

CITY OF GIG HARBOR COMPREHENSIVE LAND USE PLAN

Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Due to growth pressures within the state, particularly within the Puget Sound Basin, the State legislature found in 1990 that uncoordinated and unplanned growth, together with a lack of common goals toward land conservation, pose a threat to the environment; to the public health, safety, and welfare; and to sustainable economic development. As a result, the legislature adopted the first mandatory comprehensive planning legislation in the State's history, the Growth Management Act. The Act identifies fourteen planning goals which are intended to serve as guides to the development and adoption of comprehensive plans. These goals address urban growth, sprawl reduction, transportation, housing, economic development, property rights, permits, natural resource industries, open space and recreation, environment, citizen participation, public facilities and services, and historic preservation.

Since enactment, the Growth Management Act has been amended with new requirements. Decisions by the Growth Management Hearings Boards have also clarified certain requirements and have established measures to determine consistency of jurisdictions' comprehensive plans and implementing regulations with the Act's provisions.

Growth management planning is a cooperative process that must occur between the county and its constituent cities. Counties are regional governments, while cities are the primary providers of urban services in urban areas. To effectively coordinate land use, infrastructure, and finance throughout the region, the Growth Management Act requires that an overall vision for growth, identified in county-wide planning policies serve as a framework for the development of each jurisdiction's comprehensive plan. The "County-Wide Planning Policies for Pierce County" require that, in addition to the mandatory elements of the Growth Management Act, the following policy areas shall be considered:

- Affordable Housing
- Agricultural Lands
- Economic Development
- Education
- Natural Resources, Open Space and Protection of Environmentally-Sensitive Lands
- Historic, Archaeological and Cultural Preservation
- Siting of Public Capital Facilities of a County-wide or State-wide nature
- Fiscal Impact
- Transportation Strategies
- Urban Growth Areas

In addition to these policy areas, the City of Gig Harbor chose to include additional, non-mandatory elements including:

- Community Design
- Environment
- Economic Development
- Parks and Recreation
- Harbor Element

An Economic Development Element and a Park and Recreation Element are only mandatory if the State has made sufficient funds available for their development two years before a required update for any jurisdiction.

The Growth Management Act requires that each subject county and its cities review and update its comprehensive plan and development regulations by a prescribed year and every seven years thereafter to ensure consistency with the Act. This 2014 update of the City's Comprehensive Plan includes changes to reflect current conditions and new policy requirements. The Planning Commission's recommendation includes minor modifications but no significant departure from the policy groundwork laid out in the 1994 plan.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Citizen involvement has been, and will continue to be, the most important component of comprehensive planning. Without the community's participation at the earliest possible stage, any plan developed regardless of its technical caliber or literary quality will prove meaningless and ineffectual. In recognition of this vital process as the key to the successful development of a revised comprehensive plan, the City of Gig Harbor Planning Commission conducted a "visioning survey" in December of 1992. The purpose of the open house forum was to allow interested citizens the opportunity to participate in a "walk-through" tour and survey of the community and to rank their impressions of 100 photographs of design concepts of the City and its more common and noticeable features.

One hundred and seven citizens took the "tour" and 93 completed the four page rating questionnaire. The results of the survey, released in January of 1993, provided the City Council, the Planning Commission and the Planning Staff a foundation of public opinion upon which to base the revisal of this Comprehensive Planning document. Strong public sentiment was placed on the design or overall appearance of the community, its structures, viewpoints and streetscapes. "Good and bad design" were equally considered and it became clear from the survey respondents that design should play a key component in the location and appearance of future development throughout the community. Equally important opinions were expressed regarding housing scale and character, commercial areas and attendant parking, and parks and open spaces. Of particular interest were the responses to whether or not the opinion cast would have an effect on the comprehensive plan: 50% said yes, 42% said maybe, and only 8% said no. Clearly, there is an expectation that local government will listen and respond to the community's voice. The vision survey was not intended to be a scientifically based assessment, given the size of the population surveyed. Nonetheless, it serves as a valuable benchmark upon which to base policy over the course of revising the plan.

During the spring and summer of 1993, additional public work sessions were conducted by the Planning Commission to assess the community's response to detail policy areas of the comprehensive plan elements. The results of the response to these work sessions were analyzed by the Planning Commission and staff and articulated into the various elements which comprise this revised comprehensive plan.

The 2004 update included four study sessions to which the public was invited. In addition to public input at the study sessions, public comment was invited at two public hearings.

The 2015 update included three open houses, two joint study sessions with City Council and the Planning Commission, four public hearings and over eleven study sessions. The public was notified and invited to all of these meetings through direct mailings, website notices, email updates, and newspaper advertisements.

PLANNING GOALS

The choices which confront the City at this point in its history are significant and could dramatically alter the character and quality of life its community has come to enjoy. Planning for the future while maintaining the same quality of life is the fundamental objective of this comprehensive planning update. To achieve this, four specific goals of this fundamental objective are defined:

1. Identify existing and potential roles which the City may elect to assume within the City and the surrounding urban growth area.
2. Determine the social, physical and economic implications involved with each role.
3. Determine which roles and attendant social, physical and economic relationships are most advantageous to the City.
4. Develop and implement the necessary public programs and policies needed to accomplish the primary objective.

PLAN IMPLEMENTATION AND INTERPRETATION

The revised Comprehensive Land Use Plan serves as the basic blueprint for the City's growth within the defined urban area over the next twenty years. The plan is specific in that it formulates a growth management plan based upon population demographics, suitable land available for development, residential densities and the capability of the City to provide needed public services such as sewer, water, parks, police protection and adequate administrative facilities. The Plan does not purport to be the legal instrument to carry out the objectives of the Plan. This is the role of several programs and documents including the City's capital facilities plan, the annual budget process, the zoning code, design review guidelines, shoreline master program, floodplain management codes, environmental protection code and any future codes the City adopts which would better serve the interest of the Community and the intent of the Plan.

The Comprehensive Plan is not a "stand-alone" document; that is, the Plan has an active relationship with other plans and programs which the City may employ to further the basic goals and objectives of the Plan. The Comprehensive Plan, by itself, is not a regulatory document but, instead, relies upon the implementing ordinances (zoning, shoreline, floodplain, etc.) to carry out the overall objectives of the Plan. The Comprehensive Plan does, however, have the force of law in that it must be internally consistent and the laws which implement it must be in conformance with the Plan.

REGIONAL PLANNING STATEMENT

Gig Harbor's Comprehensive Plan has been updated based on residential and employment targets that align with VISION 2040, the Washington State Growth Management Act, and Pierce County Countywide Planning Policies. Through the targeting process we have identified the number of housing units and planned employment growth in the city for the year 2030.

The 2015 update to the City's Comprehensive Plan provides a sustainable framework for the future growth allocation in Gig Harbor, which is designated as a small city under the growth framework of VISION 2040. We have incorporated a systems approach to planning and decision-making that addresses protection of the natural environment. The plan commits to maintaining and restoring ecosystems, through steps to conserve key habitats, clean up polluted waterways, and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The plan includes provisions that ensure that a healthy environment remains available for future generations in Gig Harbor.

The Comprehensive Plan addresses each of the policy areas in VISION 2040. We advance environmentally friendly development techniques, such as low-impact landscaping. Our plan includes design guidelines for community development, integrating the pedestrian experience into the fabric of the community through thoughtful site design policies. The housing element commits to expanding housing options in all income levels to meet the diverse needs of both current and future residents. We have an economic development element in the plan that supports job creation, investing in all people, creating great communities, and maintaining a high quality of life. Our transportation element advances cleaner and more sustainable mobility, with provisions for complete streets, green streets, and context-sensitive design. We have programs and strategies to advance alternatives to driving alone and coordinate our transportation planning with neighboring jurisdictions through the interactions with Pierce Transit. We commit to conservation methods in the provision of public services.

The City of Gig Harbor recognizes our role as a 'Small City' under the PSRC Regional Growth Strategy of Vision 2040. The following planning goals and policies address our coordination and alignment with that designation under the multi-county planning policies. Through the 2017 and 2018 Comprehensive Plan amendment process, we have rewritten our Transportation Element and included updates to the amended Pierce County growth targets in our Economic Development Element. It is the City's intent to limit growth in the City of Gig Harbor to the adopted targets for the year 2030 and work with the community to identify the future plan and zoning amendments in preparation for the next GMA mandated major periodic update.

CONCURRENCY

The Growth Management Act requires that public facilities and services necessary to serve new development at adopted levels of service must be available at the time of development. Specifically, RCW 36.70A.020(12) states:

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.

Essentially, the City must develop and adopt levels of standards for public facilities which are potentially impacted by growth from new development. These standards, referred to as level of service (or LOS), can be applied to such public facilities such as transportation (streets and intersections), parks, schools, sewer and water. If the required facilities are not available or are not anticipated for an area within a six year period, a development may not proceed unless the City is capable of providing the required public improvements. or a financial commitment is in place to provide the required public improvements so that the adopted LOS is attained.

To be concurrent means that improvements or municipal service strategies are in place at the time of development, and, in the case of transportation facilities, that a financial commitment is in place to complete the improvements or strategies within six years. The relationship between the urban growth area boundary, public facility requirements, consistency and concurrency are a strong combination to assure that growth which is to be accommodated is strongly dependent upon the provisions and financing of public facilities and services to meet area demands.

In order to offset the costs of providing new or expanded public facilities such as schools, parks and waste water treatment facilities required of new developments, the City may consider the adoption of an impact fee schedule that will provide for new developments to proportionately offset the costs of new public facilities as a result of new development. An impact fee schedule would be adopted as part of the implementation program of this comprehensive plan update. Impact fees are not meant to be the sole source of funding for new facilities.