



**Snohomish County**  
**Planning and Development Services**

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**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Snohomish County Planning Commission

FROM: Stephen Toy, Principal Demographer

SUBJECT: Population and Employment Element

DATE: March 10, 2023

**Dave Somers**  
*County Executive*

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this staff report is to outline and provide information on staff-recommended amendments to the Population and Employment Element of Snohomish County's GMA Comprehensive Plan. A briefing on the recommended amendments is scheduled for the March 28, 2023, Planning Commission meeting.

**BACKGROUND**

The proposed Population and Employment Element of Snohomish County's GMA Comprehensive Plan ("Plan") describes the legislative requirements that guide the development of the 20-year growth targets that the county's 2024 plan update is based upon. Data sources and interjurisdictional processes that were used are also described.

Growth forecasts are a foundational step in the development of a comprehensive plan. Under the Growth Management Act (GMA), they provide the framework for establishing the required internal consistency among the various comprehensive plan elements. Long-range planning direction provided by the plan on various GMA requirements such as the sizing of the county's urban growth area (UGA), and future land use, housing, capital facility, and transportation needs, all stem from a set of shared growth assumptions.

Following policy direction in the countywide planning policies (CPPs) for Snohomish County, the 20-year growth targets were developed using the collaborative, interjurisdictional planning process of Snohomish County Tomorrow (SCT), a growth management planning forum consisting of members representing cities, tribes, and the county. They were developed for cities and unincorporated urban and rural areas. The CPPs require that the growth targets are based on the following sources:

- The most recent Washington State Office of Financial Management (OFM) population projections for Snohomish County, as required by the GMA, and
- The Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC) VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy (RGS).

A short description of the process that SCT followed to develop the 20-year growth targets based on these data sources and policy requirements is provided in the proposed Element. The CPPs require that the resulting SCT growth target recommendation be forwarded to the County Council for consideration and adoption into the CPPs. This step was accomplished on February 23, 2022 with the County Council adoption of Ordinance [No. 22-003](#).

At this point, the 20-year growth targets are termed “initial growth targets,” and are to be used by jurisdictions for at least one of the plan alternatives studied for their 2024 plan updates. The Population and Employment Element will contain the outcome of this process for unincorporated portions of Snohomish County by eventually including the 20-year growth targets associated with the council’s plan alternative chosen for adoption in the county’s 2024 plan update.

Following adoption of the 2024 plan updates by the other jurisdictions in Snohomish County, SCT will resolve any differences between county and city growth target choices by recommending “reconciled growth targets,” to the County Council for adoption in the CPPs. The reconciled targets would then be amended into the Population and Employment Element of the county’s plan.

The introductory narrative to the Population and Employment Element has been amended to reflect the current policy context, process, and data sources that pertain to the development of the growth targets used for the county’s 2024 plan update. The following section describes the specific policy amendments being proposed by staff.

### **PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS**

The policy table attached to this staff report shows all the amendments that staff is proposing to the Population and Employment Element. This section describes the key proposed amendments and the rationale for them.

**Policy PE 1.A.2** is proposed to be revised in order to apply key policy direction from the VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy to the growth allocation process within unincorporated urban areas. This includes:

- An emphasis on prioritizing locations in or near urban centers and high-capacity transit as areas for future growth
- Allocating growth in a way that improves the jobs/housing balance, and
- Support for infill development within the UGA.

**Policy PE 1.B.2** is proposed to be revised to establish a population allocation to areas outside the UGA in Snohomish County at 4.5% of projected countywide population growth, consistent with direction provided in the VISION 2050 RGS.

All other proposed amendments to this element fall into the housekeeping category.

### **ANALYSIS**

The following analysis provides a summary of the proposed amendments’ compliance with state law, and regional and countywide planning policies.

## **Compliance with State Law**

The proposed amendments comply with the GMA by developing and including in the 2024 plan update, growth target allocations for county subareas that establish the amount of growth that is projected for the succeeding 20-year planning period.

RCW 36.70A.110 (2) Comprehensive plans—Urban growth areas.

(2) Based upon the growth management population projection made for the county by the office of financial management, the county and each city within the county shall include areas and densities sufficient to permit the urban growth that is projected to occur in the county or city for the succeeding twenty-year period.

## **Compliance with the Multi-County Planning Policies**

The proposed amendments comply with the VISION 2050 Multi-County Planning Policies (MPPs) by developing and including in the 2024 plan update, growth target allocations for county subareas that are consistent with the policy direction contained in VISION 2050 and the Regional Growth Strategy.

MPP-RGS-1

Implement the Regional Growth Strategy through regional policies and programs, countywide planning policies and growth targets, local plans, and development regulations.

MPP-RGS-14

Manage and reduce rural growth rates over time, consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy, to maintain rural landscapes and lifestyles and protect resource lands and the environment.

The specific rural growth percentage of 4.5% proposed in Policy PE 1.B.2 is based on the share of 2017-2050 Snohomish County's total population growth that is identified for rural areas as established in VISION 2050 Regional Growth Strategy (Figure 6 on page 30). This percentage is interpreted as a maximum since, according to the regional plan (on page 37), "Counties are encouraged to plan for even lower growth—where possible—than contained in the Regional Growth Strategy."

## **Compliance with the Countywide Planning Policies**

The proposed amendments comply with the Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County by developing and including in the 2024 plan update, growth target allocations for county subareas that are consistent with the following policy direction contained in the CPPs.

CPP GF-5

...The growth target development process in Snohomish County shall use the procedures in Appendix C.

Revised language in Policy PE 1.A.2 provides greater consistency with the growth allocation description in the updated Countywide Planning Policies, Appendix C (Growth Target Procedures Steps for GF-5), 1c (Initial Growth Targets).

CPP DP-26:

Density and development standards in rural and resource areas shall work to manage and reduce rural growth rates over time, consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy, GF-5, and the growth targets in Appendix B.

### **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The GMA requires early and continuous public participation (GOAL 11 and RCW 36.70A.140). Public participation on the Population and Employment Element has been provided to date through:

- Providing an opportunity for public input through the SEPA Environmental Impact Statement Scoping period which began on November 1, 2021, and ended on December 3, 2021.
- Making draft policies available for a 30-day early public comment period which began on November 1, 2022 and ended on November 30, 2022.
- Continuously through the 2024 Update project website.

Highlights of public input received to date includes:

During the early public comment period held throughout November 2022, seven sets of comments were received on the Population and Employment Element. All comments were reviewed and considered by PDS staff. Three comments were in support of the proposed policy amendments, one set of comments suggested policy language changes and additional policy direction, and the remainder offered general observations and concerns about Snohomish County growth in general or about growth concerns in specific locations. No changes to the policies were made based on public comment, however, additional housekeeping amendments have been made to update appendix and table references.

All public comments are available in the index of records.

### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

The County issued a Determination of Significance (DS) for the 2024 Update to the Plan on November 1, 2021. A Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) will likely be issued in September 2023, satisfying State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review.

### **NOTIFICATION OF STATE AGENCIES**

Pursuant to RCW 36.70A.106, a notice of intent to adopt the proposed regulations and standards will be transmitted to the Washington State Department of Commerce for the entirety of the 2024 Update to the Plan in September 2023.

### **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends approval of the proposed plan amendments to the Population and Employment Element shown in Attachments A and B of this staff report.

### **ACTION REQUESTED**

The Planning Commission is requested to hold a public hearing, consider the proposed comprehensive plan amendments, and provide a recommendation to the County Council. The Planning Commission can recommend approval of the amendments with supporting findings of fact as proposed or modified, deny the proposal with findings, or amend the proposal with appropriate findings.

cc: Ken Klein, Executive Director  
Mike McCrary, PDS Director  
David Killingstad, PDS Long Range Planning Manager  
Ryan Countryman, Legislative Analyst

Attachments

**Attachment A - Draft Population and Employment Element Narrative**

**Attachment B - Policy Summary Table**

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