



Island County Planning and Community Development

Jonathan Lange, AICP, CFM
Director

Physical Address: 1 NE 6th St, Coupeville, WA 98239 Mailing Address: 1 NE 7th St, Coupeville, WA 98239

Ph: Whidbey 360-679-7339 | Camano 360-387-3443 | Fax: 360-679-7306

Email: PlanningDept@islandcountywa.gov | <https://www.islandcountywa.gov/207/Planning-Community-Development>

MEMORANDUM

12/10/2025

TO: Board of Island County Commissioners and Planning Commission

FROM: Planning & Community Development, Long Range Planning

RE: Island County 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update – Publishing of Complete Drafts Elements, Development Regulations, and SEPA

ATTACHMENTS / DOCUMENT LINKS:

- [Complete Draft Comprehensive Plan Elements](#)
- [Draft Comprehensive Plan Appendices](#)
- [Draft Development Regulations](#)
- [SEPA Checklist](#) and [Determination](#)

Background

The Growth Management Act (GMA) passed in Washington State in 1990 requires jurisdictions to periodically update their comprehensive plans and development regulations (RCW 36.70A.130(5)). Comprehensive plans are policy documents that set the direction for future growth in a jurisdiction over a 20-year period. Periodic updates are required every 10 years to comply with changes to state law, changes to land use, and to plan for updated population growth, housing, and employment projections. A periodic update is also an opportunity to engage the public and ensure the plan represents the community's priorities and values.

Island County last completed a periodic update of our comprehensive plan in 2016. Island County began its periodic update in 2023 for the 20-year planning period of 2025 to 2045.

Comprehensive Plan Elements, Development Regulations, and SEPA Updates

Updates to the Elements, Development Regulations, and a SEPA checklist and determination were made after a public participation plan (Resolution C-64-23), consistent with RCW 36.70A.140, was executed and input solicited from the Board of Island County Commissioners (Board), Island County Planning Commission, Community Based Organizations, and the general public.

Key themes from this engagement are summarized below and the elements are listed in parentheses where these topics are addressed in more detail.

Summary of Key Themes:

The summary below is not meant to include all the comments received during the early outreach, but to convey areas where there was consensus about changes needed during this comprehensive plan update.

- Board Priorities: Health, Equity, and Climate Resilience.
(All Elements)
- Utilize creative housing solutions that fit into the rural landscape, accommodate housing at all income levels, and direct the majority of new housing to areas where density already exists.
(Land Use, Housing, and Natural Resources)
- Plan for infrastructure to support new and existing development including community septic systems, connecting new development to public drinking water systems, stormwater management, and better coordination with cities for serving urban growth areas (UGAs).
(Land Use and Capital Facilities)
- Protect sole source aquifers and drinking water through water conservation measures, low impact development, and better utilization of tax and incentive programs.
(Land Use, Natural Resources, and Climate)
- Support large and small agriculture by minimizing surrounding land use conflicts, discouraging conversion of farmland, and minimizing barriers to farmers economic success.
(Land Use, Economic Development, and Natural Resources)
- Protect natural lands from development using best available science, a no-net-loss approach, and strategic conservation of lands that will provide connectivity and value to wildlife and ecosystems.
(Land Use, Natural Resources, Parks, and Climate)
- Prioritize housing for full-time residents and better manage the impact of short-term rentals on the housing stock.
(Housing)
- Prepare for a changing climate so our communities are resilient to the impacts of extreme heat, drought, and rising sea levels.
(Climate)
- Provide multimodal transportation opportunities on both islands and maintain ease of travel throughout the county.
(Capital Facilities and Transportation)
- Support economic resiliency through diversified businesses and support of creative industries.
(Economic Development)

Summary of Major Updates:

Below is a summary of the major updates to the elements in the comprehensive plan. This is not an exhaustive list, please refer to the published documents to review the full changes.

- **Urban Growth Areas (UGAs):**
 - Coupeville: two parcels were added to the Town's UGA.
 - Langley: changed the Priority Growth Area and areas of Long-term Rural Significance identified in the city's Joint Planning Area.
 - Oak Harbor: annexation of lands into city limits and interlocal agreement to study UGA areas for future planning.
 - Freeland: dedicated funding to study wastewater solutions to support growth in the Non-Municipal UGA.
- **Housing:**
 - Changes to remove barriers, address displacement risks, and make adequate provisions for housing at all income levels, consistent with House Bill 1220 (HB 1220) passed in the Washington State legislature in 2021.
- **Environment / Climate:**
 - New Climate Element to meet HB 1181 and the Climate Commitment Act requirements.
 - Increased measures to protect water quality and aquifers from risks of development.
 - Best available science and no-net-loss requirements incorporated into critical areas policies.
 - Policies to support sustainable forest management and increased protections of agricultural lands.
- **Infrastructure:**
 - Combined the Capital Facilities and Utilities Elements.
 - Updates to the County's 6- and 20-year capital facilities project lists.
 - Planning for septic and sewer infrastructure to support housing.
 - Changes to multi-modal level of service, complete streets, active transportation, public transit, transportation/land use integration, and safety for all users.
 - Updates to the parks and recreation inventory, funding strategies, and updates to active and passive uses.
- **Economic Development:**
 - Utilized the goals and policies in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.
- **Clinton:**
 - New subarea plan to address housing, infrastructure, and economic development in the Rural Residential and Rural Center areas of Clinton.

Elements that are not being updated during this comprehensive plan update include Historic Element, Shoreline Element, and the Freeland Subarea Plan.

Summary of Updates to Development Regulations:

Below is a summary of the major changes to the development regulations (also known as Island County Code) that will be adopted with the comprehensive plan update. These changes are specifically related to meeting the housing allocations and demonstrating capacity as required by HB 1220. Other development regulations updates, not related to housing capacity, will be implemented following the periodic update process.

- **Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (LAMIRDs):** clarifying the character and development standards for mixed-use LAMIRDs, including minimum housing densities.
- **Rural Clusters:** revised existing Planned Residential Development code to rural clusters, consistent with neighboring jurisdictions, to encourage affordable clusters through density bonus.
- **Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs):** updates to comply with new state requirements (RCW 36.70A.681) to allow two ADUs in UGAs and allowing sale as individual units; additional permits to support moderate income ADUs.
- **Recreational Vehicles (RVs):** allowance of one RV on any lot zoned for single family residences, for up to one year with permits.
- **Unit Lot Subdivision:** changes to reflect 2023 legislation that allows cities and counties update subdivision and short plat code (RCW 58.17.060(3)).
- **Co-Living Housing:** changes to reflect 2024 legislation that requires cities and counties adopt development regulations allowing co-living housing (RCW 36.70A.535).
- **Supportive Housing:** changes to reflect HB 1220 requirements that all cities and counties adopt code changes to allow supportive housing (RCW 36.70A.070(2)).

The periodic update requires jurisdiction's review and update critical areas regulations (WAC 365-196-485). Island County updated the goals and policies related to critical areas in our comprehensive plan during this update and intends to complete the required Critical Areas Ordinance development regulations updates for consistency with the comprehensive plan beginning in 2026.

Summary of SEPA Checklist and Determination:

State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) is used by government agencies to determine whether the environmental impacts of a proposal are significant. Island County completed a non-project proposal SEPA Checklist for the Island County 2025 Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update and made a Determination of Non-Significance. For additional details and how to comment, please review the published SEPA documents.

Next Steps

The Draft Elements, Development Regulations, and SEPA documents were published on December 10, 2025, for a 60-day comment period, through February 9, 2026, at 4:30 p.m.

Written comments can be submitted:

- On our public engagement website: www.islandcounty2045.com,
- Via email: CompPlan@islandcountywa.gov, or
- Via mail: Planning & Community Development, 1 NE 7th St, Coupeville, WA 98239.

Verbal comments can be submitted:

- At any Planning Commission meeting (in person or online); for the meeting schedule visit: www.islandcountywa.gov/AgendaCenter.
- At Board Tuesday Regular meetings (in person or online); find the zoom link and more information at: www.islandcountywa.gov/AgendaCenter

Following the 60-day comment period, staff will prepare final Elements and Development Regulations for adoption by the Board. Public hearings will be held at the Planning Commission and the Board before adoption. Adoption is anticipated in Spring 2026.