

HOUSING

State Context

Washington’s Growth Management Act (GMA) establishes a goal pertaining to housing, to encourage a full range of housing types to meet the needs of all segments of the population, and to encourage the preservation of the existing housing stock.¹³

Pursuant to the GMA, the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) must specifically address how local comprehensive plans will consider the need for affordable housing, such as housing for all economic segments of the population and parameters for its distribution among counties and cities.¹⁴ In turn, each county and city is obligated to plan for affordable housing consistent with the regional context determined by CPPs.¹⁵ Counties and cities planning under GMA must ensure that, taken collectively, their comprehensive plans provide sufficient land capacity for projected housing growth, consistent with the county’s 20-year population growth allocation.¹⁶

CPPs may not, however, alter the land-use powers of cities.¹⁷

Regional Context

The regional plan, Vision 2040, contains an “overarching goal” for housing that calls for the region to:

“preserve, improve, and expand its housing stock to provide a range of affordable, healthy, and safe housing choices for every resident. The region will continue to promote fair and equal access to housing for all people.”

Vision 2040’s Multi-county Planning Policies also require jurisdictions to establish local housing targets based on population projections, and local housing and employment targets for each designated regional growth center.¹⁸ In addition, the housing policies of Vision 2040 place significant emphasis on the location of housing in proximity to growth and employment centers and to transportation and transit corridors.

¹³ RCW 36.70A.020(4).

¹⁴ RCW 36.70A.210(3)(e) and WAC 365-196-410(2)(e)(ii).

¹⁵ WAC 365-196-410(2)(e)(ii).

¹⁶ RCW 36.70A.115.

¹⁷ RCW 36.70A.210(1).

¹⁸ MPP-D-3.

Snohomish County Housing

Snohomish County continues to face the following housing challenges:

1. Adequate supply of affordable housing for all economic segments in each community.
2. Adequate supply of quality housing options in proximity or satisfactory access to places of employment.
3. Infill housing development and community concerns about density and design.
4. Adequate resources for, and equitable distribution of low-income and special needs housing across the county.
5. Housing types suitable for changing household demographics and an aging population.
6. Maintenance of existing affordable housing stock, including mobile home and manufactured housing.

It is important to remember that housing is created, priced, and demolished as the result of complicated interactions of market forces and government policies that reach across regions and even nations. Snohomish County is part of a regional market where housing is a commodity largely produced by the private sector, with a small but significant portion provided by government housing authorities and non-profit agencies. Sufficient housing, concurrent with employment and population growth and adequate transportation access, is a regional challenge that needs attention at all levels of government.

It is beyond the financial capacity of local governments and nonprofits to satisfy unmet housing needs through their own expenditures. Historically, the federal government has taken the lead in the financial strategies, but federal funding does not meet the need. The housing affordability issue will get worse if federal funding trends continue.

Snohomish County jurisdictions recognize that their actions alone will not eliminate unmet housing needs. Financial constraints, however, are not a valid reason for jurisdictions not to address countywide unmet housing needs in their comprehensive plans' land use and housing strategies.

Despite the limited control that local governments have over housing markets, Snohomish County jurisdictions have made progress in meeting these housing challenges. Snohomish County Tomorrow regularly monitors and analyzes these housing challenges to better understand them and to suggest steps toward their diminishment. The *2007 Housing Evaluation Report* illustrates that, alone and in cooperation, the county and cities have adopted policies, strategies and regulations that help preserve affordable housing or remove barriers or reduce the costs of producing new housing units.¹⁹

¹⁹ The report can be found online at www1.co.snohomish.wa.us/Departments/PDS/Divisions/LR_Planning/Information/Plans/SCT+Reports/HER07.htm

The CPPs on housing are required and intended to support both GMA and Vision 2040. Generally speaking, they follow the organization of the Vision 2040 Multi-county Planning Housing Policies.

Housing Goal

Snohomish County and its cities will promote an affordable lifestyle where residents have access to safe, affordable, and diverse housing options near their jobs and transportation options.

- HO-1** The county and cities shall support the principle that fair and equal access to housing is available to all persons regardless of race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, age, national origin, familial status, source of income, or disability.
- HO-2** The county and cities shall make provisions in their comprehensive plans to accommodate existing and projected housing needs, including a specific assessment of housing needs by economic segment within the community as indicated in the housing report prescribed in CPP HO-5. Those provisions should consider the following factors:
- a. Avoiding further concentrations of low-income and special needs housing.
 - b. Increasing opportunities and capacity for affordable housing in urban centers.
 - c. Increasing opportunities and capacity for affordable housing close to employment, education, shopping, public services, and public transit.
 - d. Increasing opportunities and capacity for affordable and special needs housing in areas where affordable housing is currently lacking.
 - e. Supporting affordable housing opportunities in other Snohomish County jurisdictions, as described below in CPP HO-4.
- HO-3** County and city comprehensive plans shall include policies for accommodating affordable housing goals throughout the County consistent with Vision 2040. The land use and housing elements should demonstrate they can accommodate needed housing availability and facilitate the regional fair share of affordable housing. Housing elements of comprehensive plans shall be periodically evaluated for success in facilitating needed housing.
- HO-4** The county and cities should participate in a multi-jurisdictional affordable housing program or other cooperative effort to promote and contribute to an adequate and diversified supply of housing countywide.
- HO-5** The cities and the county shall collaborate to report housing characteristics and needs in a timely manner for jurisdictions to conduct major comprehensive plan updates and to assess progress toward achieving CPPs on housing. The report shall be sufficiently easy to understand and use for planning and evaluation. To the extent made possible by the availability of valid data, this report shall, for the entire county and each jurisdiction:

- a. Describe the measures that jurisdictions have taken (individually or collectively) to implement or support CPPs on housing, especially measures taken to support housing affordability.
- b. Quantify and map existing characteristics that are relevant to the results prescribed in the CPPs on housing, including (but not limited to):
 - i. The supply of housing units, including subsidized housing, by type, tenure, affordability, and special needs populations served.
 - ii. The availability and general location of existing affordable housing units and the distribution and location of vouchers and similar assistance methods.
 - iii. The supply of undeveloped, partially used and re-developable residential land.
- c. Identify the number of housing units necessary to meet the various housing needs of the projected population, by income ranges, and special needs populations. The number of units identified for each jurisdiction will be utilized for planning purposes and to acknowledge the responsibility of all jurisdictions to plan for affordable housing within the regional context.

HO-6 The county and cities should implement policies and programs that encourage the upgrading of neighborhoods and the rehabilitation and preservation of existing legally established, affordable housing, including but not limited to mobile/manufactured housing and single - room occupancy (SRO) housing.

HO-7 Jurisdictions shall use housing definitions consistent with those of the Snohomish County Tomorrow growth monitoring report. Definitions may be periodically revised based on consideration of local demographic data and the definitions used by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

HO-8 Each jurisdiction's comprehensive plan should reconcile the need to encourage and respect the vitality of established residential neighborhoods with the need to identify and site essential public residential facilities for special needs populations, including those mandated under RCW 36.70A.200.

HO-9 In order to improve the jobs-to-housing balance in Snohomish County, jurisdictions shall adopt comprehensive plans that provide for the development of:

- a. A variety of housing choices, including affordable housing, so that workers at all income levels may choose to live in proximity to existing and planned employment concentrations and transit service; and
- b. Provide for employment opportunities in proximity to existing residential communities.

HO-10 Jurisdictions should encourage the use of environmentally sensitive housing development practices in order to minimize the impacts of growth on the county's natural resource systems.

- HO-11** The county and cities should consider the economic implications of proposed building and land use regulations so that the broader public benefit they serve is achieved with the least additional cost to housing.
- HO-12** The county and cities should minimize housing production costs by considering the use of a variety of infrastructure funding methods, such as existing revenue sources, impact fees, local improvement districts, and general obligation bonds.
- HO-13** Jurisdictions should ensure that their impact fee programs add no more to the cost of each housing unit produced than a fairly-derived proportionate share of the cost of new public facilities necessary to accommodate the housing unit as determined by the impact fee provisions of the Growth Management Act cited in chapter 82.02 RCW.
- HO-14** The county and cities should provide incentives for affordable housing such as height or density bonuses, property tax incentives and parking requirement reductions. The incentives should apply where feasible to encourage affordable housing.