

Frequently Asked Questions - Comprehensive Planning in Thurston County

1. Who is the Local Good Governance Coalition (LGGC)?

In February of 2022, several community groups came together to form the [Local Good Governance Coalition](#) (LGGC) with the mission to connect local organizations in the joint work of supporting of the environment, affordable housing, as well as with a focus of engaging the community in local land use and budget policies and the quasi-judicial processes.

2. What is the Growth Management Act?

The Growth Management Act (GMA) is a series of state statutes, first adopted in 1990, that requires fast-growing cities and counties to develop a comprehensive plan to manage their population growth. It is primarily codified under [Chapter 36.70A RCW](#), although it has been amended and added to in several other parts of the RCW.

Under [RCW 36.70A.020](#), the GMA establishes a series of 13 goals that should act as the basis of all comprehensive plans. The legislature added the goals and policies of the Shoreline Management Act as the fourteenth GMA goal ([RCW 36.70A.480](#)). The shoreline goals may be found at [RCW 90.58.020](#).

3. What are the goals under the Growth Management Act?

The goals of the GMA set the foundation for the comprehensive plans. They include:

1. Encourage compact urban growth
2. Reduce Sprawl
3. Encourage coordinated, multimodal transportation
4. Plan for and accommodate for affordable housing
5. Encourage economic development
6. Protect property rights
7. Predictable permitting
8. Maintain natural resource industries
9. Retain open space, enhance recreation
10. Protect the environment
11. Encourage participation
12. Ensure availability of public facilities and services
13. Encourage historic preservation
14. Manage shoreline development

What jurisdiction must undertake Comprehensive Planning?

Based on the requirements in [RCW 36.70A.040](#), 18 counties, including Thurston County, and all the cities and towns within them, are required to "fully plan" under the GMA.

An additional 11 counties had originally opted to fully plan, although one county (Ferry County) later opted out under [EHB 1224](#) (2014), which gave counties under 20,000 population the option to opt out by December 31, 2015. The 28 "fully planning" counties make up about 95% of the state's population. The 10 counties that opted to "fully plan" must plan for critical areas and natural resource land only under the GMA. For more information on the requirements for each county are, please see the [Department of Commerce Website](#).

4. What is a Comprehensive Plan?

The comprehensive plan is the centerpiece of local planning and articulates a series of goals, objectives, policies, actions, and standards that are intended to guide day-to-day decisions by elected officials and local government staff.

The Plan includes elements to address all physical components of the community, including land use, transportation, housing, parks, public facilities, and economic development. Each element includes goals, objectives and policies aimed at making our community better and more stable.

The GMA lays out the following mandatory and optional comprehensive elements [RCW 36.70A.070](#):

Mandatory Comp Plan Elements

- Land Use
- Housing
- Capital Facilities Plan
- Utilities
- Rural Development (counties only)
- Transportation
- Ports (mandatory for cities with annual maritime port revenues exceeding \$60 million, [RCW 36.70A.085](#))

Optional Comp Plan Elements

- Economic Development*
- Parks and Recreation*
- Conservation ([RCW 36.70A.080](#))
- Solar Energy ([RCW 36.70A.080](#))
- Recreation ([RCW 36.70A.080](#))
- Subarea Plans (neighborhoods, rural villages, urban growth areas, tribal areas, etc.)
- Ports (optional for cities with annual maritime port revenues of \$20 million to \$60 million, [RCW 36.70A.085](#))

The elements with an asterisk are listed as mandatory in [RCW 36.70A.070\(7\)](#) and (8), but they are actually optional because funds have not been appropriated to help pay for preparing them, per [RCW 36.70A.070\(9\)](#).

While all of these elements are important, the land use element sets the direction of future growth in a community and is usually depicted as a future land use map. The future land use map, which is policy-oriented, is then implemented in large part by the official zoning map, a regulatory tool.

Comprehensive plans must also address "essential public facilities" that are typically difficult to site, such as airports, educational facilities, transportation facilities, and correctional facilities.

Each Washington city and county must periodically review and, if needed, revise its comprehensive plan and development regulations every ten years to ensure that they comply with the GMA, as per the schedule

provided in RCW 36.70A.130. Comprehensive plan amendments may be adopted on a more frequent basis (with some communities having established a formal annual amendment process), but no more than once per year.

The GMA places a strong emphasis on implementation, since most goals, objectives, and policies in a comprehensive plan cannot be achieved without strong regulatory and financial support (such as zoning, capital spending, and non-capital spending). Under the GMA, a local agency's development regulations (such as zoning) and capital budget decisions must be made in conformity with its comprehensive plan (RCW 36.70A.120).

5. What is the Timeline for Thurston County Jurisdictions for Comprehensive Planning?

Updating the various sections of each jurisdiction's Comprehensive Plans will take place starting in 2022 and will go through late 2024. Jurisdictions must pass and submit their plan to the state by June 30, 2025.

6. What is the Growth Management Hearings Board?

The [Growth Management Hearings Board](#) resolves disputes concerning comprehensive plans and development regulations adopted under the GMA. The board is made up of five members from three distinct geographic areas: Eastern Washington, Central Puget Sound, and Western Washington. See [RCW 36.70A.250](#)

Challenges to the GMA are heard by a three-member panel comprised of two members residing in the geographic area of a challenge, with one acting as the presiding officer, and a third member drawn from one of the other regions. Each hearing panel must include an attorney and a former city or county elected official and must "reflect the political composition of the board" ([RCW 36.70A.260](#)).

7. What are the goals of the Local Good Governance Coalition for the Comprehensive Planning process?

- 1) Educate the public on the process
- 2) Engage the public in the process
- 3) Regarding Climate Change:
 - Ask elected officials to update their Comprehensive Plan through a "climate and equity" lens, meaning that climate change and subsequent factors will be mentioned throughout the plans versus in a separate section, and to recognize that the effects of climate change often affect those most vulnerable the hardest.
 - Ask elected officials to include in their Comprehensive Plans their commitments to the [Thurston Climate Mitigation Plan](#) (TCMP). The four principal jurisdictions of Thurston County (the County and the Cities of Olympia, Lacey, and Tumwater) adopted the TCMP in 2021, committing to collectively working together to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

- Ask officials to include actions in the Comprehensive Plan to meet the requirements of the [Climate Commitment Act](#) (CCA) - In 2021, the Washington Legislature passed the CCA which establishes a comprehensive program to reduce carbon pollution and achieve greenhouse gas limits set in state law. The program will start Jan. 1, 2023.
- Include the actions of Washington State [House Bill #1099](#) which didn't pass through the Legislative Branch in early 2022. The bill's goal was to improve the state's climate response through updates to the state's comprehensive planning framework.

4) Regarding Housing:

- While the Washington State [House Bill 1220](#) passed in 2021, the LGGC is hoping that our elected officials will make sure their commitments in the Comprehensive Plans meet and/or exceed what's called for in the bill. The bill is specific to supporting emergency shelters and housing through local planning and development regulations.
- Ask officials to include actions of Washington State [House Bill 1782](#) which was requested by the Governor, but did not pass in 2022. The actions from 1782 would create additional middle housing near transit and in areas traditionally dedicated to single-family detached housing.

8. Upcoming Events

The second Comprehensive Planning session hosted by the LGGC will take place on August 17th at 6:30pm at the Rose Garden Shelter a Squaxin Park (formerly Priest Point) and will include members of city and county planning staff. A third session is in the early stages of development.

9. How Can I Be Involved?

- 1) Engage with elected officials through giving public testimony and personal meetings,
- 2) Writing letters and making phone calls to your elected officials,
- 3) Talking to your friends and family about the future of our community,
- 4) Join the LGGC's Comprehensive Planning Listserv to stay informed. You will receive an invite by email.
- 5) Engage with your favorite affordable housing or environmental organization.
- 6) Stay engaged with the organizations of the [Local Good Governance Coalition](#).

10. Where Can I Find My Jurisdiction's Current Comprehensive Plan and Information for Public Engagement for this Update Process? See jurisdictional links below.

Thurston County –

- Current Comprehensive Plan - <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/Pages/comp-plan-current.aspx>
- Comprehensive Planning Home – Watch for updates here. <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/Pages/comp-plan.aspx>
- Other related links - <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/planningdocuments/2021%20Tumwater%20Joint%20Plan.pdf>

City of Olympia

- Current Comprehensive Plan - <https://www.codepublishing.com/WA/Olympia/?compplan/OlympiaCPNT.html>
- Comprehensive Planning Home – Watch for updates here. Other related links - https://www.olympiawa.gov/government/codes,_plans_standards/olympia_comprehensive_plan.php

City of Tumwater

- Current Comprehensive Plan - <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/Pages/comp-plan-current.aspx>
- Comprehensive Planning Home and Current Comprehensive Plan – Watch for updates here. <https://www.ci.tumwater.wa.us/departments/community-development/tumwater-comprehensive-plan>
- Other related links - <https://www.thurstoncountywa.gov/planning/planningdocuments/2021%20Tumwater%20Joint%20Plan.pdf>

City of Lacey

- Comprehensive Planning Home and Current Comprehensive Plan – Watch for updates here. - <https://cityoflacey.org/comprehensive-planning/>