

1 Introduction

1.1 About the Comprehensive Plan

Welcome to the Mason County Comprehensive Plan. This 20-year plan articulates the community's vision and reflects community values. The goals, policies, and programs included in this Plan provide a basis for the County's regulations and guide future decision-making. This Plan also addresses anticipated population and employment growth, and how facilities and services will be maintained and improved to accommodate this growth.

A comprehensive plan indicates how a community envisions its future and sets forth strategies for achieving the desired vision. A comprehensive plan has three primary characteristics.

1. **It is comprehensive** – The plan includes all the geographic and functional elements that impact the community's physical development.
2. **It is general** – The plan summarizes the major policies and proposals of the County, but does not usually indicate specific locations or establish regulations.
3. **It is long range** – The plan looks beyond the current pressing issues confronting the community to identify long-term goals and policy direction for achieving them.

Comprehensive plans are living documents designed to adapt to changing community needs and priorities while providing consistent guidance for sustainable development. They serve as roadmaps to achieve the County's vision of balancing growth, environmental stewardship, and quality of life.

1.2 Planning Framework

This plan is intended to guide the growth and development within Mason County over the next 20 years. It must not conflict with applicable laws and regulations established by the state of Washington or the federal government. Additionally, it must be consistent with other local planning documents. Key regulations that apply to the development and update of this plan are described below.

1.2.1 State Regulatory Requirements

The State of Washington adopted the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990. Codified in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) Chapter 36.70A, the GMA requires comprehensive plans to include specific elements, obligates incorporated areas to adopt implementing regulations, and mandates counties to develop Countywide Planning Policies to address issues of a regional nature. It also establishes protocols and deadlines for these tasks.

The GMA sets out fifteen statutory goals that guide the development of comprehensive plans. For a plan to be valid, it must be consistent with the goals and specific requirements of the GMA – that is, it must not be in conflict with the state statutory goals, countywide planning policies, or plans of

adjacent jurisdictions. These fifteen goals, summarized below, ensure that local planning efforts align with statewide priorities:

1. Guide urban growth to areas where urban services can be adequately provided.
2. Reduce urban sprawl.
3. Encourage efficient multi-modal transportation systems.
4. Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population.
5. Encourage economic development throughout the state.
6. Assure private property is not taken for public use without just compensation.
7. Encourage predictable and timely permit processing.
8. Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries.
9. Encourage retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities.
10. Protect the environment and enhance the state's quality of life.
11. Encourage the participation of citizens in the planning process.
12. Ensure adequate public facilities and services necessary to support development.
13. Identify and preserve lands and sites of historic and archaeological significance.
14. Respond to the challenges of climate impact and plan for resiliency.
15. Manage shorelines of the state.

Consistency with the GMA ensures that Mason County's Comprehensive Plan is valid and enforceable, aligning the County's vision with state statutory goals.

1.2.2 Relationship to Other Local Planning Documents

The Comprehensive Plan is part of a broader network of local planning documents, including Countywide Planning Policies, development regulations, and functional plans. Each of these plays a distinct yet interconnected role in guiding Mason County's growth. The relationship of key parts of the Comprehensive Plan to other local planning documents is outlined in Table 1-1.

Countywide Planning Policies

Mason County's Comprehensive Plan builds on the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs), which provide overarching guidance for regional growth management. These policies address urban growth area boundaries, housing affordability, transportation systems, and environmental protection. By integrating the CPPs, the Comprehensive Plan ensures alignment with regional goals and fosters collaboration with municipalities and neighboring jurisdictions.

Mason County Development Regulations

The Comprehensive Plan's goals and policies are implemented through the County's Development Regulations, which provide enforceable standards for land use, zoning, and subdivision. These regulations govern how land is developed and ensure that day-to-day decisions reflect the Plan's vision. Mason County periodically reviews and updates its Development Regulations to maintain consistency with the Plan and adapt to changing needs.

Mason County Functional Plans

The Comprehensive Plan also serves as the guiding framework for the County’s functional plans, such as the Parks, Recreation, Open Space, and Trails Plan; Transportation Improvement Plan; and Utilities and Stormwater Plans. These plans provide detailed strategies and projects that support the broader goals and policies outlined in the Comprehensive Plan. By ensuring consistency across these documents, the Comprehensive Plan creates a cohesive vision for the county’s future, ensuring that all planning efforts work together to address community priorities and state requirements effectively.

Comprehensive Plan Element	Development Regulations	Countywide Planning Policy	Policy Statement
Chapter 3 Land Use	MCC 17.07; 17.10-17.17; 17.20-17.35; 17.70	#1 URBAN GROWTH	Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist, or which can be provided in an efficient manner.
Chapter 3 Land Use	MCC 17.02; 17.05; 17.70; 17.90	#2 REDUCE SPRAWL	Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.
Chapter 6 Transportation	MCC Title 12	#3 TRANSPORTATION	Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.
Chapter 4 Housing	MCC 17.11; 17.90	#4 HOUSING	Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock.
Chapter 5 Economic Development	MCC 2.78; 17.07; 17.24	#5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT	Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all residents of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, promote the retention and expansion of existing businesses and recruitment of new businesses, recognize regional differences impacting economic development opportunities, support safe and healthy working environments and living wages, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the County's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.
Chapter 3 Land Use	MCC 17.01	#6 PROPERTY RIGHTS	Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.

Chapter 3 Land Use & Chapter 5 Economic Development	MCC 15.05	#7 PERMITS	Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.
Chapter 7 Rural and Natural Environment	MCC 8.52; 17.02	#8 NATURAL RESOURCE INDUSTRIES	Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forestlands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.
Chapter 3 Land Use, Chapter 7 Rural, & Chapter 8 Parks	MCC 16.23; 17.07; 17.10; 17.26	#9 OPEN SPACE	Retain open space, enhance recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water develop new parks and recreation facilities and maintain existing.
Chapter 3 Land Use & Chapter 7 Rural	MCC 8.52 Resource Ordinance/Shorelines	#10 ENVIRONMENT	Protect the environment and enhance the County's high quality of life, including, but not limited to, air and water quality, and the availability of water.
See Public Involvement Plan	MCC 15.09.060	#11 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	Encourage the involvement of residents, property owners, and business owners in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.
Chapter 9 Utilities	MCC Title 13, Title 6	#12 PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES	Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.
Chapter 3 Land Use	MCC 17.40	#13 HISTORIC PRESERVATION	Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical or archaeological significance.
Chapter 11 Climate Resilience and Hazard Mitigation		#14 CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENCY	Ensure that comprehensive plans, development regulations, and regional policies, plans, and strategies under RCW 36.70A.210 and chapter 47.80 RCW adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate; prepare for climate impact scenarios; foster resiliency to climate impacts and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental justice.
See Mason County Shoreline Master Program	MCC 17.50	#15 SHORELINES OF THE STATE	For shorelines of the state, the goals and policies of the shoreline management act as set forth in RCW 90.58.020 shall be considered an element of the county's or city's comprehensive plan.

1.3 Planning Process

1.3.1 Background

Mason County adopted its first Comprehensive Plan in 1970. This plan was later reviewed and updated in the period from 1993 to 1996, in response to the requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA) (RCW 36.70A). In order to meet Growth Management Hearings Board requests, integrate better data, and respond to public requests, revisions to the first Plan under GMA occurred in 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2003. Subsequent periodic reviews to the Comprehensive Plan occurred with updates adopted in 2005 and 2017. The current update builds off the previous Comprehensive Plan update, and responds to the GMA requirement for periodic review. This plan is consistent with the Countywide Planning Policies, and is based on community and stakeholder input received throughout the planning process.

1.3.2 Periodic Update Requirements

Under the GMA, Mason County and its incorporated cities are required to plan for future growth as outlined in the Planning Framework section of this chapter. This planning must address growth comprehensively – balancing the need for economic development and infrastructure expansion with the preservation of community values and natural resources.

The GMA requires counties to conduct periodic updates to ensure that comprehensive plans remain consistent with state laws and local priorities. These updates are mandated every ten years and involve reviewing the existing plan, identifying areas for improvement, and adopting amendments to address changes in population, economic trends, and environmental conditions. Counties must also consider changes to regional policies and updated guidance from state agencies to ensure alignment with evolving standards.

1.3.3 Roles and Responsibilities

The roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in the comprehensive plan update process are essential for ensuring transparency, community engagement, and adherence to state and local requirements. Each entity plays a critical role in developing a plan that reflects the needs and priorities of Mason County while aligning with legal standards and regional policies.

Community Involvement

The GMA emphasizes the importance of “early and continuous” public participation in the planning process. To meet this requirement, Mason County adopted a Public Participation Plan (PPP) in 2024, outlining strategies to engage the community, ensure transparency, and provide ongoing opportunities for input. Public input is crucial as it ensures the plan reflects the diverse perspectives of residents and stakeholders, fosters community support, and helps shape a plan that addresses local needs and priorities. Efforts to engage the public include a range of outreach

methods, such as public meetings, surveys, and community events, to ensure broad participation from all segments of the community.

County Staff

County staff provide essential technical assistance and support throughout the comprehensive plan update. They collaborate closely with the Planning Advisory Commission to ensure the plan is aligned with state and regional policies and meets community needs. Staff also lead public outreach efforts, organize meetings, and oversee compliance with the public participation requirements outlined in the PPP.

Planning Advisory Commission

The Planning Advisory Commission (PAC) is responsible for reviewing and presenting an updated draft of the Comprehensive Plan to the Board of County Commissioners and the public. PAC members assess each element of the plan, propose amendments, and collaborate with county staff to ensure the plan aligns with state laws and reflects local priorities. The PAC also serves as a liaison between the public and decision-makers, ensuring that community input is meaningfully incorporated into the plan.

Board of County Commissioners

The Board of County Commissioners, as the County's legislative authority, holds the responsibility of adopting the updated Comprehensive Plan by ordinance. Their action follows the PAC's work and includes an extended public review period, ensuring the community has had an extended opportunity to review and comment on the draft documents before final adoption.

1.3.4 Review, Appeals, and Amendments

State Review

The Washington State Department of Commerce reviews all locally adopted comprehensive plans to ensure compliance with the GMA. During the 60-day review period, Commerce provides feedback and suggests changes, if necessary. Once any suggested changes are made and the update is accepted by Commerce, the plan can be formally adopted by the County Council.

Appeals Process

After adoption, the Comprehensive Plan can be appealed to Washington's Growth Management Hearings Board. The Board may uphold the Plan, require modifications, or invalidate it if found inconsistent with the GMA. Appeals to the Board's decisions can be made to Superior Court, and the outcomes are legally binding on the County.

Amendment Process

The Comprehensive Plan is a living document that requires regular updates to address changing conditions. Amendments may be initiated by the County Council, planning staff, or residents. As prescribed by the GMA, amendments are generally considered once per year and must include early and continuous public participation, commensurate with the initial adoption process.

1.4 Plan Implementation

The Comprehensive Plan serves as a guiding framework for the community's development, reflecting the desires of residents and officials regarding how Mason County should grow over the next 20 years. As outlined in the Planning Framework section of this chapter, the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan are realized through the County's Development Regulations, which set enforceable standards for land use, zoning, and subdivision. Since these regulations are directly tied to the plan, the County must regularly assess and amend them to ensure consistency with the Comprehensive Plan's directives.

To implement the strategies identified in the Comprehensive Plan, Mason County must update its regulations to support and carry out the plan's goals. These regulations include zoning, subdivision, building, health, street, and sign codes, all of which are essential tools in the implementation process.

Zoning Code

Mason County's zoning ordinance and zoning map are foundational tools for implementing the Comprehensive Plan. These documents divide the unincorporated areas of the County into zoning districts, each with specific regulations governing permitted and conditional uses of land; density and intensity of development; and building placement, height, bulk, and lot coverage.

The zoning code must align with the Comprehensive Plan's land use designations, supporting the plan's goals and policies. Regular updates to the zoning code ensure that it remains consistent with the plan and adaptable to changes in state law and local priorities.

Subdivision Code

The subdivision ordinance governs the division of land into lots, blocks, streets, and public spaces, primarily for new residential, commercial, or industrial development. This ordinance ensures that development patterns align with the Comprehensive Plan's goals, such as creating walkable neighborhoods, protecting natural resources, and providing adequate infrastructure to support growth.

Other Implementation Tools

In addition to zoning and subdivision codes, several other regulations are key to implementing the Comprehensive Plan. Building codes, for example, regulate the design, construction, quality of materials, use, occupancy, location, and maintenance of buildings and structures within the County. Mason County has adopted the International Building Code (IBC), consistent with State requirements; however, the County's building code may be updated or refined ensure alignment with the goals and policies set forth in the Comprehensive Plan. Other implementation tools may include health, street, and sign codes, which contribute to shaping the built environment and supporting the County's vision for growth.

1.5 Scope and Organization

This Comprehensive Plan is designed to meet the requirements of the GMA and Mason County’s CPPs. It reflects the community’s vision and was developed through a public process, ensuring that it represents the needs and desires of local residents.

The plan is divided into several chapters, each focusing on a key element, most of which are required by the GMA. In addition to this Introduction chapter, these elements are as follows: Community Profile and Vision, Land Use, Housing, Economic Development, Transportation, Rural & Natural Environment, Parks and Recreation, Utilities, Capital Facilities and Financing, and Climate Change and Resiliency. The focus of each of these elements is summarized in Table 1-2.

Table 1-2 Mason County Comprehensive Plan Organization

ELEMENT	ELEMENT FOCUS
Introduction	Explains the comprehensive plan’s purpose, its importance to Mason County, and its regulatory framework under state and regional planning requirements.
Community Profile and Vision	Highlights the county’s setting, demographics, and defining characteristics, paired with a foundational vision to guide growth and development over the next 20 years.
Land Use	Plans for land use to accommodate growth, protect the environment, enhance compatibility, and preserve community character.
Housing	Identifies housing needs, plans for anticipated growth, and strategies to provide a range of housing options that serve diverse community needs and income levels.
Economic Development	Supports business retention, local job creation, and strategies to enhance Mason County’s role as a regional economic and innovation hub.
Transportation	Plans for multimodal transportation systems to support the land uses envisioned by the Comprehensive Plan and the movement of people and goods.
Rural & Natural Environment	Focuses on preserving the rural character of Mason County, managing growth outside urban areas, and supporting natural resource industries while balancing environmental stewardship and community needs.
Parks and Recreation	Focuses on parks, open spaces, and recreation facilities, guided by the County’s Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan.
Utilities	Ensures efficient and sustainable systems for water, sewer, stormwater, electricity, and telecommunications to meet current and future needs.
Capital Facilities and Financing	Identifies facilities and infrastructure needed to support planned population and employment growth and outlines strategies for funding public services and improvements.
Climate Change and Resiliency	Addresses strategies to mitigate the impacts of climate change, enhance disaster preparedness, and foster resilience in the face of environmental challenges, ensuring sustainable development and protecting community health and safety.

Each element includes **goals** and **policies** to address specific issues related to that element, guiding decision-making and directing implementation tools to support the County’s vision. Goals and policies are essential to a comprehensive plan as they provide clear direction for land use, development, and resource management, ensuring that the community’s priorities are effectively realized.

This Comprehensive Plan serves not only as a blueprint for development over the next 20 years, but also as a living document that will evolve as the County grows and changes. By aligning regulations and administrative actions with the Plan, Mason County ensures a cohesive approach to achieving its vision for sustainable growth and community well-being.

Goals are general expressions of the County’s hopes and aspirations about its future development. They are the target for which the County aims to realize its vision.

Policies are broad statements of intent to guide or direct action in order to achieve the County’s goals.

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