

CHAPTER 12

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND MONITORING

PUTTING THE PLAN INTO ACTION

The Skagit County Comprehensive Plan provides a legally recognized framework for making decisions about land use in the unincorporated areas of Skagit County. It is intended to aid a broad range of public and private users, including property owners, the general public, community groups, developers, Skagit County officials, and other government agencies in making choices and decisions that may affect the quality of life in Skagit County. Responsibly for putting the Plan's policies into action relies on an understanding of several characteristics of the Comprehensive Plan:

It is a declaration of the community's vision, standards and expectations for future growth and development. The Plan's general goals and policies inform the purpose and intent of more specific land use and development regulations, and contribute to a more stable and predictable setting for economic and community development.

It guides the development of additional community plans and implementing regulations. The Plan is the framework for more detailed plans and regulations for Rural Villages and other limited areas of more intensive rural development. These more detailed community plans and regulations consider specific local circumstances that may be unique to certain areas of unincorporated Skagit County.

It guides the provision of public facilities and services by integrating land use, infrastructure and human service delivery. The Comprehensive Plan provides the framework for decisions about public facilities and services (such as where facilities should be located to support planned growth). The Plan directs public spending to areas where growth is targeted.

It provides regional coordination and consistency with other jurisdictional planning efforts. The intent is that other public agencies (local, regional, state, federal, and tribal), in cooperation with Skagit County, use the Comprehensive Plan in conjunction with the Countywide Planning Policies as a regional perspective or guidepost when developing other plans and growth policies, and when making project decisions.

It allows for citizen participation and involvement. Comprehensive planning is an evolving process which allows for periodic review and updates in response to changing community goals and vision as articulated by citizens, businesses, and interested organizations.

IMPLEMENTATION THEMES

The County's role in the overall regional growth management implementation process involves several major activities, all of which are discussed further in various sections of the Plan:

- City/County coordination – Within an agreed-upon framework, the County works with the cities and towns to address growth and development in the Urban Growth Areas through the coordination of public infrastructure investment and permitting activities, and the forecasting and monitoring of growth to ensure that adequate land is available for future urban needs.
- Regional economic development – The County is a partner with the Skagit Council of Governments and the Economic Development Association of Skagit County in maintaining a program for retaining and attracting businesses that generate revenue and jobs.
- Regional transportation planning – The County is a partner in the Skagit Council of Governments Regional Transportation Planning Organization and the Metropolitan Planning Organization, charged with planning for public investment in highways and other facilities.
- Community planning - The County works with the various rural communities within unincorporated Skagit County to establish planning priorities and timelines for developing more detailed community plans.
- Monitoring – Within the limits of available funding and technology Skagit County monitors and collects new data, or acquires existing data to establish meaningful benchmarks and indicators to assist in planning decisions. Public input plays a significant role in this process.

PERIODIC REVIEW OF THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan must retain the broad perspectives articulated by the community, and remain consistent with the intent of the Growth Management Act. Over time, changes in law, population and growth trends, economic conditions, and public perspectives and opinions may change. Periodic review of the Comprehensive Plan ensures, to the extent possible, that the Plan reflects and acts upon these changing circumstances.

The Comprehensive Plan is reviewed and amended periodically, according to several review cycles:

- Seven-year Urban Growth Area Review: Beginning in 2006, and at least every 7 years thereafter, the County and cities and towns are to review designated UGA boundaries, densities, and patterns of urban growth, and revise the boundaries and permitted densities as needed to accommodate the urban growth projected in Skagit County for the succeeding 20 years.
- Seven-year Update: Beginning in 2005, and every 7 years thereafter, the Comprehensive Plan, the land-use/zoning map, and implementing development regulations are to be reviewed, and if needed, revised to ensure they comply with the Growth Management Act. This review incorporates new data, changes in law, or changes in local circumstances that come to light through early and continuous public participation.
- Annual Amendments: Incremental changes to the Comprehensive Plan may be necessary to address unforeseen circumstances, or to re-balance land-use designation criteria for a particular parcel or area of land. The Comprehensive Plan may only be amended once annually, except for exceptions allowed by the Growth Management Act.

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENT PROCESS

General Requirements

Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan must be supported by findings from monitoring of growth management and economic indicators, changes in law, omissions or errors, or declared emergency. Comprehensive Plan amendments may be initiated by the County or by other entities, organizations, or individuals according to the process and procedures specified in Skagit County Code.

The docketing cycle for these amendments is initiated by an official notice that specifies the requirements for public participation; submittal requirements; procedures for determining the docket of amendment proposals to be reviewed in a given amendment cycle; and the steps that will be taken to reach the final amendment decision.

Comprehensive Plan amendments will be considered no more frequently than once per year, except for the adoption or amendment of a shoreline master program pursuant to RCW 90.58, the initial adoption of a community plan (subarea plan), or other exceptions as may be allowed by law. The County may consider adopting amendments more frequently than once per year if a declared emergency exists. An emergency amendment may only be adopted if the Board of County Commissioners finds that the amendment is necessary to address an immediate situation of federal, state, countywide, or local concern, as opposed to a personal emergency on the part of the applicant or property

owner, and if the situation cannot adequately be addressed by waiting until the annual comprehensive plan amendment process.

The boundaries separating the Urban Growth Area, Rural and Natural Resource Lands designations are intended to be long-term and unchanging. Amendments or changes to natural resource lands and critical area designations should be based on changes in law or local circumstances, errors in designation, or new information on natural resource lands or critical areas.

Seven-year Urban Growth Area Review

Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) include incorporated cities and towns, combined with whatever surrounding unincorporated area is necessary to accommodate urban growth projected to occur over 20 years. Beginning in 2006, and every 7 years thereafter, Skagit County and its cities and towns must assess the respective Urban Growth Area boundaries and densities, and revise their comprehensive plans and development regulations as necessary to accommodate the urban growth projected to occur in Skagit County for the succeeding 20-year period.

Skagit County and the cities and towns periodically review and update a 20-year population and employment forecast. Timing of this update may be adjusted as necessary to best utilize U.S. Census and Washington State Office of Financial Management data, and for the convenience and benefit of other update cycles requiring such data.

Procedures, timelines, and fees for requesting an amendment to an Urban Growth Area are specified in Skagit County Code. Generally, Skagit County requires that:

- Proposals to amend an Urban Growth Area boundary may only be accepted once every 7 years. More frequent amendments to Urban Growth Areas may be requested by a city or town to address errors or omissions, or in response to a declared emergency.
- Proposals must be submitted to Skagit County at least six months in advance of the regular annual amendment deadline specified in Skagit County Code. Skagit County will transmit petitions to the respective cities and towns for their review.
- Applicants for Urban Growth Area boundary changes must demonstrate compliance and consistency with the Land Use Element requirements for designating Urban Growth Areas.

Seven-year GMA Update

The update of the Comprehensive Plan, map and development regulations is made official through legislative action of the Board of County Commissioners. However, the planning process leading up to the Board's action is ongoing – the next cycle beginning shortly after the last one ends.

Comprehensive Plan policies guide the establishment of more detailed facility plans, regulations, and programs, which may require periodic updates and review according to timelines that may not always coincide with the 7-year update. Between each 7-year update new laws and policies, legal decisions, implementation measures, data and other information may raise the need to amend or update certain portions of the Comprehensive Plan, the land-use/zoning map, development regulations, or supporting plans and studies to maintain consistency and relevance.

Amendments that occur between the 7-year updates, in effect, keep the Comprehensive Plan and development regulations continuously up to date. At the end of the 7-year cycle, these various amendments are reviewed and incorporated into the official action by the Board of County Commissioners to affirm that the Plan and regulations are updated. Any actions that may be further necessary, but cannot be completed by the end of the 7-year cycle, are identified in a work program for the succeeding 7 years.

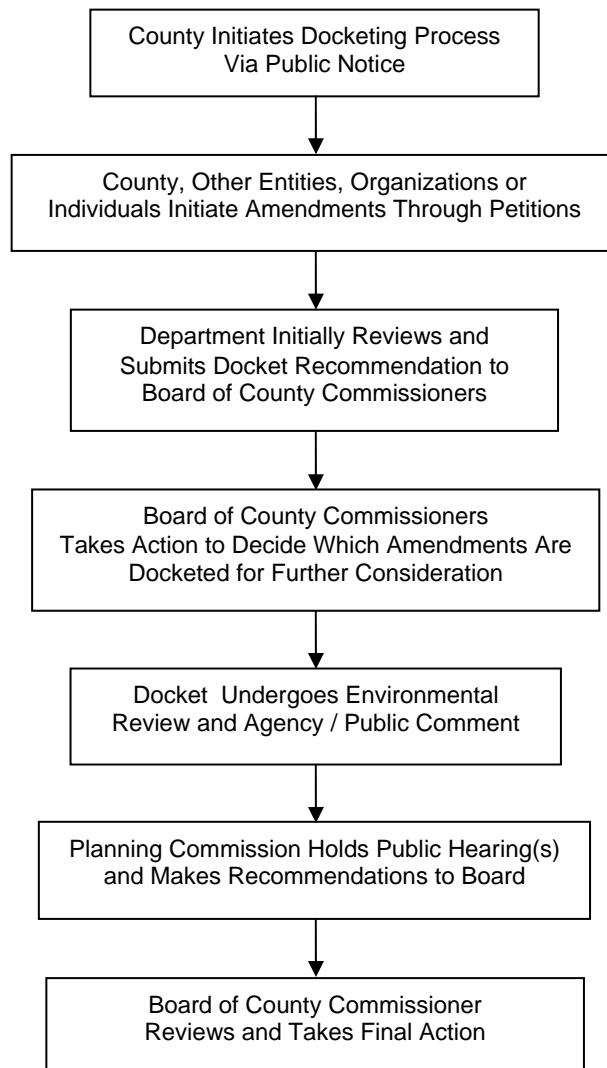
The final year of a 7-year update cycle may be combined with the coinciding regular annual amendment cycle to ensure cumulative review, consistency and convenience. Flexible submittal requirements, suspension of application fees and other measures may be used during this 7th year to encourage broad public participation. Such flexible requirements may not supersede State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioner public notification and other procedural requirements and deadlines. Depending on staffing and budget constraints, Skagit County may choose to not initiate other major planning projects or programs during this final year of the update cycle.

Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments

The Comprehensive Plan may be amended once annually (with exceptions as allowed by law) to ensure consistency with development regulations and supporting plans, such as community, facility and other functional plans. Amendments may also be necessary to address changes in local circumstances, and to rebalance existing land-use designation criteria for a specific parcel or group of parcels in light of new information.

Figure 2.1 outlines the general steps in amending the Comprehensive Plan. These steps are discussed below, and are described in more detail in Skagit County Code.

Figure 2.1 – Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment Process

General Amendment Process Requirements:

- Fees. The petitioner shall pay the application fees specified in an adopted fee schedule, unless waived by the Board of County Commissioners during the 7-year update.
- Petition. The petitioner shall submit a written application, on forms provided by the County, containing appropriate amendatory language and, if applicable, a map

showing the proposed change. The petitioner shall also address how the proposal is consistent with Comprehensive Plan policies or land-use designation criteria.

- Timing. Petitions shall be submitted by the date specified in the docketing announcement. Petitions received after the deadline will be processed with proposed amendments in the following year.
- Docketing for Further Consideration. According to procedures and timeline specified in Skagit County Code, the Department will evaluate each complete application to determine whether the proposal, if included in the annual docket for further consideration, would adversely affect the County's budget; require additional amendments to policies or regulations; be more appropriately addressed as part of a separate work program; or not be approvable due to some legal or procedural flaw in the proposal. Following the Department's recommendation on these considerations, the Board of County Commissioners will conduct a public meeting or hearing to consider whether or not to include each proposal in the year's docket of proposed amendments. A decision by the Board to include or exclude an amendment from the annual docket is final, procedural only, and does not constitute a decision by the Board as to whether the amendment will ultimately be approved. Applicants whose proposals were not included in the docket are free to resubmit the same or modified proposal in a future year's amendment cycle.
- Environmental Review. If the Board approves for the docket the amendment proposal, the petitioner shall submit an environmental checklist, and fees as specified in an adopted fee schedule, within a time specified in Skagit County Code. After receipt of the environmental checklist, fees, and supporting documentation the County will issue an environmental threshold determination on the proposed amendment(s). If the threshold determination finds that there may be significant adverse environmental impacts, a Draft Environmental Impact Statement may be required.
- Process. Amendment docketing, processing, public and agency review and participation, notification, public hearings, and final actions shall be as specified in Skagit County Code, in accordance with other local and state laws, and this Comprehensive Plan.

MONITORING PLAN EFFECTIVENESS

The effectiveness or success of the Comprehensive Plan is measured or monitored in several ways, including through the collection and evaluation of land use development trends and policies. Certain data, such as population, age, family size, cost and number of housing units, school enrollments, building permits, and others, contribute to an understanding of how these factors relate to public policies and programs.

Regular collection, evaluation, and reporting of data assists County policy- and decision-makers, and the public, in identifying whether the Plan's policies are furthering their intended goals, and whether programs and public services are meeting the public's needs. When measured over time such data can become "indicators" that may signal changing trends, or reveal successes or needed adjustments in comprehensive plan policies.

The County is committed to working collaboratively with cities and towns to collect, monitor and evaluate meaningful and mutually beneficial data, particularly in the sizing and density of UGAs. The County is also committed to continued cooperation with other jurisdictions in data sharing, and maintaining a current database of growth management information.

Skagit County initiated the Growth Management Indicators (GMI) reporting program in 2002, resulting in a report describing the status of the Comprehensive Plan's performance up to 2001. The GMI report is renewed periodically to provide information in advance of each 7-year GMA update cycle. The GMI reporting program is based on or seeks to carry out the following:

- Measure progress towards meeting the goals and objectives of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan.
- Encourage public participation in the development and review of Review of the growth management indicators data.
- Document data of countywide concern, including but not limited to: land capacity, density, permit processing, housing costs, economic strength and diversity, natural resource consumption, solid waste, transportation, open space, and water quality.
- Consider growth management indicators data as part of the County's annual budget review process.
- Identify alternatives to achieving those goals, objectives, or policies that are not demonstrating progress toward their implementation.
- Maintain a status report regarding the implementation of policies, including policies that have been implemented successfully.

COMMUNITY PLANS: THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The Comprehensive Plan envisions a hands-on approach to how the Plan and its development regulations will be applied at the community scale. Community plans exemplify how the community vision statements, goals, objectives and policies of this Comprehensive Plan are applied to detailed and specific conditions. Community plans may indicate specific land use designations, appropriate densities, and the design

standards that should apply in community planning areas. Preserving and building community character while ensuring an efficient and predictable development approval process is a central theme.

Subarea or community planning may be considered under the provisions of the Growth Management Act provided the community plan is consistent with the comprehensive plan (RCW 36.70A.080). During the development of the countywide comprehensive plan, many rural communities and residents expressed an interest in developing their own community plans. Policies within this element relate to administrative processes: initiation and development of community plans, and the relationship between each community development plan and the Comprehensive Plan.

Development of this chapter was guided in particular by the following GMA Planning Goal: "Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts."

This Goal, in the context of all of the GMA Planning Goals, led to the following Countywide Planning Policy that provide specific guidance to the analysis and policies developed in this chapter:

- Skagit County shall encourage citizen participation throughout the planning process as mandated by state statute and codes for environmental, land use, and development permits. (CPP 11.5)
- Skagit County shall utilize broad based citizen advisory committees to participate and assist in the development of the Comprehensive Plan Elements, sub-area plans, and functional plans. (CPP 11.6)

FUNCTION OF COMMUNITY PLANS

The community planning process seeks to enhance community values and assure sensible growth and development. Community plans result from partnerships uniting the County, other jurisdictions, and citizens of a planning area. A community plan puts into action the general policies of the Comprehensive Plan at a much finer scale and level of detail. Community plans may address issues at the local level that are not covered in a general comprehensive plan. Patterns of land use, design, traffic circulation, and services expressed within the community plan are a function of local economic, social, physical health, safety and welfare issues of the people who live and work within the community planning area. Community plans also consider compatibility and consistency with surrounding land uses and jurisdictions. Community plans focus on enhancing individual communities in a manner that benefits the entire county. Citizens decide what they want to nurture and what they want to change at a level that they are knowledgeable about and comfortable relating to.

The Comprehensive Plan serves as an "umbrella" document and provides a foundation upon which community plans are developed. Community plans may vary considerably

depending upon local issues, problems, and opportunities. They will generally include mapping, policy, and capital facilities amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.

CONSISTENCY BETWEEN THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AND COMMUNITY PLANS

Community plans must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, Growth Management Act, and other federal and state laws. They may explore areas where flexibility exists in the application of Comprehensive Plan policies to a given community, or where the Comprehensive Plan is silent on an issue. Ensuring consistency requires analyzing proposed community plans against each policy of the Comprehensive Plan. If a proposed community plan or policy conflicts with the Comprehensive Plan, the proposed plan or policy is inconsistent. Modifications would need to be made to any such community plan, or to the Comprehensive Plan, through the amendment process described earlier in this chapter.

GOAL A

Create opportunities for citizens to participate in developing community plans at a local level that protect and conserve community character while ensuring consistency and compatibility with the comprehensive plan.

Policies

- 12A-1.1** There are two fundamental steps in community planning: plan development and plan adoption.
- a. The development of a community plan may be initiated by the County, by community groups in collaboration with the County, or by community groups or other entities working largely or entirely with their own resources. Groups that may initiate a community planning processes should consult with the County on timing, priorities, Comprehensive Plan policies and procedures, and other factors that may affect the development, consideration, and adoption of the proposed community plan.

- (i) Skagit County is not obligated to provide financial support, staff support, or technical assistance to a community planning effort if the Board of County Commissioners has not determined it to be a priority per policy 12A-1.2 below.
 - b. Adoption of a community plan proposal shall follow the legislative procedures described earlier in this chapter. A community group that has initiated and completed a community plan per this policy may submit the plan to the County for consideration through the annual Comprehensive Plan amendment process.
- 12A-1.2** The County may initiate a community plan; provide assistance and guidance in the community planning process; or advance a community plan proposal through the legislative process, according to an annual determination of priorities by the Board of County Commissioners. In establishing priorities the Board may consider numerous factors, including:
- a. legislative mandates;
 - b. threats to public health and safety;
 - c. major environmental or economic threats or opportunities;
 - d. major development proposals;
 - e. community initiatives;
 - f. availability of staff and financial resources; and
 - g. the need to update an adopted community plan.

Goal A2

Provide for early and ongoing citizen involvement in the development of community plans.

- 12A-2.1** Establish citizen advisory committees (CACs), consistent with the County's public participation program, to make recommendations on land use designations, development and design standards, transportation improvements, capital facility improvements, densities, and other land use matters within the community planning area which are consistent with the

policies of this Comprehensive Plan and development regulations.

- 12A-2.2** Design and conduct public outreach and communication procedures to inform citizens interested in community plans of proposed policy decisions and land use matters that would affect the community plan or planning area.

GOAL A 3

Use community plans to protect and conserve community character while maintaining consistency with the Comprehensive Plan.

Policies

- 12A-3.1** Community plans may identify design characteristics and design standards that, if adopted, will be used to review development and construction projects within the jurisdiction of the adopted community plan.
- 12A-3.2** Common elements of a community planning process and the resulting plan include the following:
- a. Preparation of a community vision statement;
 - b. Assessment of current adopted County Comprehensive Plan goals, policies and strategies and development code provisions as they apply to the subarea;
 - c. Inventory, analysis, and mapping of current land uses, characteristics of the physical environment, and availability of utilities;
 - d. Assessment of current community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats including special studies such as market- and traffic analyses;
 - e. Development and evaluation of area-specific recommendations for problem solutions; and
 - f. Continuous public outreach and communication throughout the process tailored to the size, demographics, and interests of the community.

- 12A-3.3** Community plans should develop a range of alternatives that are consistent with the Comprehensive Plan while protecting community property values; economic vitality; affordable housing; the natural and built environment; natural resource lands; historic buildings, districts, and sites; and, character of the community.
- 12A-3.4** Community plans should include findings of fact to accompany the adoption of the plan that either
- a) demonstrate that community vision statements, goals and policies, and land use designations are consistent with this comprehensive plan, or
 - b) identify inconsistencies between the Comprehensive Plan and the community plan which must be resolved by amending the Comprehensive Plan.

GOAL A4

Implement and maintain an ongoing program of community planning to address the specific issues and concerns of Skagit County communities.

- 12A-4.1** Develop a long-term schedule for conducting community plans for the various Rural Villages designated in this Comprehensive Plan, and for other local areas of more detailed planning as identified herein. The following areas and issues have been identified for future community planning, although no specific timing or order of priority has been established:
- a. Big Lake Rural Village. The community plan for the Big Lake Rural Village shall include consideration and recommendations on logical Rural Village boundaries that preserve the character of the neighborhood and the community based on: existing development, land use patterns, and parcel density; natural land forms, contours, and topography; and, infrastructure capital improvement plans that are intended to serve the community, including roads, sewer and water lines. The Big Lake Rural Village is unique in that it is the only Rural Village in Skagit County served by both public water and sanitary sewer. The community plan for the Big Lake Rural Village is to consider Sewer District No. 2's comprehensive plan and capital improvement plan and its service area as a way to allow for additional infill and more intensive rural residential development while protecting the Lake's fragile watershed, water quality and recreational activities. The Big Lake Rural Village Community Plan should develop residential densities that reflect these unique features of

the Big Lake community. Clustering requirements for larger undeveloped properties shall be considered that create compatible rural densities and a non-expanding Rural Village boundary.

- b. Birdsvew. The community plan for Birdsvew shall include consideration of: appropriate land use designations for the existing camping resort properties and travel trailer parks; whether additional Rural commercial or industrial land use designations are appropriate and necessary to serve not only the rural residents in this area, but the traveling public; and whether additional rural density is appropriate to minimize large-lot sprawl in this area and to create more logical boundaries incorporating the existing RI designations.
- c. Day Creek. The community plan for Day Creek shall consider possible expansion of the Rural Center designation beyond the existing Day Creek Store to include other adjacent parcels with existing non-resource development. This community plan shall recognize the relative isolation of this area and this Rural Center from any other retail or service uses. In addition, to help ensure long-term vitality of this Day Creek Rural Center, and to minimize the impetus for new, more scattered rural commercial or industrial development in this area of the County, this community plan shall also evaluate whether additional rural density is appropriate adjacent to this Rural Center, thereby minimizing the potential for large-lot sprawl in this resource area of the County. If not completed before this Community Plan, the MRO designations in this Day Creek area shall be reevaluated to be sure they match the actual locations of the mineral resource and take into account existing critical area characteristics including ancient landslides.
- d. Upper Samish Valley. The community plan for the Upper Samish Valley shall include consideration of whether an area along Highway 9 north of Sedro-Woolley should be designated as a new Rural Center. This is one of the few populated areas of the County that is not included within a 2.5 mile radius service area of an existing Rural Village Commercial District or Rural Center. There are several existing public uses, including a school, fire station, and grange hall, that could serve as the core of a new Rural Center.

