

A PLAN FOR MANAGING GROWTH 2004-2024

City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan



Comprehensive Plan

Toward a Sustainable Seattle



readers' guide

City of Seattle
Department of Planning & Development

Comprehensive Plan
January 2005



Introduction

readers' guide



City of Seattle Comprehensive Plan

The City of Seattle's Comprehensive Plan, *Toward a Sustainable Seattle*, is a collection of City-adopted goals and policies about how the City will accommodate growth over the next 20 years. In general, the goals define a future outcome that the City is aiming for, and the policies provide guidance for more specific decisions that will be made over time. The City first adopted the Plan in 1994. It has been updated in major and minor ways in subsequent years.

The original adoption of the Plan followed extensive involvement by citizens from throughout Seattle who helped identify both values that guide the Plan and ways the City could improve the urban environment, while planning for growth. The thoughtful participation by the public inspired the identification of four core values that underlie the Plan: community, economic opportunity, social equity and environmental stewardship.

This Readers' Guide provides an overview of the purpose, contents and results of the Plan.



State Requirement for Comprehensive Planning

Washington's Growth Management Act (GMA) requires most counties and cities in the state to prepare comprehensive plans that show how they will manage the population growth the state has projected for each county.

Seattle and the Puget Sound region have seen a large amount of population growth since the late 1970's and are expected to continue growing. Without plans that direct that growth, land and other resources in the region could be quickly consumed or damaged by the levels of growth that are expected here. The state legislature enacted the GMA in order to redirect more of the expected future growth into already developed areas and to get cities and counties to think in more coordinated ways about how to handle this growth.

The GMA defines a set of goals for managing growth and lays out the basic contents of comprehensive plans. The GMA goals include:

- reducing urban sprawl
- encouraging future development to occur in urbanized areas where public facilities and services already exist
- maintaining transportation, housing and open space opportunities
- protecting property rights
- protecting the natural environment

The GMA requires each plan to include chapters, or "elements," on land use, transportation, housing, capital facilities and utilities that show where future population growth will occur and the types of infrastructure the city will need to provide to serve that growth.

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The GMA also says that all actions of a jurisdiction, including capital investments, must conform to the provisions of the Comprehensive Plan. State agencies are also required to respect local comprehensive plans. These provisions significantly increased the authority of local land use plans.

Planning in the Region

Even before the GMA was adopted, the Puget Sound Regional Council had developed a strategy for addressing growth in the four-county region, including King, Pierce, Snohomish and Kitsap counties, through a document called Vision 2020. The overall approach that Vision describes is to concentrate growth in a number of growth centers across the region and to connect those centers with high capacity transit.

At the county level, the GMA required that each county define an urban growth boundary and directed where the population growth that the state had forecast for the county should go.

In King County, the county and cities cooperated to develop Countywide Planning Policies, which established an urban growth boundary; allocated growth targets to all the jurisdictions in the county; and provided policy guidance for all the cities' comprehensive plans, including a strategy to direct large portions of the county's expected growth to a number of designated urban centers.

Growth Targets for King County: 2004-2024		
Location	New Households	New Jobs
Seattle	47,000	84,000
32 Suburban Cities	76,000	167,000
6 Rural Cities	5,000	5,000
Unincorporated King Co.	12,000	7,000

Seattle's Plan

Seattle's Comprehensive Plan promotes a development pattern called the urban village strategy.

The urban village strategy is the approach of directing most new household and employment growth into places the Plan designates as either urban centers or urban villages. The strategy tries to meet several goals:

- accommodating the City's growth targets
- revitalizing existing neighborhood business districts
- making efficient use of past and future infrastructure investments
- minimizing impacts on single-family neighborhoods
- reducing dependence on automobiles

The Plan contains growth targets for each urban center and urban village to help guide City and neighborhood planning efforts.

By locating housing, jobs and stores near each other, new growth can create more opportunities for people to shop for daily necessities without using a car. With higher concentrations of residents and employees, the City and transit providers can choose locations for new facilities that will reach greater numbers of customers and riders.

The Plan designates six urban centers: Downtown, First Hill/Capitol Hill, South Lake Union, Uptown, University District and Northgate. These are places that meet the Countywide Planning Policies' criteria as urban centers, including the potential for high levels of job and housing growth. Together these centers are expected to take about 60 percent of the city's residential growth and 75 percent of the job growth over the next 20 years.

The Plan also designates two types of urban villages. Hub urban villages are places that are expected to take shares of both job and housing growth, but at lower densities than expected in the urban centers. There are six hub urban villages, and they include some of the larger neighborhood business districts, such as Ballard, Fremont and West Seattle Junction.



Residential urban villages are centered around smaller business districts that are expected to experience primarily residential growth, although they all have capacity for some commercial growth. There are 18 residential urban villages, including places like Rainier Beach, Columbia City, Admiral, Upper Queen Anne and Wallingford.

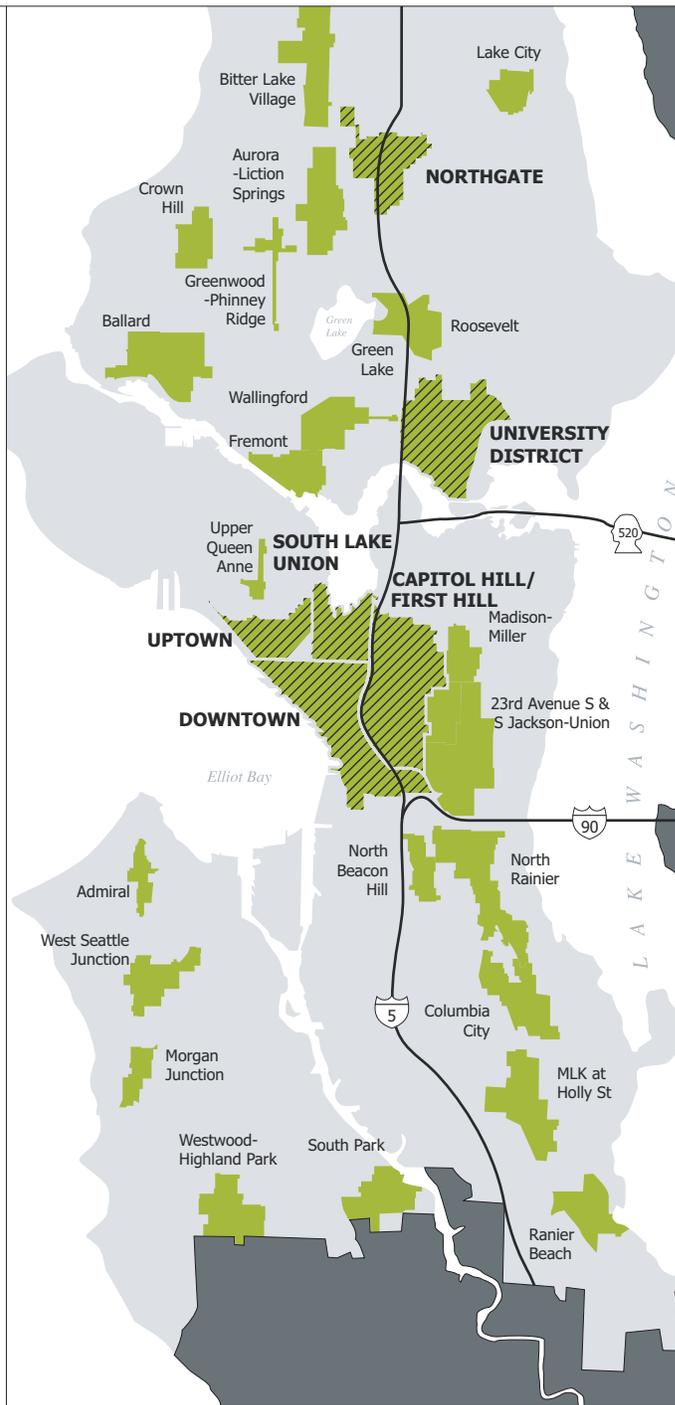
The Plan also designates two manufacturing/industrial centers in the Duwamish and Interbay areas. These are places where residential uses are not permitted and where the City encourages the growth of employment.

Growth Targets for Seattle: 2004-2024		
Type of Location	New Households	New Jobs
Urban Centers	27,450	61,120
Urban Villages	11,880	4,450
Manufacturing/Industrial Centers	0	11,900
Outside Villages/Centers	7,670	-----
Citywide Total	47,000	84,000

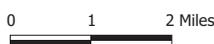
Seattle's Plan includes all of the elements required by GMA, plus others that cover:

- economic development
- urban villages
- neighborhood planning
- cultural resources
- human development
- environment

Seattle's Plan also incorporates the principle of sustainability. This is the idea that Seattle will accommodate growth in ways that allow it to continue growing, while improving the quality of life and the city's natural environment for future generations.



Urban Centers and Villages



Comprehensive Plan Elements



Urban Village Element. Seattle's Comprehensive Plan is unique in having an element addressing urban villages. This element shows the importance the urban village strategy plays in the City's plan for managing growth. It contains policies that define the different types of urban villages, urban centers and manufacturing/industrial centers. The appendix to this element displays the 20-year growth targets for each center and village.



Land Use Element. The Growth Management Act requires that all comprehensive plans include a land use element. Policies guiding the City's zoning and development regulations can be found here. This includes general descriptions of the five major zoning categories – single family, multifamily, commercial, industrial and downtown – as well as the rationale behind development regulations, such as height and density limits, parking and setback requirements. Zoning and development regulations are important tools for implementing the urban village strategy because they help to direct and control where and what type of development can occur.

The element is divided into three major sections: one deals with policies that affect all areas of the city; a second describes the unique rules for each of the five zoning categories; and the third addresses special areas, such as shorelines, environmentally critical areas and major institutions. Detailed regulations that are used in reviewing individual development projects can be found in the City's Land Use Code.

The Plan's Land Use Appendix includes data summarizing current land use, population and employment characteristics.

The Future Land Use Map shows the general locations where certain categories of use are expected to occur – single family, multifamily, mixed-use, industrial, major institution and downtown.



Transportation. Part of Seattle's growth strategy is to encourage people to use cars less than they do today. One way to do that is through the urban village strategy's goal of concentrating most new housing, jobs and services near one another in small areas, so that more trips can be made by walking, biking or transit. Another way is to support new public transit options. The element sets goals for the percent of future trips in each urban center that will be made in some way other than a single-occupant car. This element contains policies that set the stage for street design standards that will match future street improvements to the types of uses and neighborhoods the street is serving. This is also where the reader will find the City's arterial level-of-service standards (sometimes called the "concurrency" standard), a GMA requirement for defining acceptable performance of the transportation system.

More detailed lists of projects and programs to carry out these policies can be found in the Transportation Strategic Plan, a separate document that provides more specific guidance for the actions and programs carried out by the Seattle Department of Transportation.

The Transportation Appendix includes an inventory of existing transportation facilities and services, as well as maps showing arterials, traffic signals, transit lanes, 2002 traffic flow, transit routes and park-and-ride lots. It also shows projections of the City's street system performance relative to the concurrency standard and the expected future traffic volumes on state highways and within adjacent jurisdictions.



Housing. The GMA requires the Plan to accommodate a variety of housing for all income groups. The private market serves higher income groups well, and policies in the urban village and land use elements help guide where units can be built. This element includes goals for the percentage of housing units that would be affordable to lower-income households. Its policies call on the City to use incentives, available funding mechanisms and partnerships to encourage development of affordable housing.



The Housing Appendix includes data about the affordability of the city's rental and owner-occupied units, U.S. Census information about household type and size, recent housing unit growth, and descriptions of City programs that support housing.



Capital Facilities. Because most of the city is already developed, many capital facilities such as libraries, parks, police and fire stations are already in place. Policies in this element call for new facilities to be built in locations where they can serve the growing populations of urban centers and urban villages and also help attract growth to those places. This element calls for maintenance of existing facilities as a way to meet the Seattle's needs efficiently.

The Capital Facilities Appendix describes the citywide systems for fire, police and public school facilities, as well as parks, libraries, neighborhood service centers, public health clinics and publicly subsidized housing. It also contains lists of the specific capital facilities that serve each urban center and urban village.



Utilities. Policies in this element primarily address City-owned utilities that provide electricity, water and drainage service.

They also encourage efficient use of water and power resources and efforts to control the environmental impacts of utility service.

The Utilities Appendix contains descriptions of the City's electricity-generating and distributions system, the water, drainage and wastewater systems and solid waste facilities. It also describes privately owned utilities for communications and power.



Economic Development. This element promotes the idea of accommodating most of the city's job growth in the urban centers and villages. It also encourages City efforts to attract activities that bring higher-than-average wages and new capital into the Seattle's economy, while recognizing that the City has limited ability to directly influence the economy. Many of the policies

here address related activities that the City can undertake to encourage economic development, such as establishing a positive business climate and ensuring that needed infrastructure is in place.



Neighborhood Planning. There are two major portions of this element. The first portion contains policies that describe the role of neighborhood plans within the City's growth management structure. Generally, this says that neighborhood plans are to be prepared primarily for areas that the Comprehensive Plan designates as urban centers or urban villages, and that these plans must be consistent with the Plan. The policies also describe ways in which the City would implement and update the neighborhood plans.

The second portion of this element is the lengthiest of the entire Plan because it contains the goals and policies for all of the City-adopted neighborhood plans. Following the 1994 adoption of the Plan, the City offered assistance to neighborhoods containing urban centers or urban villages that wanted to prepare plans for themselves. Thirty-seven neighborhoods undertook planning efforts, and because many of them looked at areas surrounding urban villages, the plans cover about two-thirds of the city's geographic area.

Each neighborhood plan emphasizes different aspects of the urban environment and each goes into a different level of detail, but they all are intended to fine-tune the citywide Plan policies for specific neighborhoods, and the policies in these neighborhood plans carry the same effect as other policies in the Plan.

In addition to these goals and policies, neighborhood planning groups proposed specific improvements for their neighborhoods, and many of these recommendations have been incorporated into the work programs of City departments.



Human Development. Unlike most elements of the Plan, this one does not deal much with the location and physical nature of city growth, but focuses instead on the people who live here. Policies in this element address City goals for building supportive human relationships, developing educational opportunities, promoting accessible health care and public safety, and encouraging cultural diversity.



Cultural Resources. This element includes policies about how the City can encourage the use of cultural activities to support the distinct communities that make up the city. It includes goals and policies on historic preservation, important regional cultural facilities in the city, public art and life-long learning.



Environment. Policies throughout the Plan address City efforts to improve various aspects of the environment, such as reducing the number of trips made by car and efficient use of water and electricity. This element presents policies that deal with broader environmental subjects, such as the role a healthy environment plays in economic development, how natural processes can help control human impacts on the environment, as well as the City's approach to planning for aquatic areas and to minimize Seattle's contributions to global climate change.



Implementing the Plan

As a policy document, the Plan lays out general guidance for future City actions. Many of those actions are addressed in functional plans that focus on a particular aspect of City services, such as parks, transportation or drainage. Another way the City implements the Plan is through development regulations, primarily found in the City's zoning map and Land Use Code.

The City periodically revises its functional plans and regulations and continues to look for ways to further advance the urban village strategy and other goals of the Plan through these implementation measures.

Updating the Plan

Even though the Plan is intended as a long-range guide, it will work best if used as a living document that is periodically revisited and updated to address new challenges and changing circumstances. Under state law, the City can amend the Plan only once a year. Most years since the initial adoption in 1994, the City has made amendments.

In 2004, the City adopted a series of amendments to meet the GMA requirement for a 10-year review of the Plan. This update included extending the horizon year of the Plan from 2014 to 2024, and adopting new growth targets, based on revised population forecasts provided by the state.

The City's Department of Planning and Development (DPD) oversees the annual amendment process. To suggest amendments to the Comprehensive Plan, or to learn about amendments being considered, read DPD's monthly newsletter, *dpdINFO*, or visit www.seattle.gov/dpd/planning/compplan.



How the Layout of the Comprehensive Plan Works

The updated design of the Comprehensive Plan helps the reader find what they're looking for quickly and easily.

Page Number. Pages are numbered for each element of the plan.

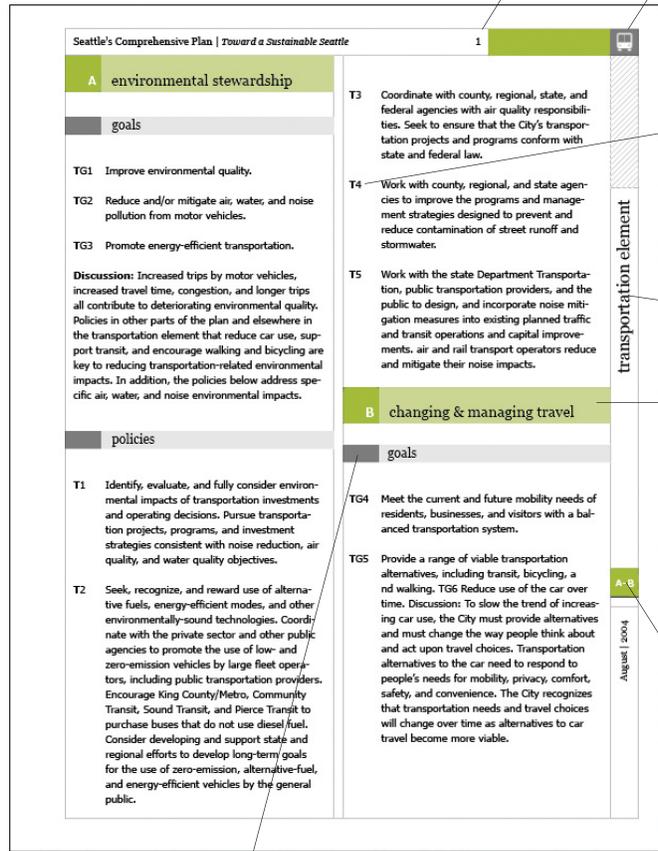
Element Symbol. Each element of the plan has a unique corresponding symbol for fast reference when flipping through the document.

Goal & Policy Numbering. Identified for each element, e.g., T4 stands for transportation policy 4. G is used for goals, so TG2 means transportation goal 2.

Section Header. This area denotes what section you are in. Placed on the edge of the page for quick reference.

Sub-section Header. Large bars denote where sub-sections begin. They are accompanied by a letter.

Sub-section Range. This area denotes which sub-sections appear on this page.



Goals & Policies. Provide guidance for future City decisions and actions

 **Elements.** Element symbols always appear inside of a square.

 **Appendices.** A circle denotes an appendix.

 **Table of Contents.** Three horizontal lines indicate a table of contents.