

INTRODUCTION

This element summarizes select household characteristics, housing stock, housing characteristics, and housing needs within the City.

BACKGROUND

The Growth Management Act requires cities and counties to have a housing element (or chapter) in their comprehensive plan. This is to be guided by the following goal:

“Ensure the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock. (RCW 36.70A.020)”

Under the Act, the housing element specifically helps ensure the vitality and character of established neighborhoods, while also identifying sufficient land for housing and providing for a full range of existing and projected needs. These needs include people with disabilities and people with different income levels and household sizes.

The state legislature also adopted a new requirement in 1997 for fast-growing counties, like King and Snohomish, and their cities to evaluate every five years whether they are achieving their goals, objectives, and targets. This requirement is sometimes referred to as the Buildable Lands Program and it is especially significant for housing. If a local government is not meeting its goals, objectives, and targets, it must take reasonable measures to improve the situation. State guidelines identify a number of “reasonable measures,” related to housing, for local governments to use. These measures were also adopted as part of the draft 2002 Buildable Lands Report from Snohomish County Tomorrow.

County-wide process

When housing issues affect more than one jurisdiction, cooperative solutions are often needed. The Growth Management Act requires each county, in cooperation with its cities, to adopt county-wide planning policies for certain topics, including affordable housing. In Snohomish County, an organization called Snohomish County Tomorrow, with representatives from the county and each of its cities, helped to develop such policies. These were adopted in 1993 and amended in subsequent years. Snohomish County jurisdictions must take actions consistent with the county-wide planning policies. Many of these policies require a cooperative process. County-wide planning policies for affordable housing are summarized below:

1. Provide fair and equal access to housing.
2. Provide for existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the county.

3. Cooperate with other local governments.
4. Use a fair-share distribution among jurisdictions to avoid over-concentrations of low-income and special-needs housing.
5. Use effective strategies for affordable housing.
6. Cooperate with a designated public/private financing program.
7. Employ incentives for encouraging compact development.
8. Rehabilitate housing and upgrade neighborhoods.
9. Use a county-wide process to report on the effectiveness of local housing strategies.
10. With other jurisdictions, consistently apply fair housing policies.
11. Provide for siting of essential public facilities for residential needs.
12. Use innovative urban design techniques.
13. Site housing close to or accessible to work.
14. Encourage environmentally sensitive building practices.
15. Achieve public benefit through regulations that result in the least cost for housing.
16. Expedite the permitting process.
17. Diversify infrastructure funding.
18. Impose only reasonable impact fees.
19. Consider the establishment of new, fully contained communities and master-planned resort communities.
20. Adopt housing relocation programs.

More specific strategies for affordable housing have been adopted through Snohomish County Tomorrow. In 2002, the county developed a draft report to assess how jurisdictions, since 1997, have met the adopted county-wide planning policies and strategies. Information from the draft report indicates that Mountlake Terrace is on par with most other cities in the region. To ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing, Mountlake Terrace should increase the number of residential units for low-income households.