

CHAPTER 12

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT

INTRODUCTION

The Economic policies were developed jointly with the Skagit Council of Government and a Citizen Advisory Committee (CAC) for inclusion within an Overall Economic Development Plan (OEDP). The OEDP was organized to address requirements of the U.S. Economic Development Administration and the economic element of Skagit County's Comprehensive Plan.

The CAC took an overall view of economic development and proposed economic policies cover the areas of employment, business development, commercial activity, visitor services, human services, conservation and economic development, transportation and economic development, and business and investment climate.

More discussions on the topics discussed in this chapter are found in:

- *Overall Economic Development Plan (OEDP) for Skagit County, July 1994 (Updated December 1995 and 2000)* - This plan serves as a comprehensive statement of plans for economic growth and development over the next twenty years. Included within the OEDP is information concerning specific development plans for UGAs as well as countywide.

Development of this chapter was guided in particular by the following GMA Planning Goal: Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted Comprehensive Plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.

This Goal, taken in the context of the totality of the thirteen GMA Planning Goals, led to the following CWPPs that provide specific guidance to the analysis and policies developed in this chapter:

- A diversified economic base shall be encouraged to minimize the vulnerability of the local economy to economic fluctuations (CWPP 5.5)
- The Comprehensive Plan shall support and encourage economic development and employment to provide opportunities for prosperity (CWPP 5.15)

EMPLOYMENT

GOAL A

Create and maintain diverse employment opportunities that meet the changing income needs of Skagit County residents.

OBJECTIVE 1

- *Facilitate the creation and retention of family wage jobs to meet the needs and demands of Skagit County households.*
- *Encourage diverse job options and entrepreneurial opportunities for persons interested in full-time and part-time employment or desiring to own their own business.*
- *Encourage educational opportunities for residents of all ages to develop and upgrade skills required for employment, advancement and entrepreneurship.*

Policies

- 12A-1.1** Business investments that provide economic and employment opportunities to meet the employment needs of all county residents should actively be encouraged.

- 12A-1.2** Skagit County should work cooperatively with local jurisdictions and EDASC to address employment needs consistent with countywide regional policies.
- 12A-1.3** Home occupations that are consistent with the character of adjoining properties and neighborhoods will be accommodated.
- 12A-1.4** Skagit County should cooperate with education providers and employer interests in developing facilities and programs meeting a continuum of needs at the K-12, college, and continuing education levels.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

GOAL B

Sustain the economic utilization of Skagit County's natural resources and attract a more diversified base of non-resource industries consistent with local quality of life and environmental values.

OBJECTIVE 2

- *Encourage value-added resource based products (particularly with agriculture, fisheries and forestry activities).*
- *Plan for a diversity of ready-to-build sites with sufficient support infrastructure and services needed to meet demand for industrial land through the duration of the comprehensive plan.*
- *Encourage, where feasible, the re-use and redevelopment of existing industrial sites which are no longer viable for their original or previous use.*

- *Encourage low cost, easily accessible, state of the art telecommunications services throughout the county with linkages to nearby counties that are economically tied to Skagit County.*
- *Focus business recruitment and development on firms which will diversify the local economy and can effectively serve Puget Sound, national, Pacific Rim and other global markets from a Skagit County location.*
- *Facilitate the retention and expansion of existing local business and start-up of new businesses particularly those providing family wage job opportunities and operating in compliance with applicable regulatory requirements.*

Policies

- 12B-2.1** Skagit County's comprehensive plan shall accommodate multiple and sustainable economic uses including agriculture, fisheries and forest products industries that require proximity to rural area resources in a manner consistent with open space preservation and environmental protection.
- 12B-2.2** Long term commercially significant natural resource lands shall be protected from encroachment from conflicting uses.
- 12B-2.3** In cooperation with local jurisdictions, Skagit County shall plan for a minimum five year inventory of ready-to-build industrial sites at all times through the duration of the Comprehensive Plan.
- 12B-2.4** Sites for industrial use shall be designated at locations that can be readily accessed, served with utilities, and free of major environmental constraints that preclude a timely permit process and development as consistent with applicable laws.

- 12B-2.5** Local jurisdictions and Skagit County should use common wetland standards countywide in order to facilitate consistency of the permitting process.
- 12B-2.6** Land shall be designated as industrial so as to accommodate a mix of business, light and heavy industry, and public and private owners consistent with market requirements and trends.
- 12B-2.7** Land use policies in rural areas and urban growth areas shall accommodate the retention and expansion of existing local businesses that provide family wage jobs which are in compliance with applicable federal, state and local regulatory requirements.
- 12B-2.8** Skagit County will maintain cooperative working relationships with local, tribal, regional, statewide, federal and international organizations that pursue economic development activities consistent with the goals and objectives of this economic development element.

COMMERCIAL ACTIVITY

GOAL C

Encourage a range of commercial retail and service businesses to meet local resident needs and serve visitors to Skagit County.

OBJECTIVE 3

- *Encourage convenience oriented retail within rural villages or urban growth areas that are convenient to residential neighborhoods and major employment centers.*
- *Encourage cluster retailing.*

Policies

- 12C-3.1** In cooperation with local jurisdictions, Skagit County shall identify an inventory of suitable and potentially suitable commercial sites adequate to meet anticipated demand plus a market factor of 20%.
- 12C-3.2** Convenience oriented retail that is proximate to residential neighborhoods and major employment centers shall be allowed within rural villages and urban growth areas.
- 12C-3.3** Within UGAs and rural villages commercial developments should be designed to encourage pedestrian activity with provisions for sidewalks and streetscape amenities, and for pedestrian access to other nearby shopping facilities and residential areas.

VISITOR SERVICES

GOAL D

Support Skagit County as a visitor destination by preserving and enhancing the unique qualities of both rural areas and urban communities.

OBJECTIVE 4

- *Promote visitor opportunities that complement the long-term commercial significance of natural resource and critical areas or rural lifestyles of Skagit County residents.*

- *Offer opportunities for both isolated and more group oriented visitor experiences.*
- *Build on the county's locational advantages for visitor services by encouraging lodging, retail and transportation services.*
- *Encourage attractions which would enable Skagit County to capture destination as well as pass-through visitor traffic.*
- *Consider creating a countywide visitor bureau.*

Policies

- 12D-4.1** Skagit County shall support efforts to develop, refurbish and maintain scenic open space, cultural and heritage resources that are attractive to both local residents and visitors.
- 12D-4.2** Skagit County shall support local jurisdiction efforts to improve and market visitor services.
- 12D-4.3** Visitor facilities shall be sited at locations that can be served with necessary public infrastructure and which are compatible with neighboring uses.
- 12D-4.4** Plans for rural area visitor facilities and services shall be coordinated with applicable local, state, and federal agencies.

HUMAN SERVICES

GOAL E

Support a full range of human and social services necessary to encourage a strong local economy.

OBJECTIVE 5

- *Encourage development of human and social service facilities that create job opportunities, meet community needs and maintain Skagit County's quality of life.*
- *Improve access to social services for local for the public in Skagit County.*
- *Provide sufficient sites to meet demand for human and social services through the duration of the comprehensive plan.*

Policies

- 12E-5.1** Skagit County shall support development and maintenance of human and social service facilities including but not limited to health care, education, transportation and other services for special needs populations.
- 12E-5.2** In cooperation with local jurisdictions, Skagit County shall plan for public use and other sites sufficient to meet demand for human and social service facilities through the duration of the comprehensive plan.
- 12E-5.3** In cooperation with local jurisdictions and pertinent state and federal agencies, Skagit County shall encourage improved access to social services at locations proximate to populations being served and to adequate transportation services including public transit.

CONSERVATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOAL F

Encourage economic development that conserves natural resources and open spaces, protects environmental quality and enhances Skagit County's overall quality of life.

OBJECTIVE 6

- *Identify land use policies that conserve resource lands utilizing innovative techniques including mitigation and enhancement of critical areas such as wetlands.*
- *Protect as feasible major existing development from flood threats, and limit non-resource development in designated floodplain areas.*
- *Encourage development of commercially and environmentally viable recycling businesses.*
- *Encourage the use of created wetland resources for stormwater and wastewater treatment, if environmentally acceptable.*
- *Establish criteria and checklists to address development/environmental conflicts by consulting participants who represent diverse interests and viewpoints.*

Policies

- 12F-6.1** Skagit County shall encourage commercial and industrial developments that utilize innovative and experimental applications and demonstrate an ability to conserve natural resources and protect or enhance environmental quality.
- 12F-6.2** Skagit County should encourage clean up, re-use and redevelopment of vacant or underutilized industrial sites. Where continued industrial use is no longer viable, re-designation to another land use shall be made.
- 12F-6.3** In cooperation with applicable state and federal agencies, Skagit County shall develop and implement a comprehensive flood protection program, particularly to protect existing developed uses. Future non-resource development in designated floodplain areas shall be limited.
- 12F-6.4** Skagit County shall establish mediation and problem solving programs to address project-related or area-wide conflicts between development and environmental objectives. These programs shall involve participants representing a diversity of affected interests and viewpoints.

TRANSPORTATION AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

GOAL G

Provide, maintain and encourage a transportation system that is adequate to attract and accommodate projected economic growth.

OBJECTIVE 7

- *Work with the Port of Skagit County to encourage installation of a rail spur to the Bay View Airport industrial complex.*

- *Encourage the Washington State Ferry System to maintain ferry services from Anacortes to the San Juan Islands and Vancouver Island, B.C. in order to provide for commerce and tourist trades in and through Skagit County.*
- *Support and encourage enhancements of foot traffic on the Deception Pass Bridge in order to continue encouraging commerce with and from Whidbey Island, at the same time encouraging tourism activity in Skagit County.*
- *Support the Port of Anacortes in its efforts to more fully utilize the Port's deep draft marine terminal for trade, commerce and related economic development.*
- *Encourage an economic study on the marine-based economy of Skagit County in the Overall Economic Development Plan.*
- *Strive to keep Highway 20 open to eastern Washington throughout the year, if economically feasible, in order to stimulate the economy of the economically distressed upper Skagit Basin.*
- *Support the Port of Skagit County in securing regularly scheduled commercial air service into Bay View.*

Policies

- 12G-7.1** Skagit County shall develop and coordinate programs and implement projects to effect combined objectives of transportation and economic development.

BUSINESS AND INVESTMENT CLIMATE

GOAL H

Foster a public-private cooperative partnership involving Skagit County, local cities, tribal governments, state and federal agencies that is supportive of diverse business operations and investments throughout Skagit County.

OBJECTIVE 8

- *Provide the public services and public facilities necessary to support a high quality of life and attract business investment.*
- *Develop a long-term program that effectively builds local capacity for sustained economic development.*
- *Provide planning flexibility that will be responsive to unforeseen or changing economic conditions and community expectations.*
- *Review land-use and permitting procedures to assure that regulatory processes are understandable, predictable and can be accomplished within reasonable time periods in a manner that meets or exceeds state statutory requirements.*
- *Encourage business investment as a means to provide job opportunities for Skagit County residents.*

- *Maintain a balanced tax system that is competitive for business and residential investment.*
- *Develop and maintain accurate inventories of suitable land available for residential, industrial, commercial, public facility and agricultural uses.*
- *Encourage economic development that creates a net positive fiscal impact for Skagit County and local communities.*

Policies

- 12H-8.1** Skagit County shall establish a program for review of land use and permitting processes involving participation from business, environmental, community and other affected interests; recommendations for procedural changes shall be made at least every five years through the duration of the comprehensive plan.
- 12H-8.2** Countywide benchmarks or indices for comparing actual with projected growth rates and for measuring progress towards plan goals and objectives will be applied at the time of Comprehensive Plan review at least every five years.
- 12H-8.3** Jurisdictions in Skagit County shall regularly update inventories of land utilization, land demand, and suitable available properties for residential, industrial, commercial, public facility and agricultural uses.