

CHAPTER 7

HOUSING

INTRODUCTION

Housing is one of the most important needs in our lives and communities.

- It provides shelter and a link to the neighborhood and the larger community.
- It is the single largest purchase made by most households.
- As an industry, housing is a major partner in the economic life of the community both as a consumer of goods and services and producer of dwelling units, jobs, and income.
- As a major economic activity, housing depends on local government. While taxes on housing are a principal source of local government revenue, services to housing and to the inhabitants of this housing comprise a major portion of local government expenditures.

Skagit County faces challenges and opportunities as it works toward providing housing options for present and future generations. Every community has low and moderate income households. Since a community benefits from its residents, it has a responsibility to ensure they have a desirable place to live. The Comprehensive Plan's Rural Element seeks to provide for a variety of rural residential densities and housing opportunities within the confines of the Growth Management Act (GMA). And although the majority of unincorporated Skagit County is restricted by GMA mandates from providing higher density (urban) housing, such housing may be made provided in the Swinomish, Bayview Ridge, and municipal Urban Growth Areas.

The Housing Profile contains detailed information describing the demographic and economic conditions pertaining to housing needs for the next 20 years. This Housing Chapter contains the goals and policies through which Skagit County encourages the availability and affordability of housing for its citizens.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT MANDATE

Addressing the countywide community housing need requires a regional approach that involves all levels of government (federal/state/local) and the private sector. Each jurisdiction has a responsibility for meeting its obligations in addressing affordable housing in Skagit County. The greatest potential for promoting affordable housing is in the urban areas, given the intent of the Growth Management Act to direct most population growth to these areas, and to maintain lower densities and larger lot sizes in the rural area. Skagit County recognizes that development within cities and their unincorporated Urban Growth Areas is subject to interlocal agreements that may affect the type, style and location of housing. The Countywide Planning Policies are the most appropriate tool for advancing a countywide or regional housing strategy supported by the County, cities and towns, and other public and private entities.

The following GMA Planning Goal drives the formation and implementation of the County's housing goals and policies: *“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.”*

The Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) provide specific guidance to the analysis and policies developed in this element:

- *Local governments shall allow for an adequate supply of land use options to provide for a wide variety of incomes, housing types, and densities. (CPP 4.1)*
- *Public/private partnerships shall be encouraged to build affordable housing and devise incentives for innovative and environmentally sensitive design to meet the housing needs of people with low and moderate incomes and special needs populations. (CPP 4.2)*
- *The Comprehensive Plan should support innovative land use management techniques, including, but not limited to, density bonuses, cluster housing, planned unit developments and the transfer of development rights. (CPP 4.3)*
- *The existing affordable housing stock should be maintained and efforts to rehabilitate older and substandard housing, which are otherwise consistent with comprehensive plan policies, should be encouraged. (CPP 4.4)*
- *The construction of housing that promotes innovative, energy efficient and less expensive building technologies shall be encouraged. (CPP 4.5)*

- *Comprehensive Plan provisions for the location of residential development shall be made in a manner consistent with protecting natural resource lands, aquatic resources, and critical areas. (CPP 4.6)*
- *Manufactured home parks shall be allowed only within urban or urban growth boundary areas. (CPP 4.7)*

HOUSING GOALS AND POLICIES

GOAL A – HOUSING QUANTITY

Ensure that the supply of housing and sufficient land capacity keep pace with population growth in the County.

GOAL A 1 – HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

Maintain a progressive program of financial, regulatory, and development measures that will produce opportunities for a full range of housing affordability.

Policies

- 7A-1.1** Work with housing producers and stakeholders in urban and rural areas to apply creative solutions to infill and development using techniques such as attached dwelling units, co-housing, home-sharing, accessory dwelling units, clustering, planned unit developments and lot size averaging.
- 7A-1.2** Develop explanatory materials, offer pre-application conferences, and employ other measures to facilitate the review and approval of building permit and land use applications.
- 7A-1.3** Support, when financially feasible, low income housing programs, with tools such as multifamily tax exemptions, public bond issues, grants, and low interest loan programs.
- 7A-1.4** Zoning and subdivision regulations should provide for the efficient use of lands for residential development where appropriate to increase available land supply and opportunities for affordable housing to match the

demographic and economic housing needs of the County's current and projected population.

- 7A-1.5** Develop procedures to reduce impact fees for low income housing projects, when such fees are required.
- 7A-1.6** Maintain an ongoing monitoring and evaluation program to improve the process of permit review and approval, save time, and decrease costs.
- 7A-1.7** Work with the Skagit Council of governments to establish a program for regular updating of the Housing Needs Assessment, including provisions to monitor and assist in providing affordable housing opportunities. The Assessment should be updated on a regular basis, several years in advance of each seven-year Comprehensive Plan update that is required by the Growth Management Act.

GOAL B – HOUSING QUALITY

Strive to preserve, conserve, and enhance the existing housing stock, including historic structures and sites; develop design guidelines and standards to improve the quality of new housing consistent with applicable building codes.

GOAL B1 – INFORMATION

Manage regulatory, administrative, funding and information programs that contribute to the development and maintenance of high quality housing and strong communities throughout the County.

Policies

- 7B-1.1** Facilitate the rehabilitation and reuse of existing structures for housing by allowing reduced permitting fees and “grandfathered” development standards.
- 7B-1.2** Allow reuse of formerly non-residential structures for housing in mixed use developments in Rural Village Commercial Districts and Urban Growth Areas.

- 7B-1.3** Establish development standards and design guidelines for Urban Growth Areas, Rural Villages, and large CaRD developments, to promote efficient, pedestrian friendly, and attractive communities.

GOAL C - HOUSING DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESSIBILITY

Strive to ensure that a variety of housing types, densities, and values can be produced in the rural area, Urban Growth Areas, and Rural Villages appropriate to the character of the individual communities. Additionally, ensure sufficient infrastructure capacity is available to accommodate growth and provide housing opportunities for all economic segments of the population.

GOAL C1 – HOUSING FOR SPECIAL NEEDS

Ensure the availability of housing for people with special needs.

Policies

- 7C-1.1** Allow mixed residential and commercial uses in Urban Growth Areas and Rural Village commercial districts to promote housing affordability and availability.
- 7C-1.2** Consider allowing reduced minimum lot sizes in exchange for community facilities and amenities such as parks, open space, recreational facilities, and community centers.
- 7C-1.3** Allow duplexes in zoning districts permitting single-family residences, as an alternative to accessory dwelling units or the ability to further subdivide. A duplex extinguishes two development rights.
- 7C-1.4** Allow specialized housing facilities such as group homes for children and adults with special needs, in appropriate zoning districts.

GOAL D – FARM-WORKER HOUSING

Strive for an adequate supply of housing to meet the needs of farm workers and the agricultural industry.

Policies

- 7D-1.1** Work in partnership with other public agencies and the private sector to ensure an adequate supply of farm-worker housing.
- 7D-1.2** Review permit applications for farm-worker housing developments in consideration of proximity to job locations and necessary public facilities and services consistent with the Washington State Temporary Worker Housing Health and Safety Regulations (RCW 70.114A).

GOAL E – MANUFACTURED HOUSING

Recognize the value of manufactured housing as an affordable housing solution.

Policies

- 7E-1.1** Regulations regarding manufactured housing shall be consistent with federal and state laws.

