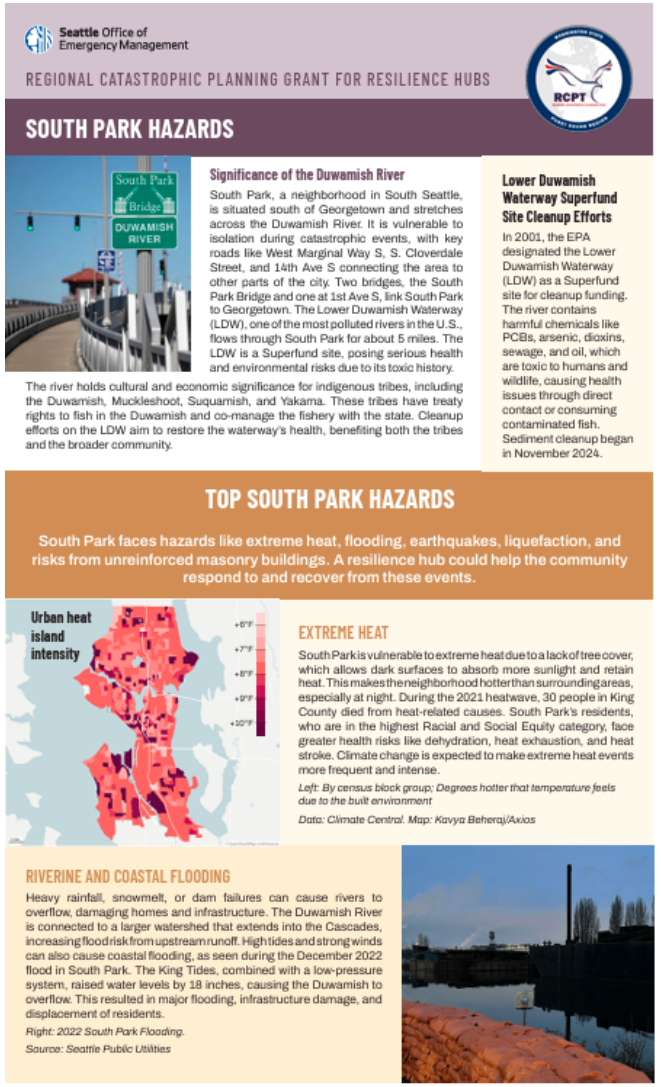
Overview

- To understand the needs, priorities, and visions of communities across the 8 Puget Sound counties in co-creating community-led, community-informed Resilience Hubs that address emergencies, social cohesion, and equitable access to resources.
- Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant Pilot project planning for both "Blue Sky Days" and "Grey Sky Days".
- Support emergency preparedness and planning to build capacity, identify existing resources, and develop community-driven strategies to mitigate risks, reduce impacts, and improve overall community resilience.



Principles and key concepts

- Building capacity at the community-level so that they may lead their own vulnerability and hazard analysis for resilience planning
- **Community Informed Decisions**– Self-identified communities
- **Resource Sharing** – created adaptable tools and resources
  - One-on-one technical assistance through “office hours.”
  - Location-specific hazard sheets
  - Trainings on operational topics to carry forward after the project ends



Seattle Office of Emergency Management

REGIONAL CATASTROPHIC PLANNING GRANT FOR RESILIENCE HUBS

SOUTH PARK HAZARDS

Significance of the Duwamish River

South Park, a neighborhood in South Seattle, is situated south of Georgetown and stretches across the Duwamish River. It is vulnerable to isolation during catastrophic events, with key roads like West Marginal Way S, S. Cloverdale Street, and 14th Ave S connecting the area to other parts of the city. Two bridges, the South Park Bridge and one at 1st Ave S, link South Park to Georgetown. The Lower Duwamish Waterway (LDW), one of the most polluted rivers in the U.S., flows through South Park for about 5 miles. The LDW is a Superfund site, posing serious health and environmental risks due to its toxic history.

The river holds cultural and economic significance for indigenous tribes, including the Duwamish, Muckleshoot, Suquamish, and Yakama. These tribes have treaty rights to fish in the Duwamish and co-manage the fishery with the state. Cleanup efforts on the LDW aim to restore the waterway's health, benefiting both the tribes and the broader community.

Lower Duwamish Waterway Superfund Site Cleanup Efforts

In 2001, the EPA designated the Lower Duwamish Waterway (LDW) as a Superfund site for cleanup funding. The river contains harmful chemicals like PCBs, arsenic, dioxins, sewage, and oil, which are toxic to humans and wildlife, causing health issues through direct contact or consuming contaminated fish. Sediment cleanup began in November 2024.

TOP SOUTH PARK HAZARDS

South Park faces hazards like extreme heat, flooding, earthquakes, liquefaction, and risks from unreinforced masonry buildings. A resilience hub could help the community respond to and recover from these events.

EXTREME HEAT

South Park is vulnerable to extreme heat due to a lack of tree cover, which allows dark surfaces to absorb more sunlight and retain heat. This makes the neighborhood hotter than surrounding areas, especially at night. During the 2021 heatwave, 30 people in King County died from heat-related causes. South Park's residents, who are in the highest Racial and Social Equity category, face greater health risks like dehydration, heat exhaustion, and heat stroke. Climate change is expected to make extreme heat events more frequent and intense.

Left: By census block group; Degrees hotter that temperature feels due to the built environment

Data: Climate Central. Map: Kavya Beheraj/Axios

RIVERINE AND COASTAL FLOODING

Heavy rainfall, snowmelt, or dam failures can cause rivers to overflow, damaging homes and infrastructure. The Duwamish River is connected to a larger watershed that extends into the Cascades, increasing flood risk from upstream runoff. High tides and strong winds can also cause coastal flooding, as seen during the December 2022 flood in South Park. The King Tides, combined with a low-pressure system, raised water levels by 18 inches, causing the Duwamish to overflow. This resulted in major flooding, infrastructure damage, and displacement of residents.

Right: 2022 South Park Flooding.

Source: Seattle Public Utilities

Subvención para la planificación regional en caso de catástrofes para centros de resiliencia: HOJA INFORMATIVA SOBRE LOS RIESGOS EN SOUTH PARK

TERREMOTOS

Los terremotos son el mayor riesgo en Seattle, causados por la acumulación de energía cuando la corteza terrestre se atasca y libera energía en forma de ondas sísmicas. South Park es especialmente vulnerable a los terremotos de la Zona de Subducción de Cascadia o la Falla de Seattle. Un gran terremoto podría dañar carreteras y puentes, como ocurrió durante el terremoto de Nisqually en 2001, lo que dificultaría a los residentes cruzar el río Duwamish y aumentaría los riesgos existentes.

Kevin Galvin, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

LICUEFACCIÓN

La comunidad de South Park no sólo corre el riesgo de sufrir fuertes sacudidas del suelo durante un terremoto, sino que también se enfrenta al peligro de licuefacción. La licuefacción ocurre cuando las fuerzas sísmicas hacen que el suelo saturado de agua se convierta en líquido, lo que puede provocar el colapso de edificios, el hundimiento de vehículos y daños en carreteras y puentes. Una vez que el temblor cesa, el suelo adquiere una textura parecida al concreto húmedo, lo que hace que el daño quede inmovilizado. Dado que el área está cerca del río Duwamish y tiene un historial de inundaciones, el suelo contiene gran cantidad de agua, lo que aumenta la probabilidad de licuefacción durante un terremoto. Esto aumenta los riesgos de daños graves a la infraestructura, amenazas a la seguridad y consecuencias potencialmente desastrosas.

EDIFICIOS DE MAMPOSTERÍA SIN REFUERZO ESTRUCTURAL

Los edificios de mampostería sin refuerzo estructural (URM, por sus siglas en inglés) son estructuras antiguas de ladrillo construidos normalmente antes de 1945. Dado que estos edificios no se construyeron siguiendo los códigos de edificación modernos, es mucho más probable que sufran daños o se colapsen durante un terremoto. La mayoría de los URM tienen paredes de ladrillo, y pisos y techos de madera. Un indicio característico de la construcción URM son las denominadas “hileras de cabecera”, es decir, líneas de ladrillos colocados de canto. Se calcula que hay 1,164 edificios URM en toda la ciudad de Seattle.

LOS SIGNOS INCLUYEN

SEATTLE HAZARD EXPLORER 2.0 (Explorador de riesgos de Seattle (SHE) 2.0)

¿QUÉ PUEDE HACER USTED?

Un Centro de Resiliencia de South Park podría ofrecer un lugar seguro para las personas desplazadas o que han perdido acceso a sus hogares y vecindario, además de proporcionar información, apoyo para la reunificación y otros recursos inmediatos.

MÁS INFORMACIÓN

Visite el sitio web de los Centros de Resiliencia de Puget Sound para obtener más información sobre nuestros riesgos principales y las formas de fomentar la resiliencia. maps.seattle.gov/resilience-hubs

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Takeaways

Technical Expertise + Lived Experience

Why it matters
Design informed by day-to-day reality

What this looks like
Co-design processes that involve multiple community sectors

Implication
Funding and support for participatory design processes

There Is No One-Size-Fits-All Model

Why it matters
Each community is unique

What this looks like
Hubs are built in different ways, using different partnerships and strengths

Implication
Funding and support must be flexible

Community Buy-In = Essential

Why it matters
A Hub only functions in a crisis if people trust and know about it before that crisis

What this looks like
Hubs should be used (and useful) year-round

Implication
Sponsors should invest in long-term relationships

Panel Discussion & Q&A

Question #1

- What kinds of roadblocks or challenges did you anticipate before engaging with the community and how did you prepare for those? Alternatively, what unexpected roadblocks or challenges came up during community engagement and how did you navigate those?

Question #2

- What do you wish government and planners knew about working with community organizations?

Question #3

- How have you seen community engagement shape the outcomes of this project OR how do you hope that community engagement will shape the outcomes of this project? How are you communicating those outcomes back to the community?

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Project Information

Kitsap Black Student Union:
https://kitsapblackstudentunion.org

Regional Catastrophic Preparedness Grant for Puget Sound Resilience Hubs:
https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/f71d4e26a1854667aef12114e28de5b1

City of Spokane:
https://my.spokanecity.org/planspokane/climate-planning/

PSP Vital Signs:
https://vitalsigns.pugetsoundinfo.wa.gov/
Phase 1 Opportunities to Revise HWB VS and Indicators for Puget Sound Recovery

Executive Summary:
http://cascadiaconsulting.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Phase-1_HWB-Vital-Signs_Executive-Summary.pdf

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Thank you!