

INTRODUCTION

I.I COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

The Island County Comprehensive Plan is the document that provides the broad policy basis for Island County's land use planning program and sets the framework to guide land use decisions within the county. The plan identifies ways that the County's land use planning efforts will implement state and regional requirements, including the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) and administrative codes. Equally important, the plan acts to coordinate actions with local jurisdictions, service providers, and state and federal agencies that may have a stake in Island County's land use policies and implementing regulations and actions.

In addition to its legislative and coordination roles, the comprehensive plan also reflects community values and aspirations about the county's future. The plan aims to organize county actions and programs that define relationships between land use goals and policies and community livability, economic vitality, provision of needed public facilities, and environmental stewardship.

I.II REGULATORY FRAMEWORK

The GMA was passed in 1990 in response to rapid population growth, concerns with suburban sprawl, environmental protection, and quality of life. It provides direction regarding:

- Jurisdictions must create a comprehensive plan consistent with the goals of the GMA
- The plan must account for the next 20 years of population growth
- Plans are reviewed every 10 years and updated if necessary; this review will be for years 2025 - 2045
- Must include public participation early and often
- Plans are implemented through capital investment and development regulations

Key Considerations:

A. Urban Growth Areas (UGAs)

1. Counties, in consultation with municipalities, must designate UGAs to accommodate population growth and development.
2. UGAs are places within which urban growth shall be encouraged, and outside of which growth can occur only if it is not urban in nature.

B. Resource Lands & Critical Areas

1. Counties must designate and regulate Resource Lands such as agricultural lands, forest lands, and mineral resources. Counties must also designate Critical Areas such

as wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, and geologically hazard areas.

C. Public Facilities

1. Each jurisdiction must identify lands useful for public purposes and allow for essential public facilities.
2. Some rural governmental services and urban services, such as transportation infrastructure, must be in place at the time development is completed (these terms are defined in RCW 36.70A.030(40) through (48)).

I.III.1 STATE PLANNING GOALS

The GMA sets forth statutory goals for the guidance of the cities and counties required to plan under the act in RCW 36.70A.020. In addition, RCW 36.70A.480 states that the goals and policies of the state Shoreline Management Act, as set forth in RCW 90.58.020, are added as one of the goals as presented in RCW 36.70A.020.

The GMA goals as presented in RCW 36.70A.020 and RCW 36.70A.480 are outlined below.

- **Urban Growth:** Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.
- **Reduce Sprawl:** Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low density development.
- **Transportation:** Encourage efficient multi-modal transportation systems that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled and are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.
- **Housing:** Plan for and accommodate housing affordable to all economic segments of the population, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of the existing housing stock.
- **Economic Development:** Encourage economic development that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunities for all citizens, 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, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of natural resources, public services, and public facilities.
- **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.
- **Permits:** Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.

- **Natural Resource Industries:** Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands and discourage incompatible uses.
- **Open Space and Recreation:** Retain open space and green space, enhance recreational opportunities, enhance fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks and recreation facilities.
- **Environment:** Protect the environment and enhance the state's quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.
- **Citizen Participation and Coordination:** Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process, including the participation of vulnerable populations and overburdened communities, and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.
- **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.
- **Historic Preservation:** Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical or archaeological significance.
- **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; support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled; 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.
- **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.

I.III ISLAND COUNTY VISION STATEMENT

Island County strives to grow our communities in ways that respect the people who lived here in the past, that responds to those who live here today and accommodates those desiring to live here in the future. We will protect our vital natural resources, our wild and natural places, our working farms and forests, and our shorelines that contribute to our unique island life. We strive to create capacity for all our residents and meet their needs equitably, in pursuit of a thriving economy and resilient community.

I.III.I PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE OF ISLAND COUNTY

Island County is primarily made up of two unique islands: Whidbey and Camano. Our islands

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are host to small towns, rural residences, large and small farms, sizable forests, and shorelines dotted with homes that allow residents and visitors alike to enjoy the marine environment. As islands, we have finite resources. Our drinking water comes from sole source aquifers, we have constrained amounts of prime farmland with soils sufficient to grow our food, and we have limited land to support dense development. Comprehensive planning on islands requires that we keep these constraints at the forefront, and plan for growth in a thoughtful and measured way that centers conservation of resources and resiliency.

People live in Island County for many reasons - to be close to family, for a job or deployment, to move away from the city, or to retire. They stay because of a quieter way of life with a strong sense of community, access to open space and recreation, and beautiful views of rural lands, mountain ranges, and shorelines. Many island families have resided here for generations, contributing to the cultural and living history.

Our communities change and grow over time. Communities are framed by the people who live and work here. As residents age, babies are born, and new residents move here our communities adapt and start to look and feel different. The people who live here shape our stories - they bring new ideas, open stores and restaurants, work the farms that provide our food, and build the houses we live in. Over generations, people inevitably leave their mark on our islands in ways big and small.

Key to building a thriving economy and healthy community is ensuring businesses have housing for their employees, school enrollment is growing, healthcare and services are readily available, and our population represents generations of people at different stages of their lives. The County's last comprehensive plan under-planned the amount of growth that would occur over the 20-year planning period. The effect of underestimating growth is clear, we continue to lack a variety of housing types across our communities to support residents at all ages and income levels.

The state mandated housing changes for the 2025 Comprehensive Plan will challenge us to meet the needs of all members of our communities, at all income levels. It's our statutory duty to create places in our communities for everyone to live and thrive. The resounding input from residents is that they want the physical mark left on this place by growth over the next 20 years to be small, and we should protect our rural lands from too much growth.

Comprehensive planning presents an opportunity to prepare for the change that will happen in our communities over the next 20 years in ways that protect our unique island life. There will be tensions and compromises to be made. Change will happen whether we plan for it or whether we do nothing at all. We cannot stop it, though we can guide it in ways that are adaptive and responsive to our vision and values.

Our aim with this comprehensive plan update is to protect rural lands, and encourage urban areas to look, feel, and function more like small and medium sized cities. We must plan for the infrastructure and services needed to support new housing types where density already exists. We must be creative and consider new and innovative ways to meet the needs of our residents today, and 20 years into the future.

I.III.II VALUE STATEMENTS

In Island County We Value:

- **Economic vibrancy** through a diverse and resilient economy that supports small and large businesses, the Navy, local government, healthcare employers, tourism, a vibrant arts community, and local agriculture that supports all sizes of farms.
- **Protection of natural resources**, including our aquifers, farms, forests, wetlands, shorelines, and marine environment in support of residents for generations to come.
- **Equal access to housing** through slow and thoughtful planned density with accompanying infrastructure and services for all ages and incomes.
- **Reliable utilities and infrastructure** including multi-modal transportation that allows us to travel with ease across both islands, water and wastewater solutions that protect the environment, and access to technology that connects us to the rest of the world.
- **Access to the outdoors** and all the beauty and diversity of our islands with healthy activity options for all ages.
- **Health equity** and access to robust and affordable healthcare, human services, and food security to support our resident's ability to stay healthy at all stages of their lives.
- **Emergency preparedness and climate resilience** to ensure our residents have safe access to food, water, and shelter as we plan for, adapt, and respond to a changing world.
- **Community** and a sense of connectedness through walkable towns, historic places, gathering spaces, safe neighborhoods, and a commitment to keeping this place special.

I.IV PURPOSE AND COMPONENTS OF THIS PLAN

This comprehensive plan has been developed in accordance with the GMA, chapter 36.70A RCW, to address growth issues in Island County. It represents the community's policy plan for growth through the year 2045 (a 20-year planning period). The essence of policy planning is that it provides the community with an expressed set of statements defining the direction and character of future development, which clearly integrate the goals and objectives of the GMA.

Table I-1. Plan Chapter Contents

Plan Chapter	Description of Contents
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Land Use	<p>Establishes the land use designations and general policy framework for the land use planning program that seeks to establish the desired character and pattern of development, while protecting the quality of life, economic opportunities, and natural environment of the community. Included in this topic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population and Employment Projections • Buildable Lands Analysis • Land Use Designations for Urban, Rural, and Resource Lands <p>Also includes the Rural Lands element - Addressing the necessary strategies and programs to ensure land uses outside of areas designated for urban growth are compatible with traditional rural uses and economic activities.</p>
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Economic Development	Establishes goals, policies, objectives, and provisions for economic growth and vitality and a high quality of life.
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Shoreline Management	RESERVED – Not Updated in 2025
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Housing	Establishes requirements to develop a variety of housing types to meet the needs, of present and future residents at all income levels.
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Historic Preservation	RESERVED – Not Updated in 2025
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Natural Resources	<p>Establishes the framework for designating and regulating land uses to preserve areas critical to the health, safety, and welfare of the community. Included in this topic:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wetlands • Aquifer Recharge Areas • Fish and Wildlife Habitat Conservation Areas • Frequently Flooded Areas • Geologically Hazardous Areas • Water Quality & Quantity
<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Parks & Recreation	Provides the framework and coordination necessary for the retention and possible expansion of open space and the provision of a wide variety of parks and recreational opportunities.
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Transportation	Outlines improvements or strategies to accommodate existing and proposed land uses, while encouraging efficient multi-modal transportation systems to support the community and region.
<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Utilities	RESERVED – Combined with Capital Facilities
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Capital Facilities / Utilities (combined)	Addresses the appropriate coordination, location, and delivery of adequate public facilities and services to support existing and proposed land uses, including a funding plan. Establishes the preferred siting of and coordination necessary to ensure utilities are available for existing and proposed land uses.
<input type="checkbox"/> 11. Climate	NEW – Addresses planning and preparation for resilience to climate related changes including extreme heat, drought, and sea level rise.

The benefits of a policy plan are as follows:

- Public understanding and participation in the planning process are facilitated by the uncomplicated character of the policy statements.
- Elected officials become closely involved in the planning process through definition of explicit policy statements.
- Several diverse agencies and interests making development decisions in the community may utilize the policy plan as a coordinating device.
- Policy planning provides stability and consistency in the planning program notwithstanding changes in conditions of a community.

The guiding functions of the policy plan are:

- Useful in the adoption of land use codes by legislative bodies.
- Applicable in the administration of development controls and incentives by responsible officials.
- Necessary to provide a reasonable and fair means of amending the comprehensive plan and development regulations with a supporting record that will withstand challenge.

The role of this plan is:

- To set goals and policies to guide growth in the County through the year 2045.
- To develop future land use patterns and maps.
- To establish a specific program for plan implementation.

I.IV.I CENTRAL THEMES

- The Board of Island County Commissioners set three priorities for the 2025 Comprehensive Plan update: Health, Equity, and Climate Resilience. Staff used these priorities to inform updates to elements.
- Citizen input is an essential part of the comprehensive planning process. The process of publicly debating sensitive issues is valuable in forming a viable outcome. Citizen involvement engenders commitment and willingness to find solutions.
- Housing and land prices have continued to rise in Island County and affordable housing has created inequity and displacement throughout the county. Providing incentives for the development of affordable housing for all county residents is a priority of this plan.
- Farm and forest lands are a valued resource for the county. The County is committed to provide planning options and incentives to help sustain the productivity and economic viability of farms and forests.
- Meeting the new requirements of planning for and accommodating housing at all income levels in unincorporated Island County is going to take creativity and

flexibility. Growth should be directed to areas that are already designated for higher densities first, like non-municipal urban growth areas (NMUGA) and Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (LAMIRDs). In rural areas, clustering is the preferred alternative to large lot development to preserve open space.

- Job opportunities in the county are limited in many areas. Providing employment opportunities for an increasing population, which will also allow an increased percentage of residents to work in the county and not have to commute, is of great importance in this planning effort.
- The Navy is a very large part of the County's economic, social, and cultural make up. The County established goals, policies, and development regulations to ensure that land use decisions will be compatible with current and future naval operations.
- As outlined in the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs), it is essential to successful plan implementation that the County continue to work closely with all jurisdictions and districts within its boundaries. Close coordination and cooperation is necessary to ensure effective land use planning and ensure full and efficient use of UGAs.
- The CPPs establish the framework from which county, town and city comprehensive plans are developed and adopted. The CPPs provide the foundation for assuring that consistency criteria, required between county and city planning under the GMA, are fulfilled. The CPPs were jointly and collaboratively developed and adopted by Island County and the jurisdictions of Coupeville, Oak Harbor, and Langley on June 22, 1992, and most recently updated in 2023 (a major update). The CPPs provided guidance in development of this Comprehensive Plan.

I.V PLAN UPDATES

I.V.I ANNUAL DOCKET PROCESS

To be responsive to changing conditions, Island County updates this plan through the annual docket process, ensuring that the plan remains a viable tool for decision-makers and citizens to use when seeking policy direction regarding land use and Island County's future. Timely and thorough review of the plan will assist in keeping it responsive to the needs of local citizens.

Amendments may be made to the comprehensive plan once a year only after careful analysis of cumulative impact of proposals and developing trends and a finding that the proposed amendment is in the common interest of the people of Island County. The GMA directs the creation of a process and procedures for plan amendments and establishes the annual "docket" process (RCW 36.70A.130(4)), but the specific processes and procedures are left to the County to determine. For Island County, the process of amending the comprehensive plan and related development regulations, including the annual docket process, timing, and application requirements, are located in Chapter 16.10 ICC.

The 2025 update included a new process for amendments and includes a multi-year work plan to be reviewed annually to determine which elements will be updated each year, based on

staffing and resources available, legal need, and competing priorities. Annual docket items will create the annual work plan for the Long Range Planning team, and will include:

- Each of the plan chapters
- Related updates and implementation programs
- Subarea planning efforts
- Annual documentation, reporting and cleanup efforts
- Ongoing intergovernmental coordination; and
- Additional major projects (i.e. decennial census, etc.).

I.V.II PERIODIC UPDATE

For the comprehensive plan to remain current, it needs to be reviewed and updated periodically. State law requires jurisdictions to periodically conduct a thorough review of their plan and regulations to bring them up to date with any relevant changes in the GMA and to respond to changes in land use or population growth.

The plan shall be reviewed by the Planning Commission at least every periodic update, based on the schedule identified by the GMA as found in RCW 36.70A.130(5), making recommendations to improve the entire plan. When preparing periodic updates to the comprehensive plan, all comprehensive plan elements shall utilize most current data available from local, state, federal sources.

I.V.III OVERVIEW OF 2025 UPDATE

House Bill 1220 (Housing): The Housing Element of Island County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan update must comply with HB 1220 passed in 2021 by the Washington Legislature, which mandates that jurisdictions plan for and accommodate housing at all income levels. Under HB 1220, jurisdictions are required to evaluate whether they have sufficient land capacity to allow for the housing types and amounts identified at all income levels. If there is insufficient capacity, the jurisdiction must identify and implement zoning changes and land use allowances that provide enough capacity prior to adoption of the comprehensive plan.

House Bill 1181 (Climate): In 2023 the Washington State Legislature passed HB 1181, requiring local governments across the state to plan for climate impacts as part of their comprehensive plan processes. The bill added a fourteenth goal to the GMA to address climate resilience and required a Climate Resiliency Sub-Element for all fully planning counties and cities. The focus of the resilience sub-element is to assess how climate change is impacting our communities, highlight communities that may be more vulnerable to local impacts, and identify strategies that support adaptation and increase community resilience.

Growth Projections: To comply with the GMA requirements and calculate a population projection for the 20-year planning period, Island County reviewed the County demographic characteristics, economic conditions, and past growth trends, as well as data from the State of Washington and the U.S. Census Bureau. Based on this research, the County arrived at the

following conclusions:

- In the year 2045, Island County is projected to have a population of 99,202. The 2020 census determined that Island County had a population of 86,857; this represents a total projected increase of 12,345 people over a 25-year period.
- The median age of Island County is higher than the state as a whole and is increasing at a faster rate.
- Island County's 1998 and 2005 comprehensive plan population projections significantly overestimated future population growth, while the 2016 population projection significantly underestimated future population growth.
- NASWI indicates that at the time of this report, there are no plans to add additional personnel in the next 20-year period.

I.VI IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES

Implementation of the comprehensive plan is an ongoing process involving all sectors of the community and all departments in the County. Code amendments, capital improvements, and everyday permitting and land use decisions, which affect the quality of life on the Islands will greatly depend on the desires and level of citizen support given to the planning effort. The effectiveness and value of this plan will only be measured over an extended period of time when citizens and local officials have an opportunity to achieve common objectives.

The general goals and policies should first be viewed as an overall framework for future decision making. Public and private interests must carefully examine this statement of comprehensive planning policy to ensure cooperation and coordination in meeting common objectives.

Beyond revisions to development regulations, it is necessary for public and private interests to work in a spirit of cooperation to implement the plan. Policies within the plan provide overall guidance for decision making, offering flexibility to developments and innovations which achieve common objectives. The plan has been intentionally formulated to provide guidelines for future development, which foster a high-quality living environment for all citizens at the lowest possible public cost.

The following is an outline of general areas of implementation strategies. For this comprehensive plan to succeed, it is of utmost importance to proceed on schedule to accomplish all of these items. Specific implementation strategies are located within the goals and policies section of each chapter.

I.VI.I SUBAREA PLANNING

Clinton

A subarea plan was completed for the Clinton LAMIRDs as part of the County's 2025 Comprehensive Plan update. Further studies will be needed to determine if Clinton can transition into a NMUGA before the next comprehensive plan update to support more housing and commercial growth.

Camano Island

The County may also explore the viability of creating a subarea plan for Camano Island at a future date, to be determined via the annual docket process.

I.VI.II PROGRAMS & PARTNERSHIPS

Interlocal Agreements

- A. The County will work with Oak Harbor to update the interlocal agreements to assist in guiding development in the unincorporated portions of the UGAs.
- B. The County will work with the Town of Coupeville and the City of Langley to update the interlocal agreements regarding the JPA and the joint planning processes.
- C. Working with the municipalities, the County will establish procedures to assist in coordinated review of land use and capital projects in JPAs.

Countywide Planning Policies

The Countywide Planning Policies are updated before each periodic update to ensure jurisdictions are working together to accomplish shared goals for population growth, housing and employment projections, and development in UGAs.

I.VI.III OTHER RELEVANT COUNTY PLANS AND DOCUMENTS

Homeless Housing Plan

Island County Human Services is updating the 5-year Homeless Housing Plan which outlines objectives and actions to meet the emergency housing and needs of individuals in crisis in our community. This plan is updated every five years and will serve as an implementation tool for achieving the emergency shelter requirements of our comprehensive plan housing allocations.

Capital Facilities Plan / Capital Improvement Plan

The 20-year Capital Facilities Plan, and 6-year Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) are implementation tools the County uses to prioritize capital expenditures and projects. The Public Works Department leads the CIP process annually and Planning will continue to work collaboratively with Public Works to ensure comprehensive plan items are included and addressed.

Department Work Plans

Every year each department in the County prepares an annual work plan which can include implementation measures from the comprehensive plan update. Different departments may take on different implementation items such as code updates, mapping updates, process improvements, etc. Coordination between departments in developing the annual work plans to include comprehensive plan implementation will be an ongoing effort.

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