

Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

I-1 THE MASON COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Why Mason County Is Planning.

The comprehensive plan serves to guide public decision making in Mason County. The plan states the goals for the future that have been identified by the citizens of the county or specified by the state in the Growth Management Act as state-wide goals. Mason County is growing, and the comprehensive plan looks ahead to the year 2014 and sets policies for county investments in roads, water, sewer, parks, and all other public facilities provided by the county. It projects what demands will be created by population increases in that time and how best to respond to these needs. It guides the land development regulations which will manage private growth and ensures that the resource lands and the environment are protected, efficient provision for public services are made, and that progress is made on the other goals of county and its citizens.

How is the comprehensive plan organized.

The first chapter of the Mason County Comprehensive Plan is a general introduction to the plan and the county. The second chapter discusses how the plan was created and what the county's goals and county-wide planning policies are. In the third chapter of the plan, there are planning policies for various subject areas. The next several chapters each address particular subjects or elements of the plan. These elements of the comprehensive plan are land use and rural lands, housing, capital facilities, utilities and transportation.

I-2 THE GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT PLANNING PROCESS

GMA Overview

Mason County is planning under the authority and requirements of the Growth Management Act. The Act establishes a number of requirements for local comprehensive planning. It identifies specific goals that comprehensive plans are to achieve, prescribes the elements each plan is to contain, establishes requirements for regulations, mandates the “urban growth area,” requires local governments to demonstrate how they will pay for the improvements and facilities called for in their plans, and requires extensive public participation in the planning process.

Relationship of the Plan Elements

All of the elements of the comprehensive plan must be consistent with each other and with the goals and policies identified in the plan. The land use element provides the basis for other elements of the county’s comprehensive plan. Consistency with other plan elements is, therefore, crucial to the success of the comprehensive plan.

Land Use

The Land Use Element provides for enough developable land to meet the County’s 20-year population forecast and the related demand for housing, transportation, capital facilities, and utilities. If sufficient land is not identified in the land use element, the County must revise one or all of the plan elements to ensure that there is sufficient land base to meet the physical requirements of all plan elements.

Housing

The Housing Element identifies the county’s demand for housing over the next 20 years. It then analyzes the ability of the county to accommodate the projected housing needs. This analysis provides the basis for the allocation and distribution of residential land uses in the land use element. Housing goals and planning policies are developed to meet the needs identified in the element.

Capital Facilities

The Capital Facilities Element identifies the facilities such as water, wastewater disposal, criminal justice facilities necessary to support the anticipated development. It also defines the level of service for each type of facility and service. The Capital Facilities Element then determines the needed improvements, the costs associated with meeting the need, and the financial ability of the county to pay for those needs. Goals and policies are established to guide public investment decisions and land use decisions. Public services which are necessary to meet the expected growth must be available as development happens, or within

a reasonable time afterwards.

Utilities

The Utilities Element identifies services provided to Mason County residents by private utilities providers and the associated service areas thereof. The Land Use element of the plan identifies areas for potential concentration of development. Private utilities providers may, through the use of the Land Use element, identify areas where utilities provision may fall short of future demand and consequently plan for future growth.

Transportation

As with both the Utilities and Capital Facilities Elements, the Land Use Element, to a large extent, will determine the need for transportation system upgrades. The Transportation Element determines the ability of the existing and planned transportation network to accommodate anticipated growth throughout all areas of the County at the level of service desired by the community.

GMA Requirements

The Growth Management Act establishes 13 statewide goals with which local comprehensive plans and regulations must be consistent. The goals are established in the following areas:

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| Urban Growth | Sprawl |
| Transportation | Housing |
| Economic Development | Property Rights |
| Permits | Natural Resource Industries |
| Open Space and Recreation | Environment |
| Citizen Participation | Public Facilities and Services |
| Historic Preservation | |

These goals are discussed in Chapter II.

GMA requires local governments to adopt interim regulations to protect critical areas and natural resource lands. Mason County adopted an ordinance for this purpose, Ordinance No. 77-93, on August 3, 1993. Both resource lands and critical areas are discussed in the land use chapter.

GMA required comprehensive plans of counties, and cities or towns within those counties, to be consistent with one another. This purpose is met with the coordination and review process, which was followed in the development of this plan.

GMA required Counties and cities or towns to agree on and justify Urban Growth Areas "within which urban growth shall be encouraged and outside of which growth can occur only if it is not urban in nature." The Urban Growth Area must be able to accommodate growth that is expected to occur over 20 years. Urban growth areas are discussed in the land use chapter.

GMA required Counties and cities or towns to jointly adopt countywide planning policies which establish guidelines on how their comprehensive plans will be developed in order to be consistent. This was done with county-wide planning policies which the City of Shelton and Mason County adopted August 21, 1992. These policies are summarized in the next section, and given in detail in Chapter II.

GMA required local governments to establish processes for "early and continuous" public participation in the GMA planning process. Mason County established a intensive public participation process, only part of which is described in the comprehensive plan.

Comprehensive Plan Amendments

The Growth Management Act provides that the comprehensive plan and implementing regulations are subject to continuing evaluation and review, and that the comprehensive plan shall only be amended through established procedures.

Mason County establishes the following procedures for its comprehensive plan amendments:

1. Amendments may be considered no more frequently than once a year.
2. All proposals shall be considered concurrently so that the cumulative effect of the various proposals can be evaluated.
3. The county shall establish and disseminate procedures for the amendments which establish the form of the application for amendments, the timing of applications, and the process of the review and public participation.
4. Exceptions to these general procedures shall be allowed when:
 - a. An emergency exists,
 - b. The revisions are proposed to resolve an appeal of the comprehensive plan filed with the growth management hearings board or court,
 - c. The proposal is an initial adoption of a subarea plan, or
 - d. The adoption or amendment is of a shoreline master program under the procedures set forth in chapter 90.58 RCW.

I-3 COUNTYWIDE PLANNING POLICIES

Overview

GMA required development and adoption of countywide planning policies in all counties planning under the Act. Within each county, cities or towns and the county were to develop and adopt written policy statements (joint policies) which promote consistency between their comprehensive plans, and coordination of their planning efforts. The Countywide Planning Policy contain policies intended to guide the planning process for the City of Shelton and Mason County. Those policies address the following issues:

Urban growth area designations and distribution of population forecasts

Rural area designations

The means to promote contiguous and orderly development and provide for urban services

Siting of public facilities of County or state significance

Transportation facilities and strategies

Need and Distribution of Affordable housing

Joint procedures for planning within Shelton urban growth areas

Economic development

Fiscal impacts

Planning Process

Public Process

The formal review period for the Countywide Planning Policies began in May, 1992 and continued through August, 1992. Public hearings were held in May and June of 1992. The Countywide Planning Policies were revised to reflect input received through the public review process and the public hearings. Mason County and the City of Shelton jointly adopted the Countywide Planning Policies on August 17, 1992.

I-4 MASON COUNTY OVERVIEW

Geography

Mason County is situated along the southwestern portion of Puget Sound, and encompasses roughly 968 square miles. It borders on Jefferson County to the north, Grays Harbor County to the west and southwest, Thurston County to the southeast, Pierce County to the east, and Kitsap County to the northeast. Mason County remains a predominantly rural county despite the urban spillover from both Thurston and Kitsap Counties. The City of Shelton, the only incorporated area in Mason County, includes approximately 4.77 square miles, or less than one percent of the County's total land area. Two Native American Tribes, the Skokomish and the Squaxin Island Tribes, have reservations within the boundaries of Mason County.

Three geological provinces combine to form Mason County. They include the Puget Sound Lowland, the Olympic Mountains, and the Black Hills. Additionally, Seven watersheds exist within Mason County. They include Case Inlet, Chehalis, Lower Hood Canal, Oakland Bay, Skokomish, Totten-Little Skookum, and West Hood Canal. Mason County also includes over 90 miles of marine shoreline, nearly 100 freshwater lakes, two major rivers, and a number of smaller tributaries and creeks.

Mason County's rich natural resources and open spaces predominate the County's landscape. Combined national, state, and private forests currently account for about 82 percent of the County's land. Mineral deposits underlie Mason County's top soils. At present these deposits support 21 surface mining operations. Agricultural and aquaculture areas contribute both to the County's natural beauty and its economy. Mason County also includes substantial open space. Open space within the County hosts wildlife habitat, undeveloped natural areas, and many developed park and recreation sites. These open space areas include 101 sites managed by federal, state, county, municipal, and private interests.

Climate

Mason County's climate can be characterized as moderate-maritime, influenced by the Pacific Ocean, yet sheltered by the Olympic Mountains. Average temperatures range from a high of 78⁰ F. in July to 32⁰ F. in January. The average daily temperature in Mason County is 51⁰ F. The County receives an average of 64 inches of precipitation annually, with average monthly rainfalls ranging from a low in July of 0.8 inches, to a high of 10.4 inches in January.

Introduction

Population

Mason County's 1995 population is 45,300 and is expected to grow to as many as 63,685 73,477 people by the year 2014, as projected by the state Office of Financial Management in its high series projection. The County has experienced rapid population growth since the 1960s. Between 1960 and 1990, the County's total population grew by roughly 136 percent. From 1990 to 1994, the County's population grew by 15.5 percent at an annual average rate of 3.7 percent. Historically, the bulk of the Mason County's population growth has occurred in the unincorporated areas of the County. The City of Shelton and the Community of Belfair, however, are expected to attract a larger share of Mason County's population growth in the future.

Economy

Natural resource industries currently support Mason County's economy and are expected to be as important in the future. The County is highly specialized in the production of forestry and aquaculture commodities. This specialization focuses on both raw materials and value added products in these industries. Heavy construction and government service also anchor the County's economy.

Government is the County's largest employer. Over 22 percent of Mason County's total employment in 1992 was provided by the government sector. The service industry was the largest private employer, followed closely by the retail industry.