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## Background

In 1990, the Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management Act (GMA). For the first time in the State's history, most counties and their cities were required to develop and adopt comprehensive plans and regulations to implement those plans. In 1997, Skagit County adopted a Comprehensive Plan (or Plan) intended to comply with the GMA.

The Skagit County Comprehensive Plan contains goals, policies and strategies intended to guide the County's growth and development for the 20-year period through 2015. In essence, the Plan defines how the vision for Skagit County's desired future will be achieved.

## Purpose

The policies of the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan, if properly implemented, should improve the quality of life for the citizens of Skagit County over the next 20-years.

When the Board of County Commissioners approved the Plan in 1997, they included provisions that require the creation of a "Growth Management Indicators" (GMI) Program that would tell the public and future decision-makers whether the Plan is achieving its intended outcomes (see the Plan at pp. 2-11 through 2-13). This 2002 GMI Report is the first document to attempt to monitor the County's level of success in implementing the Comprehensive Plan.

The purpose of the GMI Program is to provide the public and the Skagit County Board of Commissioners with a method for evaluating the County's progress towards successfully implementing the Comprehensive Plan, helping to assure governmental accountability to the citizens of Skagit County. The information developed through the GMI Program will be used to assess whether the Plan's objectives are being realized, or are being attained too slowly. With this information, the Board of Commissioners and the public will be able to determine whether scarce public resources should be reprioritized, or policies and regulations modified, in order to successfully implement the Plan.

GMI's must be based on a benchmark and be measured against a foundation, or base of information, from which to track changes or trends over time. The system for creating this first GMI Report was established by:

- Clearly identifying the desired outcomes of successful Plan implementation, termed *benchmarks*;
- Selecting relevant *indicators* for each benchmark; and
- Identifying levels of achievement or targets for those indicators.

## Why Prepare a GMI Report for the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan?

Generally, the GMI Report should be used as the Board of Commissioners originally intended, to help future County decision-makers and the public to determine whether the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan is being implemented in a way that achieves its intended outcomes.

# INTRODUCTION

The Skagit County GMI Report should provide "early warning" if the goals, policies and implementing strategies of the Plan are not having their desired effect. In that case, the report should provide enough information for policy-makers to determine whether different actions are needed to implement County policy, or whether revisions to the policies themselves are required. In sum, the GMI Report should be used to help Skagit County establish priorities, take actions, and direct scarce resources to achieve the vision articulated by the Comprehensive Plan.

## Data Sources Used in the GMI Report

Measuring policy effectiveness involves the review of a wide range of data—some quantitative and easily accessible, others more qualitative and elusive. The collection and presentation of growth management indicators is accompanied by analysis and indication of trends over recent time, where measured by the available data (e.g., 1995-2001). Sound criteria are necessary to select growth management indicators that can be easily understood and evaluated without bias. This report utilized a number of different criteria to evaluate and select the appropriate range of various growth management indicators for Skagit County. The criteria include:

- *Relevance*—ensuring that a particular indicator is an appropriate measure for the community and applicable to the important issues.
- *Validity*—indicators based on sound data that accurately depict the real situation.
- *Consistency and Reliability*—data that can be reliably collected and analyzed over time.
- *Measurability*—data that is readily available and can be obtained from known sources.
- *Clarity*—data that can be easily understood by a wide range of people.
- *Comprehensiveness*—data that represents many facets of an issue and reduces the need for an excessive number of indicators.
- *Cost Effectiveness*—data collection and analysis is not prohibitively expensive.
- *Comparability*—data that can be measured across jurisdictions for easy comparison

Skagit County has attempted to use the best available data for the *indicators* to monitor the effectiveness of Plan implementation. The GMIs must also incorporate public involvement and input in order to make sure that they reflect the values and interests of the public. In order to ensure that the indicators remain viable measures of plan implementation consistently from year to year, Skagit County will revise, and if needed, add new data and indicators on a bi-annual basis, as new and better data sources become available.

## Desired Outcomes Of Successful Plan Implementation

The key objectives or desired outcomes of successful Plan implementation are termed *benchmarks* in this report. They have been grouped into five major categories, as follows:

- Land Use & Population Growth;
- Transportation;
- Economic Development;
- Environment; and
- Housing.



## Key to Indicator Symbols

This GMI Report includes an arrow symbol for each of the 26 Benchmarks to show the direction of the trend towards or away from the desired outcome. The arrows are included below to give a quick overview of how Skagit County is doing on meeting the relative benchmark or desired outcome. However, the reader should be cautioned that it is not always easy to see a trend or understand its long term significance. The data and analysis should be carefully reviewed to better understand the context in which a particular arrow has been assigned.



Trends are occurring in a positive direction toward achievement of the benchmark



There has been insignificant movement in the indicators, the trend has been mixed, or there is inconclusive data.



Indicates a negative trend away from the benchmark or desired outcome

## How to Read This Report

The Report includes separate chapters for each of the five major *elements* for which benchmarks have been established, including Land Use & Population Growth; Transportation; Economic Development; Environment; and Housing.

There a number of benchmarks identified for each element. The benchmarks themselves are presented in a standard format. The upper left hand corner on the first page of each benchmark includes a graphic box identifying the benchmark or desired outcome along with the indicators used to measure the progress towards that outcome. Immediately to the right of the benchmark box is an arrow symbol indicating the relative trend towards achievement of the benchmark based on the indicator data.

Along the right side of the page, is a subject heading and text discussion indicating a brief overview of the benchmark—its context and relevance—and presentation of the data and analysis for each growth management indicator. Figures such as graphs and tables are included to highlight specific measures and trends. References are also included to the data sources.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The key objectives, or *benchmarks* of successful Plan implementation are summarized by category, below. The indicator arrow for the benchmark is also included to provide a brief summary of the trends toward achievement of the desired outcomes. More detailed presentation and analysis of the data is found in each chapter.

## Land Use & Population Growth

1. Direct the majority of population growth to urban growth areas (i.e., cities and unincorporated urban growth areas). 
2. Steer the majority of new housing unit development into urban growth areas (UGAs). 
3. Achieve residential densities of at least four (4) dwelling units per net acre within UGAs. 
4. Promote economic prosperity in rural areas while protecting and maintaining the rural lifestyle and the functions of natural resource lands. 
5. Direct the majority of new economic activities into UGAs. 
6. Protect resource lands of long-term commercial significance (i.e., agricultural, forest and mineral lands). 

## Transportation

7. Maintain a safe transportation system to facilitate the efficient flow of people goods and services. 
8. Provide for a multi-modal transportation system that encourages alternative transportation options. 

## Economic Development

9. Diversify Skagit County's economy. 
10. Facilitate the creation and retention of "livable wage" jobs. 
11. Maintain healthy and competitive natural resource industries. 
12. Encourage a range of commercial retail and service businesses. 
13. Ensure economic well-being for the agricultural industry in the County. 
14. Maintain the availability of viable industrial and manufacturing sites in the County. 
15. Make the County's employment base more similar to statewide characteristics and lessen the seasonal fluctuations in employment. 
16. Encourage educational advancement for residents of all ages. 

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Environment

- 17. Preserve and protect wetlands. 
- 18. Protect aquifer recharge areas, wellheads, and ground and surface water quality and quantity. 
- 19. Protect hydrological functions and reduce the potential for physical injury and property damage associated with flooding. 
- 20. Maintain the County's existing excellent air quality. 
- 21. Maintain open space, recreation, scenic, historic and cultural lands. Protect and enhance fish and wildlife populations and their associated habitats. 
- 22. Reduce per capita solid waste disposal and encourage recycling. 

## Housing

- 23. Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population. 
- 24. Promote a variety of housing opportunities. 
- 25. Conserve, protect, and enhance the existing housing stock, including historic homes. 
- 26. Meet the housing needs of low and very low-income residents and special needs populations. 