



Technical Memo

To: Mason County Planning Advisory Commission (PAC)
From: Kirsten Peterson, Planning Consultant
Date: November 20, 2024
Project: Mason County 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update
Subject: Land Use Element Goals

Background

As part of its 2025 periodic Comprehensive Plan update, the Mason County Planning Advisory Commission has completed their review and recommendation of the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs). The next step in the update process includes a review of each element of the Comprehensive Plan. A proposed outline for the new plan was previously provided to the Commission, with draft chapters of the Introduction and Community Profile section also previously provided to the Commission.

The next element up for review is the Land Use Element.

What is found in the Land Use Element?

As described in [RCW 36.70A.070\(1\)](#), the land use element is a required element. This element sets the direction for future growth in a community and includes a future land use map that identifies the general location and intensity of land uses. These various types of uses could include agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, and recreational uses, to name just a few.

The Land Use element includes a future land use map (which is driven by policy), and is then implemented in large part by the official zoning map, as a regulatory tool. Since these maps are so closely linked, a zoning change cannot be approved unless it is consistent with the future land use map.

This land element must also address issues like:

- Protection of groundwater used for public water supplies
- Consideration of environmental justice

- Planning approaches that promote physical activity and reduce vehicle miles traveled
- Draining, flooding, and stormwater runoff
- Wildfire risk

A more detailed description of the requirements for the Land Use Element is described in RCW 36.70A.070(1) as follows:

(1) A land use element designating the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of the uses of land, where appropriate, for agriculture, timber production, housing, commerce, industry, recreation, open spaces and green spaces, urban and community forests within the urban growth area, general aviation airports, public utilities, public facilities, and other land uses. The land use element shall include population densities, building intensities, and estimates of future population growth. The land use element shall provide for protection of the quality and quantity of groundwater used for public water supplies. The land use element must give special consideration to achieving environmental justice in its goals and policies, including efforts to avoid creating or worsening environmental health disparities. Wherever possible, the land use element should consider utilizing urban planning approaches that promote physical activity and reduce per capita vehicle miles traveled within the jurisdiction, but without increasing greenhouse gas emissions elsewhere in the state. Where applicable, the land use element shall review drainage, flooding, and stormwater runoff in the area and nearby jurisdictions and provide guidance for corrective actions to mitigate or cleanse those discharges that pollute waters of the state, including Puget Sound or waters entering Puget Sound. The land use element must reduce and mitigate the risk to lives and property posed by wildfires by using land use planning tools, which may include, but are not limited to, adoption of portions or all of the wildland urban interface code developed by the international code council or developing building and maintenance standards consistent with the firewise USA program or similar program designed to reduce wildfire risk, reducing wildfire risks to residential development in high risk areas and the wildland urban interface area, separating human development from wildfire prone landscapes, and protecting existing residential development and infrastructure through community wildfire preparedness and fire adaptation measures.

Resource Documents

Included for consideration by the PAC members are the following documents:

- **GMA Checklist – Land Use Element:**

The GMA checklist is a tool used by communities to determine if the elements of the Comprehensive Plan are in compliance with the requirements outlined in the RCW.

The currently adopted Comprehensive Plan was analyzed against the requirements of the GMA checklist at the beginning of the periodic update process. The section specific to Land Use has been attached for the PAC’s consideration. It is being provided as a tool to help ensure that the updated Comprehensive Plan includes all of the required elements. The new Land Use element that is developed during the periodic update will need to be reviewed against this GMA checklist for submission to the Department of Commerce.

- **Existing Comprehensive Goals from Existing Land Use Chapter:**

Chapter 3 of the existing Comprehensive Plan is the current chapter that focuses on Land Use. The chapter provides background information and data to provide context for the goals and policies that come later in the chapter. The policies related to land use begin on page 37 of the existing Chapter 3.

Chapter 5 of the existing Comprehensive Plan is the Housing Element. It also contains objectives and procedures that are identified in the category of land use. These objectives and procedures begin on page 29 of Chapter 5.

Finally, Chapter 2 of the existing Comprehensive Plan is the current location of the Countywide planning policies. In addition to containing policies related to each of the required GMA elements, the current version also contains “Objectives and Procedures”. The objectives and procedures specific to land use begin on page of 17 of the existing Chapter 2 of the Comp Plan. They will NOT be incorporated into the newly updated countywide planning policies. This is an opportunity to review those objectives for inclusion in each of the various elements of the updated Comprehensive Plan.

The above-referenced goals, policies, objectives and procedures have all been incorporated into one document for review by the PAC. The PAC can use these as a starting point for identifying the goals and policies that are pertinent to Mason County, and determine if any goals are no longer applicable, if additional goals should be added, or if additional goals should be edited. The accompanying GMA checklist has been provided to help determine what goals should be updated or added for compliance.

In addition to review by PAC, Mason County staff and SCJ Alliance will continue to collect feedback from the public and incorporate new information that is both relevant and appropriate for inclusion in the Periodic Update of the Comprehensive Plan.

- **Policy Framework Matrix for Land Use:**

The policies from Land Use Chapter 3 have been incorporated into a spreadsheet matrix that identifies whether the policies read like a goal, a policy, or an action item. There are also additional columns for capturing additional feedback on the policies as the discussions proceed.

This spreadsheet is intended to be a tool for tracking changes to the policies throughout the periodic update process.

When reading through the matrix, Column C Column C. assesses whether the goal or policy identified in Row A or B reads like a goal, policy, or action.

Keep in mind the following:

- **Goals** should be broad.
- **Policies** should provide the direction of the goal
- **Actions** achieve both the goal and the policy.

Incorporating Feedback on the CPP's into the Comprehensive Plan

As a reminder, the previous review of the countywide planning policies led to a lot of great dialogue amongst the PAC and with the community. A great deal of feedback was received, which many suggestions for edits to the policies. It was eventually determined that several of the comments were more appropriate for inclusion in the Comprehensive Plan policies rather than the CPPs.

As described previously each of the elements of the comprehensive plan serve distinct functions in regional planning with different implications for local governance. While CPPs provide a high-level framework for collaboration and consistency among jurisdictions within the county (i.e., between Mason County and Shelton), the Comprehensive Plan policies offer more detailed, actionable strategies for local governance and development.

Mason County staff and SCJ have captured the various comments into a separate comment tracking matrix. This matrix will be used to track the comments received, make notes, and keep track of decisions made by the PAC.

Incorporating these suggestions within Mason County's Comprehensive Plan rather than the CPPs allows the County to develop targeted policies that respond to its unique community dynamics and environmental contexts. The Comprehensive Plan offers a more actionable platform for addressing the detailed, often location-specific needs raised in these particular recommendations.

Next Steps

The PAC is being asked to review the goals and policies in each separate element of the Comprehensive Plan. For the upcoming meeting specific to land use, the PAC is being asked to

- Review the land use related goals, policies, objectives and procedures.
- Provide policy direction to ensure alignment with Mason County’s long-term planning goals.

Attachments

1. GMA Checklist, specific to Land Use
2. Existing Goals from Comp Plan and Strategies in CPP’s, specific to Land Use
3. Policy Framework Matrix, specific to Land Use