

# MANIFEST DENSITY

THE FUTURE OF HEALTHY CITIES REQUIRES FRESH COMMUNITY THINKING.

**THE TERM “URBAN DENSITY”** means vastly different things to different people. Some envision homogeneous housing developments with no yards or hyperurban spaces with little green respite. Others see dynamic, walkable neighborhoods with less need for cars and more access to open space.

These opposing viewpoints play out for neighbors, municipal staff, and elected officials in communities across our state. The breakdown in many places is a separation between professional staff—knowledgeable about building less car-centric communities and protecting farm and forest—and citizens wishing to protect what is familiar and beloved.

A newly formed advocacy group in Olympia wants to bridge that divide to maximize the positive potential our coming growth offers. Olympians for People-Oriented Places (O-POP) envisions itself as a group that models positive civic engagement, supports elected officials who stick their necks out on these issues, and ultimately advocates for and educates about thoughtful land use. We think about our community as a whole, rather than reacting to change with a “not in my backyard” approach.

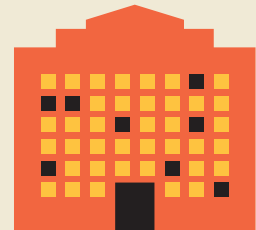
And really, why not? We need members of the community to stand together and say that we care about open space, access to locally grown food, and reduction of auto use; about the viability of transit, walking, and biking and the diversity of neighborhoods; and about affordable housing, thoughtful design, a dynamic economy, and fiscally responsible growth. These topics aren’t always considered together, but when “urban density” is viewed as a strategy rather than a benchmark, it touches each of these goals. The advocacy of urban density is a means to an end, and that end is a vibrant, diverse, and well-planned city.

For the moment, O-POP has brought a core group of people of different ages and experiences together to connect others to the conversation. Our efforts include capturing the attention of young families and passionate students, whose busy lives and relative inexperience present obstacles to engagement, and reaching out to experienced leaders, whose professional lives saw the introduction of the first comprehensive plans (but who may have long since disengaged or gotten bogged down by old fights). We need the energy, knowledge, and care of diverse members of our community to move forward. Ultimately, rather than approaching change with an adversarial tone, we aspire to say together, “Yes, this is our vision, and it’s one that we can achieve!” **C**

*Janae Huber is the cofounder of O-POP, the president of her neighborhood association, the parent of a first grader, and the Washington State Arts Commission’s public art collections manager.*



CITY 101



## Hunt and Gather

The need for more urban density has the potential to engage people from all sectors of our communities. Here are some folks who should care about this issue:

- Walkers and cyclists
- Farmers
- Architects and designers
- Developers and builders
- Environmentalists and advocates for open space
- Affordable housing advocates
- Small-business owners

To foster a sense of community and purpose, O-POP has hosted five different meetings to date, similarly driven by member interests:

**Meeting 1** *Gauge interest in the issue:* People were interested, but had an uneven knowledge base, so an education and advocacy thread emerged.

**Meeting 2** *All about education:* What does urban density look like?

**Meetings 3 & 4** *Develop mission and values:* Chart the path to advocacy.

**Meeting 5** *Movie-night potluck,* plus more education, with further education sessions planned for fall

