

GROWTH MANAGEMENT AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Author: Lish Whitson

Update: August 17, 2016

INTRODUCTION

This paper describes Washington State’s planning law: the Growth Management Act (GMA). The City’s core policy document for land use, transportation and housing policy - [Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan](#) - fulfills the City’s requirement to plan under the GMA.

GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT

Washington State’s GMA, [RCW 36.70A](#), was adopted in 1990 in response to concerns about unplanned development in rural areas. The GMA focused on reducing the impacts of unplanned growth on the environment and quality of life.

The GMA requires most cities and counties to prepare 20-year plans to accommodate growth in urban areas, and requires counties to draw “urban growth boundaries,” outside of which development is limited. Further, it requires that the actions of a jurisdiction be consistent with its Comprehensive Plan. Consistency is also required between a local jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan and regional plans, such as the Puget Sound Regional Council’s (PSRC) [Vision 2040](#) and King County’s [Countywide Planning Policies](#) (CPPs). These regional planning documents provide growth estimates for local jurisdictions, and a regional framework for focusing growth in “regional growth centers,” also known as “urban centers.”

The GMA lays out requirements for Comprehensive Plans, including mandatory elements and a Future Land Use Map. The mandatory elements are:

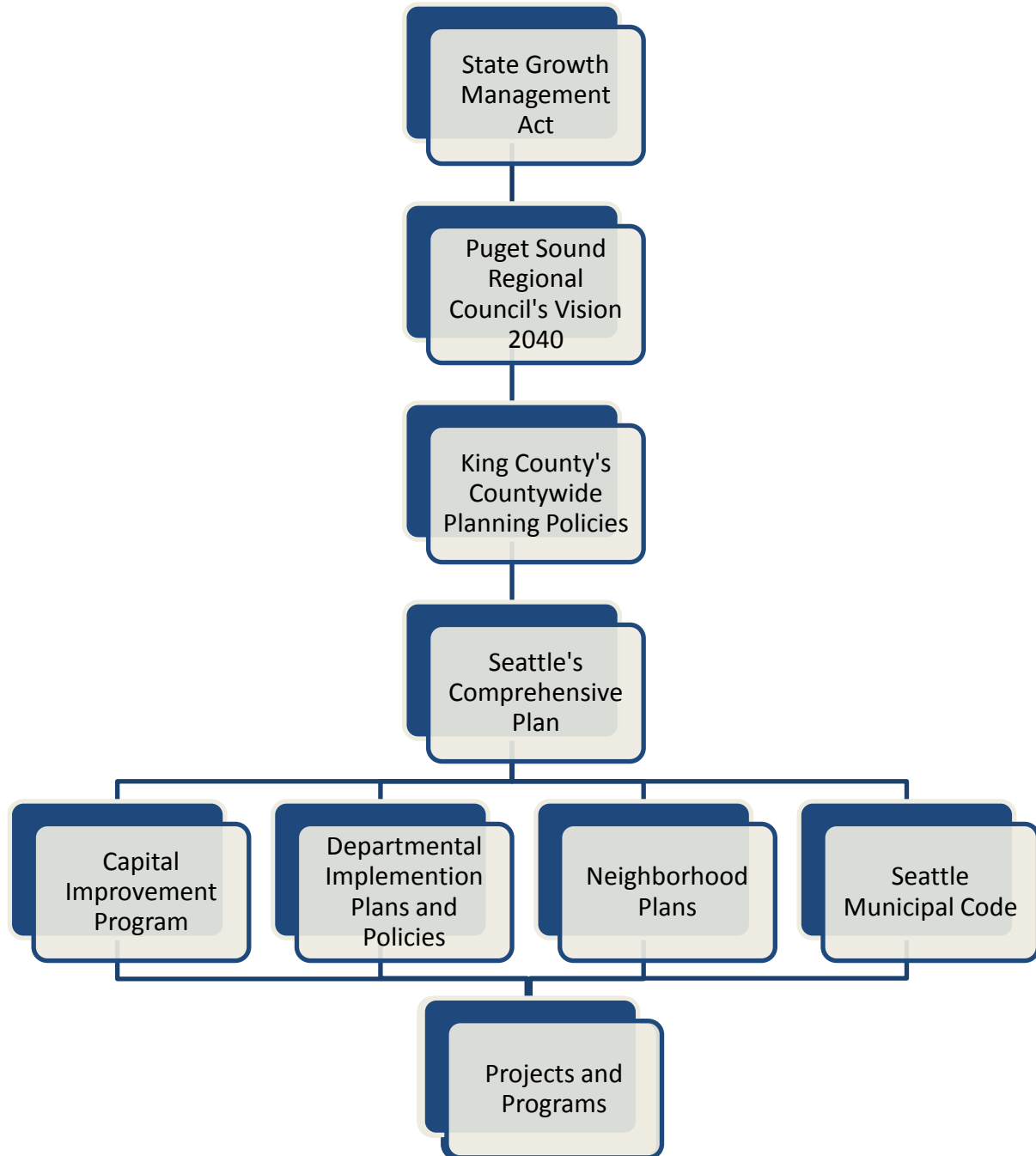
- Land Use
- Housing
- Capital Facilities
- Utilities
- Rural (counties only)
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Park and Recreation (after the State provides funds for creating this element)
- Container Port (jurisdictions with container ports only)

In addition to these mandatory elements, Comprehensive Plans may address other issues, at the discretion of each jurisdiction, such as neighborhood planning or cultural resources.

Finally, the GMA requires early and continuous public involvement in all planning and land use decisions. This includes providing public notice of potential amendments to the Comprehensive

Plan and implementing development regulations, opportunities for public comment, and an additional opportunity to comment if the Council wishes to change a proposal after the original comment period has ended. Figure 1 below illustrates the hierarchy of GMA planning.

Figure 1: Hierarchy of planning under the Growth Management Act



PUGET SOUND REGIONAL COUNCIL VISION 2040 PLAN

The PSRC covers the four-county central Puget Sound region: King, Snohomish, Pierce and Kitsap. Three Seattle City Councilmembers and the Mayor sit on the PSRC Executive Committee, along with County and local officials from across the four counties.

Vision 2040 is the PSRC's regional plan under the GMA. Adopted in 2008, Vision 2040 seeks to focus population and employment growth in regional growth centers. There are 24 of these centers, which serve as hubs for regional transportation, public services and amenities. Seattle contains six (called "urban centers" in King County) and two out of eight of the region's manufacturing/industrial centers. Manufacturing/industrial centers are areas maintained for manufacturing and industrial activity.

Vision 2040 also divides the central Puget Sound region into different categories of urban and rural areas as shown on Map 1 on Page 4. Under this framework, Seattle is one of five "Metropolitan Cities," along with Bellevue, Tacoma, Everett and Bremerton. Under Vision 2040 Metropolitan Cities must accommodate the most residential and employment growth.

[Transportation 2040](#) is the PSRC's regional transportation plan. The plan outlines the regional transportation investments and strategies planned for the next 25 years. Seattle's transportation plans must be consistent with Transportation 2040 to receive regional funds.

KING COUNTY PLANNING POLICIES

King County's [Growth Management Planning Council](#) (GMPC), an inter-jurisdictional committee, is charged with developing planning policies to guide all Comprehensive Plans in King County. The CPPs provide a countywide vision and serve as a framework for each jurisdiction to develop its own comprehensive plan, which must be consistent with the overall vision for the future of King County. The sixteen-member GMPC, chaired by the County Executive, includes the Mayor of Seattle and two Councilmembers. Amendments to the CPPs are first approved by the King County Council and then sent to the County's local jurisdictions for ratification. The most recent amendments to the CPPs were ratified in 2013.

The current CPPs provide housing unit and job growth targets for each jurisdiction over the period 2006-2031. Seattle's targeted growth over that 25-year period is 86,000 new housing units and 146,700 new jobs. The City has prorated that target over a 20-year period and is planning for 70,000 new households and 115,000 jobs between 2015 and 2035.

Map 1: Vision 2040 Regional Growth Map
 (adopted April 24, 2008)

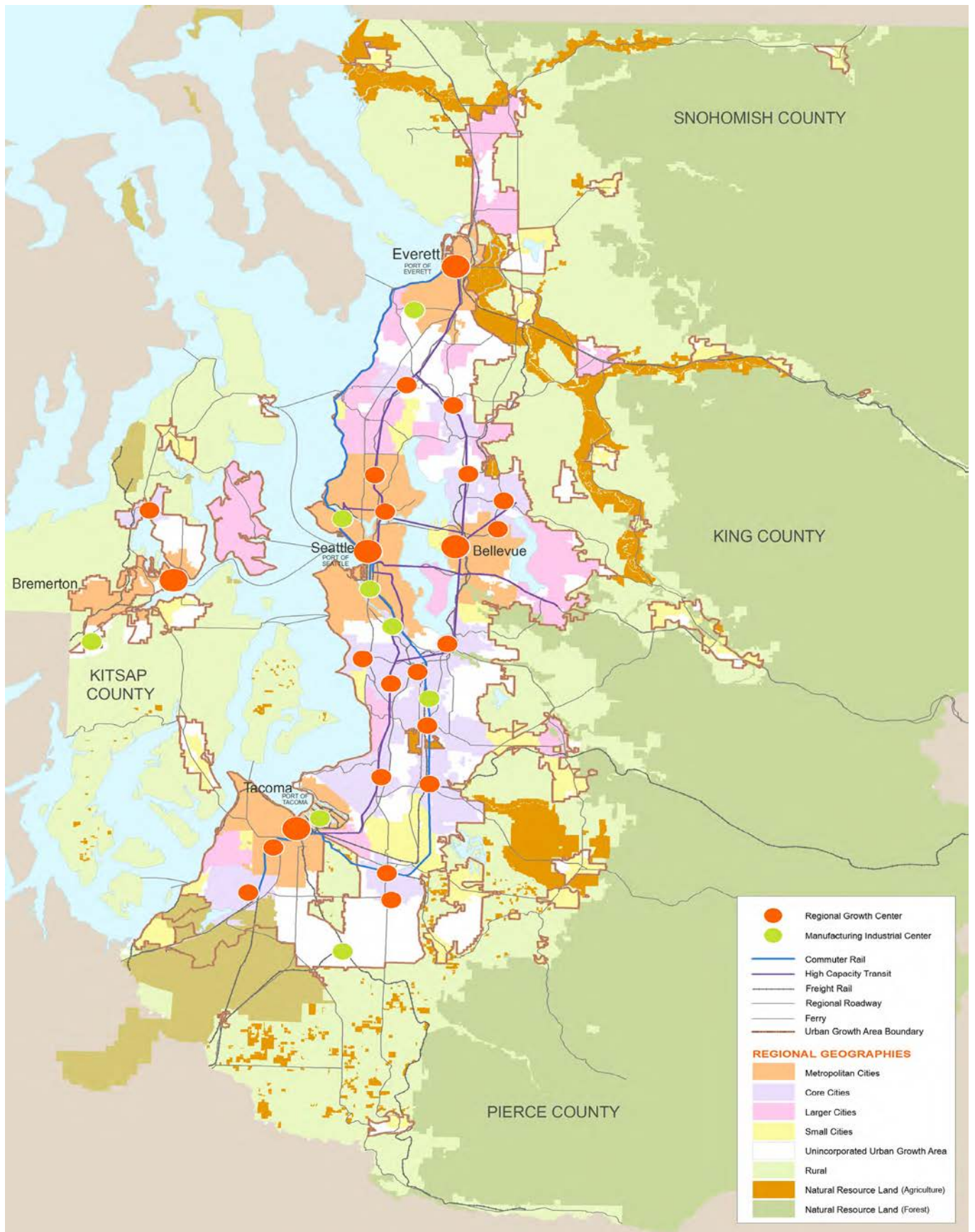


Table 1: King County 2006-2031 Growth Targets

	Housing Unit Target	Percent of Housing Unit Target	Job Target	Percent of Job Target
Seattle	86,000	36.90%	146,700	34.27%
Suburban Cities	134,610	57.75%	272,308	63.61%
Urban Unincorporated King County	12,470	5.35%	9,060	2.12%
Total	233,080	100.00%	428,068	100.00%

The CPPs identify King County’s urban centers as primary locations for growth. They also identify the county’s [urban growth boundary](#) (UGB). The purpose of the UGB is to maintain active agricultural areas and forested areas in their current use, and to focus growth in urban areas. The CPPs also call for the incorporation of unincorporated urban areas of King County either into neighboring cities or as new cities.

SEATTLE’S COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Seattle’s first Comprehensive Plan under the GMA was adopted in 1994. It planned for growth between 1994 and 2014. The first major update to the plan was in 2004, at which time the plan shifted to cover the period from 2004 to 2024. Seattle’s next major update is scheduled for 2015 and 2016, after which the plan will cover the period between 2015 and 2035.

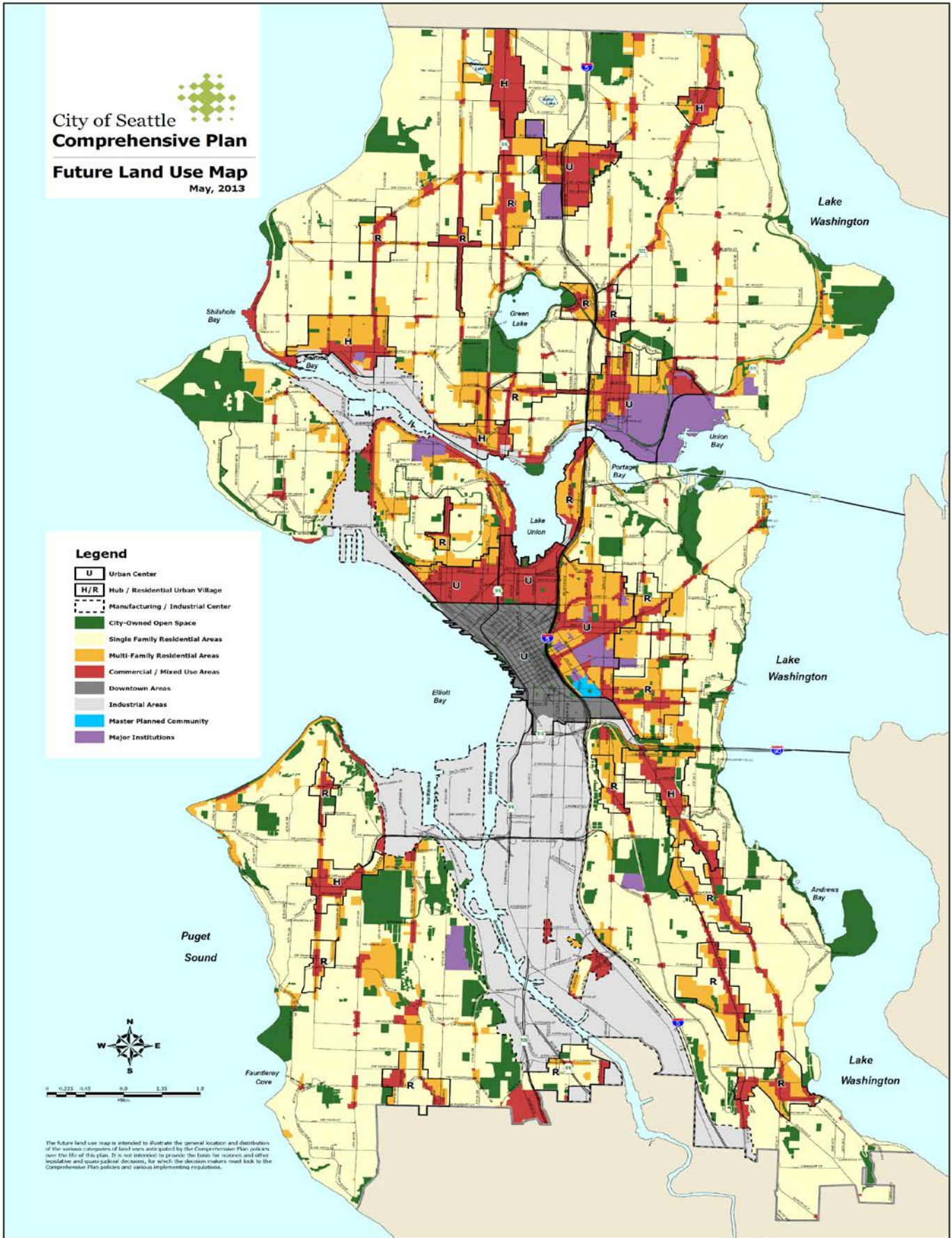
Seattle’s current plan is built on four core values:

- Community
- Environmental Stewardship
- Economic Opportunity and Security
- Race and Social Equity

It includes seven elements mandated by the GMA and six optional elements. Each element includes a collection of goals, policies and maps to guide City action. Goals provide a long-term vision for the future of the city. Policies are intended to guide the development of specific rules, programs or projects in achieving the goals of the plan. They tend to be general statements providing direction. A list of key topics included in each element is contained in Appendix A.

Seattle’s Comprehensive Plan is built on the “urban village strategy.” In addition to planning for growth in the six urban centers and two manufacturing/industrial centers identified in regional plans, Seattle has established six hub urban villages, where both residential and job growth are targeted, and 18 residential urban villages, where residential growth is planned around a core of transit and services. The [Future Land Use Map](#) (FLUM), a required part of the comprehensive plan under the GMA, shows these centers and villages and the City’s general categories of land use. The FLUM is shown on Map 2 on page 6.

Map 2: Seattle's Future Land Use Map



NEIGHBORHOOD PLANNING AND THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The [Neighborhood Planning Element](#) brings the broad citywide policies contained in the rest of the plan down to a neighborhood scale. The element contains the goals and policies for Seattle's 33 adopted neighborhood plans. The policies in these neighborhood plans carry the same effect as other policies in the plan.

Following the 1994 adoption of the Comprehensive Plan, the City offered assistance to neighborhoods to plan for growth in areas containing urban centers or urban villages. In addition, areas identified as distressed communities were invited to develop plans, and Delridge and Georgetown acted on this offer. Communities in and around Seattle's urban centers, urban villages, manufacturing/industrial centers and the two distressed communities developed these plans with consultant assistance in the late 1990s. These neighborhoods identified their own planning areas and issues on which to focus. Many of these plans addressed multiple areas, and some urban centers were divided into multiple planning areas. Planning areas cover about two-thirds of the city. A list of plans and the areas they cover is contained in Appendix B.

At the end of the neighborhood planning process, the City worked with the neighborhood planning committees to identify key goals and policies to incorporate into the Comprehensive Plan. These goals and policies were required to be consistent with the broader Comprehensive Plan. They were adopted by ordinance, and constitute the "Adopted Neighborhood Plan" for each area. Other ideas in the neighborhood plans were recognized by resolution, but they do not have the same status as adopted goals and policies for GMA purposes.

AMENDING THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

Under the GMA, Seattle may generally amend the Comprehensive Plan only once a year. The City has developed an annual docketing process (Resolutions [31117](#) and [31402](#)) to elicit recommendations for amendments and to vet those proposals.

- Spring: The Council solicits amendment proposals from the public and City departments
- Summer: The Council identifies proposals to move forward for more analysis (the docket)
- Fall: The Department of Planning and Development analyzes the docketed proposals and makes a recommendation to the Council
- Winter: The Council determines which amendments to adopt

In addition to allowing amendments annually, the GMA requires periodic review of the plan and the City's growth forecasts. Seattle is currently undertaking one of these reviews under the name "[Seattle 2035](#)." That review will include a thorough overhaul of most aspects of the plan, except the neighborhood plans.

Appendix A: Summary of Comprehensive Plan Elements

ELEMENT	GMA REQUIRED?	KEY TOPICS
Urban Village	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Urban Village Strategy, including criteria for designation and planned character of different categories of villages and centers; • Distribution of growth to urban centers, villages, and areas outside of centers and villages; • Open space policies and goals; and • Potential annexation areas.
Land Use	Yes	<p>Policies to guide land use regulations (Seattle Municipal Code Title 23), including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The five major land use categories (single family, multifamily, mixed-use commercial, industrial and downtown); • Citywide topics such as public facilities, off-street parking, and design review; and • Special areas, such as shorelines, environmentally critical areas and major institutions.
Transportation	Yes	<p>Policies to guide development of specific plans for different transportation modes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Walkability and the bicycle network; • Multi-modal travel, including transit and freight; • On-street parking management; • Level-of-service standards for the transportation network (“concurrency”); and • Strategies to reduce the numbers of people driving alone, particularly to work.
Housing	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The planned share of housing affordable to lower-income households; • Mixes of housing types attractive to diverse households; and • Strategies to encourage the development of affordable housing, including incentives, available funding mechanisms and partnerships.
Capital Facilities	Yes	<p>Policies to guide the development of the City’s Capital Improvement Program, which is technically part of the Comprehensive Plan under the GMA, except for transportation and utility facilities.</p>
Utilities	Yes	<p>Policies to guide the development of utility infrastructure to support growth and the urban village strategy.</p>
Economic Development	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies to support key industry sectors; • Education and training; and • Improvements to the business climate.
Neighborhood Planning	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific goals and policies for 33 neighborhoods; • Neighborhood planning processes; and • Neighborhood plan implementation.

ELEMENT	GMA REQUIRED?	KEY TOPICS
Human Development	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategies to meet the basic needs of Seattleites; • Opportunity to share the city’s economic prosperity; and • Participation in building a safe, healthy, educated, just and caring community.
Cultural Resource	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic preservation; • Cultural facilities and public art; and • Life-long learning.
Environment	No	Cross-cutting environmental issues, including climate change and protection of aquatic areas.
Container Port	Yes	City actions to support a thriving container port.
Urban Design	No	Private and public developments’ contribution to the city’s built environment.

Appendix B: Neighborhood Plans

PLAN	SUBAREAS (IF APPROPRIATE)	DESIGNATION
Admiral		Residential Urban Village
Aurora-Licton		Residential Urban Village
BINMIC (Ballard/Interbay Northend)		Manufacturing/Industrial Center
Capitol Hill		Part of 1 st Hill/Capitol Hill Urban Center
Central Area	23 rd at Jackson-Union Madison/Miller 12 th Avenue	Residential Urban Village Residential Urban Village Part of 1 st Hill/Capitol Hill Urban Center
Columbia City		Residential Urban Village
Crown Hill/Ballard	Crown Hill Ballard	Residential Urban Village Hub Urban Village
Delridge		Distressed community
Downtown	Belltown Chinatown/International District Commercial Core Denny Triangle Pioneer Square	Part of Downtown Urban Center Part of Downtown Urban Center Part of Downtown Urban Center Part of Downtown Urban Center Part of Downtown Urban Center
Eastlake		Residential Urban Village
First Hill		Part of 1 st Hill/Capitol Hill Urban Center
Fremont		Hub Urban Village
Georgetown		Distressed community
Greater Duwamish		Manufacturing/Industrial Center
Green Lake		Residential Urban Village
Greenwood/Phinney Ridge		Residential Urban Village
Morgan Junction		Residential Urban Village
North Beacon Hill		Residential Urban Village
North Neighborhoods	Lake City	Hub Urban Village
Northgate Urban Center		Urban Center
North Rainier		Hub Urban Village
Othello		Residential Urban Village
Pike/Pine		Part of 1 st Hill/Capitol Hill Urban Center
Queen Anne	Upper Queen Anne Uptown	Residential Urban Village Urban Center
Rainier Beach		Residential Urban Village
Roosevelt		Residential Urban Village
South Lake Union		Urban Center
South Park		Residential Urban Village
University Community		Urban Center
Wallingford		Residential Urban Village
West Seattle Junction		Hub Urban Village
Westwood-Highland Park		Residential Urban Village