



**Snohomish County**

**Planning and Development Services**

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**MEMORANDUM**

TO: Snohomish County Planning Commission

**Dave Somers**  
*County Executive*

FROM: Matthew Siddons, Senior Planner

SUBJECT: Urban Core Subarea Element, Snohomish County Comprehensive Plan

DATE: May 10, 2023

**INTRODUCTION**

The purpose of this staff report is to provide information on the development of the Urban Core Subarea element of Snohomish County's Growth Management Act (GMA) Comprehensive Plan ("Plan"). A briefing on the recommended language is scheduled for the June 27, 2023, Planning Commission meeting.

**BACKGROUND**

The purpose of this element is to establish goals and policies for the Urban Core Subarea Plan. A subarea plan is a long range planning document for a specific geographical area. It includes goals and policies that form the planning framework for future development. The policy framework for the subarea plan comes from the Growth Management Act (GMA), Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC's) VISION 2050, and the Snohomish County Countywide Planning Policies. The Urban Core Subarea is an element within the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan serves as the document that guides County decisions and services including growth and development. Other elements in the Comprehensive Plan include Land Use, Transportation, Capital Facilities and Utilities, and Parks, Recreation, and Open Space. The goals and policies in these elements also apply to the Urban Core Subarea Plan. The Urban Core Subarea Plan provides additional detailed policies to a specific geographic location within the unincorporated Southwest Urban Growth Area.

The subarea is generally located between the cities of Everett, Mill Creek, Lynnwood, and Mukilteo. This area will be serviced in the future by light rail transit as part of Sound Transit's Everett Link extension. The vision of the Urban Core Subarea Plan is to create a plan for a complete community with a variety of housing, services, and amenities in proximity that can be accessed by multi-modal transportation modes including transit, walking, and cycling.

In 2016, voters approved a package of regional improvements known as Sound Transit 3 (ST3). The representative project for ST3 proposed extending light rail service from Lynnwood City Center to Everett station. The Everett Link extension will add 16 miles of light rail and six new stations connecting Snohomish County to the Puget Sound regional light rail network. The project will connect through the City of Lynnwood, unincorporated Snohomish County, and the City of Everett. There are two station locations proposed in unincorporated Snohomish County at Ash Way and 164th St SW, and at Mariner

near the intersection of 128th St SW and I-5. A third provisional station is proposed at SR 99/Airport Road. This station is dependent on additional funding. The timeline for the unincorporated Snohomish County stations opening for service operations is 2037. Currently, Sound Transit beginning environmental review process, which includes the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement and a series of technical reports.

Between 2018 and 2019, Snohomish County initiated station area planning work to identify locally favored light rail station options at 164th St and 128th St. This initial planning work included extensive public outreach seeking community input and establishing relationships with cities and partner agencies. From Spring 2020 to Fall 2021, Snohomish County conducted additional public outreach. The purpose was to collect input from people who live, work, and travel through the Urban Core Subarea. Total combined outreach included four stakeholder workshops, two open houses, three online open houses, and four online surveys/workshops. The online open houses combined had over 7,000 total participants and over 700 submitted comments. On February 18, 2020, County Council approved Joint Resolution No. 20-004 expressing support for Snohomish County light rail station planning.

The Urban Core Subarea Plan Element builds upon the previous outreach work completed by Snohomish County. The feedback from public outreach was used to inform decisions regarding locally favored station locations and setting the boundaries of the Urban Core Subarea. The boundaries of the plan incorporate the future station areas, and a section of the SR 99 corridor. Additional outreach work completed as part of the Comprehensive Plan update has been included in the Public Participation section of this report.

## **PROPOSED COMPREHENSIVE PLAN AMENDMENTS**

The Urban Core Subarea Plan is a new element in the Comprehensive Plan. The narratives, policies, and maps are all new additions to the Comprehensive Plan. This element provides detailed planning guidance and policies specific to the Urban Core Subarea. The intent is to develop urban centers around light rail stations. These centers will serve as the service, amenity, and recreational focal points for the local community. The Urban Core Subarea Plan will guide future decisions on land use and transportation planning. This includes the introduction of new future land use designations for Light Rail Community and Mixed-Use Corridor. The Urban Core Subarea also supports investments in housing, capital facilities and utilities, and economic development programs.

The Urban Core Subarea Plan is comprised of ten sub-elements. A description of each of the sub-elements is provided.

- Introduction
  - Provides an overview of the Everett Link extension and planning framework.
- Community Profile
  - Provides a historical and demographic overview of the community.
- Interjurisdictional Collaboration
  - Interjurisdictional collaboration on future planning in the Urban Core Subarea.
  - Collaboration with Sound Transit on siting of light rail stations including reviewing NEPA and traffic studies.
  - Coordinate land use policies along the SR 99 corridor with adjacent municipalities.
- Environment and Climate Change
  - Promote the conservation of streams, wetlands, and environmentally critical areas.
  - Enhance the urban tree canopy by new plantings and preserving existing tree stands.
  - Encourage the expansion of electric transportation infrastructure.

- Land Use and Urban Design
  - The creation and implementation of Light Rail Community and Mixed-Use Corridor land use designations for the Subarea.
  - Policies supporting higher densities and mixed-use development in lands designated as Light Rail Community
  - Policies regarding building designs, amenity features, and parking reductions.
  - The Urban Low Density Residential (ULDR) designation shall not be applied within the Subarea. Single family housing will still be permitted under Urban Medium Density Residential (UMDR).
- Housing
  - Establish a targeted inclusionary housing program within areas designated as Light Rail Community and Mixed-Use Corridor.
  - Increase housing variety at a range of affordability levels including missing middle housing such as duplexes, triplexes, fourplexes, and townhomes.
  - Establish indicators for monitoring the affordability and availability of housing for all income levels.
- Transportation and Mobility
  - General mobility policies that support multi-modal transportation and infrastructure improvements.
  - Develop and implement street typologies and design guidelines in the Subarea.
  - Transit policies that support collaboration with Sound Transit and Community Transit to expand transit.
  - The plan includes a list of transportation projects needed in the subarea to implement the subarea policies including projects that support pedestrian and bicycle connectivity and access, support transit speed and reliability, and address roadway congestion.
- Parks, Recreation, and Open Space
  - Identify and mitigate barriers to public access to parks and open spaces.
  - Enhance connectivity to the Interurban Trail and North Creek Trail.
  - Acquire lands for new urban parks and open spaces near transit and high-density residential developments.
- Capital Facilities and Utilities
  - Work with service providers to extend services in a manner consistent with growth patterns supported in the Comprehensive Plan.
  - Coordinate with service and utility providers to identify opportunities for co-location of public facilities and infrastructure.
  - The County should coordinate with wastewater service providers to identify unsewered urban enclaves.
- Economic Development
  - Business retention, expansion, and workforce training policies for educational and skills training.
  - Land development and acquisition policies regarding parcel assemblage for the County.

The full element narrative is included as Attachment A and the policy table as Attachment B includes the proposed goals and policies for the Urban Core Subarea element.

## **ANALYSIS**

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

### **Compliance with State Law**

The GMA planning goals adopted in RCW 36.70A.020 guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans. Several of these goals are addressed in the Urban Core Subarea Plan including urban growth, transportation, housing, economic development, open space and recreation, environment, and public facilities and services.

Under the GMA, subarea plans may be included with comprehensive plans as optional elements. The subarea must be consistent with the comprehensive plan.

#### **RCW 36.70A.080 Comprehensive plans- Optional elements**

- (2) "A comprehensive plan may include, where appropriate, subarea plans, each of which is consistent with the comprehensive plan."

The Urban Core Subarea element is consistent with the Comprehensive Plan and meets the requirements of the GMA.

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

The Urban Core Subarea element policies comply with VISION 2050 Multi-County Planning Policies (MPPs) by adopting policies that conform to the following MPPs:

- MPP-DP-54 "Tailor concurrency programs for centers and other subareas to encourage development that can be supported by transit."
- MPP-DP-1 "Develop high-quality, compact urban communities throughout the region's urban growth area that impart a sense of place, preserve local character, provide for mixed uses and choices in housing types, and encourage walking, bicycling, and transit use."
- MPP-DP-22 "Plan for densities that maximize benefits of transit investments in high-capacity transit station areas that are expected to attract significant new population or employment growth."
- MPP-DP-25 "Support the development of centers within all jurisdictions, including high-capacity transit station areas and countywide and local centers."

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

The proposed amendments to the Economic Development element comply with the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) for Snohomish County by adopting policies that conform to the following CPPs:

- DP-10 "The County and cities shall coordinate the designation and planning of regional, countywide, and local centers with transit service and other service providers to promote well-designed and transit oriented developments that enhance economic development opportunities for all residents, address environmental goals, and reduce vehicle miles traveled and greenhouse gas emissions from transportation."
- DP-11 "Consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy and growth targets in Appendix B, the County and cities should encourage higher residential densities and greater employment concentrations in Urban Growth Areas by revising development regulations and incentive programs as appropriate."

- DP-13 “The County and cities should integrate the desirable qualities of existing residential neighborhoods when planning for urban centers and mixed-use developments. Jurisdictions should adopt design guidelines and standards for urban centers to provide for compact, efficient site design that integrates building design with multimodal transportation facilities and publicly accessible open spaces.”
- DP-14 “The County and cities should promote and focus new compact urban growth in local centers, countywide centers, regional centers, and transit emphasis corridors.”
- DP-18 “In coordination with transit agencies, jurisdictions that are served by transit should, where appropriate, enact transit oriented development policies and development standards. Transit oriented development should include the following common elements:
  - a. Located to support the development of designated local growth centers, countywide growth centers, regional growth centers, and existing and planned transit emphasis corridors;
  - b. Include pedestrian scale neighborhoods and activity centers to stimulate use of transit and ride sharing;
  - c. Plan for an appropriate intensity and mix of development, including both employment and housing options, that support transit service; and
  - d. Plan for growth near high-capacity transit.”

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

### **Public Participation Opportunities**

RCW 36.70A.140 requires early and continuous public participation (GOAL 11). Public participation for the Urban Core Subarea element has been provided to date through:

- Information regarding a Sound Transit open house session and the draft Urban Core Subarea Plan policies were posted on the County’s [Light Rail Communities webpage](#).
- County employees staffed a table at Sound Transit’s Everett Link Extension Scoping meeting held at Cascade High School on February 15, 2023. The County gave information handouts to attendees regarding the Urban Core Subarea Plan. There was a sign-up sheet for people to receive email notifications about the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update. Over 1,600 members of the public attended the meeting, making it Sound Transit’s best attended open house event.
- The draft Urban Core Subarea policies were posted on [the 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update webpage](#) for 31-day public comment from March 1-31, 2023.
- A notification email regarding the comment period for the Urban Core Subarea policies was sent to the following:
  - The 2024 Comprehensive Plan Update contacts list.
  - Property owners and developers who have previously expressed interest in the subarea planning process.
  - Contacts in adjacent cities, service providers, and utility providers that operate within the subarea.
- Virtual meetings on the draft Urban Core Subarea policies were held for interested parties:
  - March 9, 2023, for adjacent municipalities, service providers, and utility providers. The meeting was attended by representatives from Sound Transit, Community Transit, and the cities of Everett, Lynnwood, Mill Creek, and Mukilteo.

- March 23, 2023, with representatives for a property owner along 164th St SW.
- March 24, 2023, for the Housing Authority of Snohomish County (HASCO).

### **Public Participation Feedback**

Comments were received from posting on the 2024 Update project website, and through email to County employees.

- A total of 21 responses were submitted comments regarding the draft Urban Core Subarea policies. These included city governments, local agencies, property owners, and members of the public.
- The cities of Lynnwood and Mill Creek submitted comments regarding Interjurisdictional Coordination, Land Use, Transportation, and Capital Facilities.
- Policies UC 3.11 and UC 3.12 were added to the Interjurisdictional Collaboration subelement regarding interlocal agreements and annexations.
- Comments were submitted on policy UC 5.7 regarding off-street parking reductions for developments near high-capacity transit systems. New wording was added that off-street parking reductions should meeting community and market demands.
- There are concerns about displacement risk of existing residences, businesses, and institutions caused by redevelopment. Policy UC 5.5 supports the preservation and establishment of affordable and flexible spaces for small businesses and start-ups. Policy UC 5.6 was added regarding strategies to mitigate the risk of displacement for community and cultural facilities. Policies UC 6.7 and UC 6.8 support mitigation and relocation strategies for households that are at risk of displacement.
- Service Providers submitted comments on the Capital Facilities and Utilities subelement. This included the County engaging and coordinating with service providers to identify opportunities for the co-location of public facilities. Policy 9.7 supports the coordination with wastewater service providers to identify unsewered urban enclaves.
- 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.

### **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 comprehensive plan amendments and findings contained in this staff report.

### **ACTION REQUESTED**

The Planning Commission is requested to hold a public hearing, consider the proposed comprehensive plan element, and provide a recommendation to the County Council. The Planning Commission can recommend approval of the element 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 Manager  
Ryan Countryman, Legislative Analyst

**Attachments**

**Attachment A – Draft Urban Core Subarea Element Narrative**

**Attachment B – Draft Urban Core Subarea Policy Summary Table**