



Washington State
Department of
Commerce

We strengthen communities

A Guide to the Periodic Update Process Under the Growth Management Act

Fully-Planning Counties & Cities

LOCAL GOVERNMENT DIVISION
GROWTH MANAGEMENT SERVICES

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Acronyms and terms used in this guide

Buildable Lands – The Review and Evaluation Program, RCW 36.70A.215

CAO - Critical Areas Ordinance

CARL – Critical Areas and Resource Lands

CFP – Capital Facilities Plan

Commerce – Washington State Department of Commerce (previously named the Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development or CTED prior to July 2009)

Comprehensive plan - land use document that provides the framework and policy direction to manage where and how growth needs are met. Plan elements address land use, housing, capital facilities, utilities, rural/natural resources, transportation, economic development, environment, cultural resources, and other topics.

Development regulations - controls placed on development or land use activities by a county or city, such as codes for zoning, critical areas, planned unit developments, and subdivisions.

GMA – Growth Management Act, RCW Chapter 36.70A

GMS – Growth Management Services, a unit in the Department of Commerce Local Government Division that helps counties and cities implement the GMA.

MRSC – Municipal Research and Services Center

OFM – Washington State Office of Financial Management

Periodic update – A regularly scheduled review and update of county and city comprehensive plans and development regulations. For most communities, the update takes place every ten years under a schedule established by the Legislature in the GMA.

Public Participation Program – a locally established program to ensure public participation is encouraged early and often, and identifies how all persons who have requested notice of a comprehensive plan update are given notice of the amendments and an opportunity to comment.

PSRC – Puget Sound Regional Council; responsible for certifying Puget Sound jurisdictions' adopted plans & policies

RCW – Revised Code of Washington (laws adopted by the state Legislature)

SEPA – State Environmental Policy Act

SMA – Shoreline Management Act

SMP – Shoreline Master Program

UGA – Urban Growth Area

WAC – Washington Administrative Code (rules adopted by state agencies)

I. Introduction

The Growth Management Act (GMA)¹, first adopted in 1990, is a series of statutes developed to address ways to accommodate growth. It requires that the fastest-growing cities and counties complete comprehensive plans and development regulations to guide future growth. In addition, all jurisdictions are required to protect critical environmental areas and conserve natural resource lands, such as farms and forests.



Under the GMA, every county and city in the state is required to conduct a thorough periodic update of its comprehensive plan and/or development regulations that are consistent with, and implement the plan. The obligation for a periodic update varies depending on whether the jurisdiction is fully or partially planning.² The GMA requires *fully-planning* counties and cities to review their comprehensive plan and development regulations to bring them up to date with any relevant changes in the GMA, recent case law and to respond to changes in land use and population growth. The review and update also include critical areas and resource lands (CARL). If a county or city is a *partially-planning* jurisdiction, the “Guide to the Periodic Update for Partially Planning Jurisdictions” should be used in place of this guide.

Some jurisdictions have additional planning requirements. Population size, rate of growth and other factors place local governments into different categories. [Figure 1](#) shows the regional variation in planning requirements. These variations are discussed throughout the guidebook.

In 2022, approval of [HB 1241](#) by the Washington State Legislature changed the periodic update cycle recurrence from eight years to ten years after the 2024-2027 update cycle.³



This guide explains when and how to go through the necessary steps in the periodic update process. The level of effort and timing of the update steps will vary depending on how recently your community has comprehensively updated its plan, the size of your community, and other factors. The list of steps in this guide is not intended to be exhaustive.

This guide is intended as a user-friendly supplement to the GMA statutes and administrative rules that describe procedures that must be followed and substantive issues that must be addressed.

This guide may not be able to answer all of your questions about the periodic update. Commerce’s Growth Management Services team is available to help! Visit Commerce’s [Growth Management webpage](#) for the Regional Assistance Map to contact the Commerce planner assigned to your region. Additional resources and links can be found on the [Periodic Update webpage](#) and the [Growth Management Planning Topics webpage](#)

¹ The GMA is codified under [RCW 36.70A](#)

² Statute describing fully and partially planning: [RCW 36.70A.040](#); see also [Figure 2](#) of this guide

³ [RCW 36.70A.130\(5\)](#)

II. The basics:

Who must complete the periodic update?

Every county and city in the state is required to conduct a periodic update, though the obligation varies depending on whether the jurisdiction is fully or partially planning.

Fully planning means that a city or county must meet all GMA requirements, including adoption of a comprehensive plan and a complete set of development regulations implementing the plan. Only the state's fastest growing counties and cities are required to plan fully, though a number of counties have "opted-in" by choice.

Partially planning jurisdictions are the counties, and the cities within their boundaries, that do not meet GMA population and growth rate thresholds and have not chosen to fully plan under the GMA. Partially planning counties are required to designate and protect critical areas and resource lands (CARL). Partially planning cities must designate and protect critical areas, but may also designate mineral resource lands. Currently, there are eleven partially planning counties: **Adams, Asotin, Cowlitz, Ferry, Grays Harbor, Klickitat, Lincoln, Okanogan, Skamania, Wahkiakum, and Whitman Counties.**⁴

Fully planning counties and cities must complete the periodic update for their entire comprehensive plan and development regulations within the designated timeframe. Drafts must be submitted to Commerce for stakeholder 60-day review, followed by final update deliverables submitted to Commerce within 10-days of final adoption by the local jurisdiction.

Some regions of the state with larger populations must include additional planning policies, which may include the Buildable Lands Program and multi-county planning policies. [Figure 1](#) illustrates the regional variations in planning requirements.

Regional Requirements:

Buildable Lands Program

Included as a component of the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1997, the Review and Evaluation Program under RCW 36.70A.215 is often referred to as the Buildable Lands Program. It requires that **Clark, King, Kitsap, Pierce, Snohomish, Thurston and Whatcom (as of 2017) Counties and the cities within them** establish a Program in their Countywide Planning Policies to identify the methodology, data collection, and inter-agency agreements to guide the completion of a Buildable Lands report every ten years.⁵ This report is due no later than two or three years, as specified by RCW 36.70A.215, to the due date of the periodic review.⁶ The Buildable Lands reports are a look back at actual development trends, patterns, and densities, to determine if cities and counties have designated adequate



⁴ [RCW 36.70A.040](#) and [Figure 2](#)

⁵ Buildable Lands Guidelines 2018 <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/growth-management-topics/buildable-lands/>

⁶ [RCW 36.70A.215](#)

amounts of residential, commercial and industrial lands to meet the growth needs incorporated in their comprehensive plans. See the [Buildable Lands Program webpage](#) for the updated Buildable Lands Guidelines and additional resources. As a supplemental document to the Buildable Lands Guidance, the Department of Commerce released its [Housing Memo: Issues Affecting Housing Availability and Affordability](#) to the public. The memo addresses barriers to housing production and affordability in Washington, and provides tools aimed at assisting local governments in improving housing affordability. The memo, requested by the 2017 Legislature’s E2SSB 5254 as part of an update to the Buildable Lands program, *is relevant to cities and counties statewide.*

Vision 2050 & Multicounty Planning Policies (MPPs) in Central Puget Sound

VISION 2050 is the shared regional plan for moving toward a sustainable future in **King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties**. VISION 2050’s multicounty planning policies, actions, and regional growth strategy guide how and where the region grows through 2050.

To help coordinate regional and local planning efforts, the [Puget Sound Regional Council \(PSRC\)](#) works with countywide planning groups, local jurisdictions, transit agencies, and others to ensure that adopted regional policies and provisions are addressed in local plans. This happens through the review of countywide planning policies, local comprehensive plans, including subarea plans for regionally designated centers and transit agency plans.

State law requires PSRC to review and certify countywide planning policies, local comprehensive plans, and Sound Transit’s long-range plans for the counties mentioned above and the cities within them.

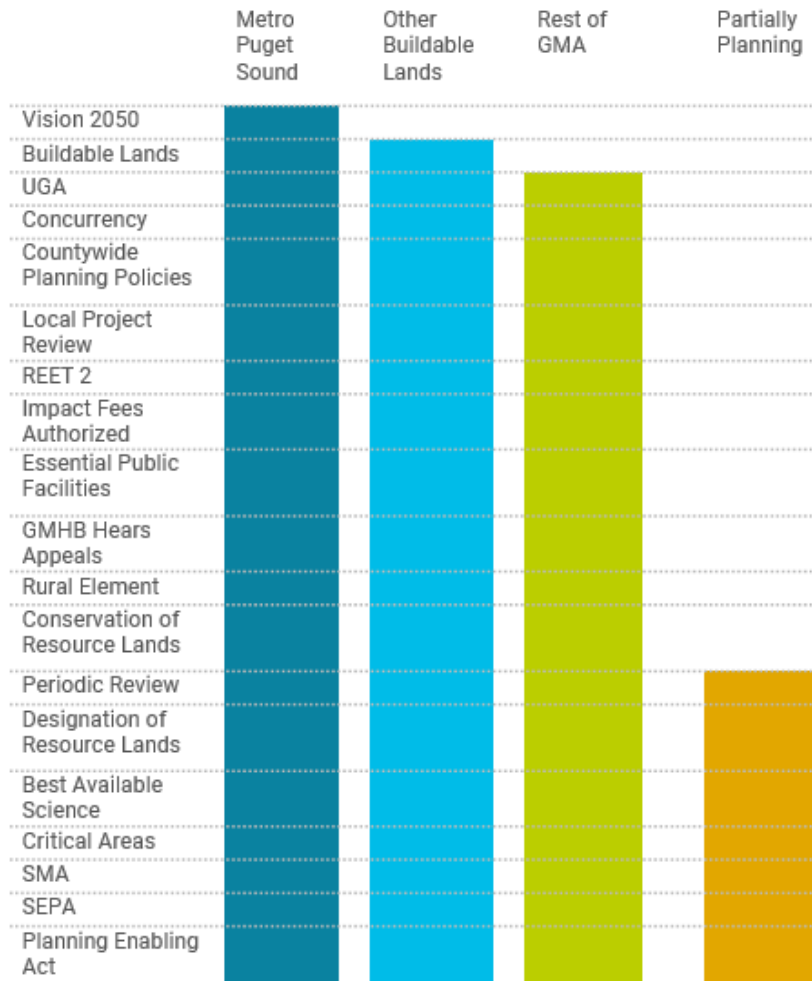
PSRC has a Plan Review Manual and checklists to help local governments and agencies understand certification requirements. Local governments and agencies are encouraged to review the checklists and planning guidance throughout their plan update to understand the process in advance of certification review.

PSRC staff is available to assist and support in the development of plan updates and policy amendments, including review of draft plans. Early coordination with PSRC helps local plans to be consistent with VISION 2050 and state planning requirements well in advance of final adoption and PSRC certification. Review the process diagram below and contact PSRC staff for additional guidance: planreview@psrc.org



Source: Puget Sound Regional Council “Vision 2050 Planning Resources Plan Review Manual” May 2021

Figure 1: Regional Variations in Planning Requirements

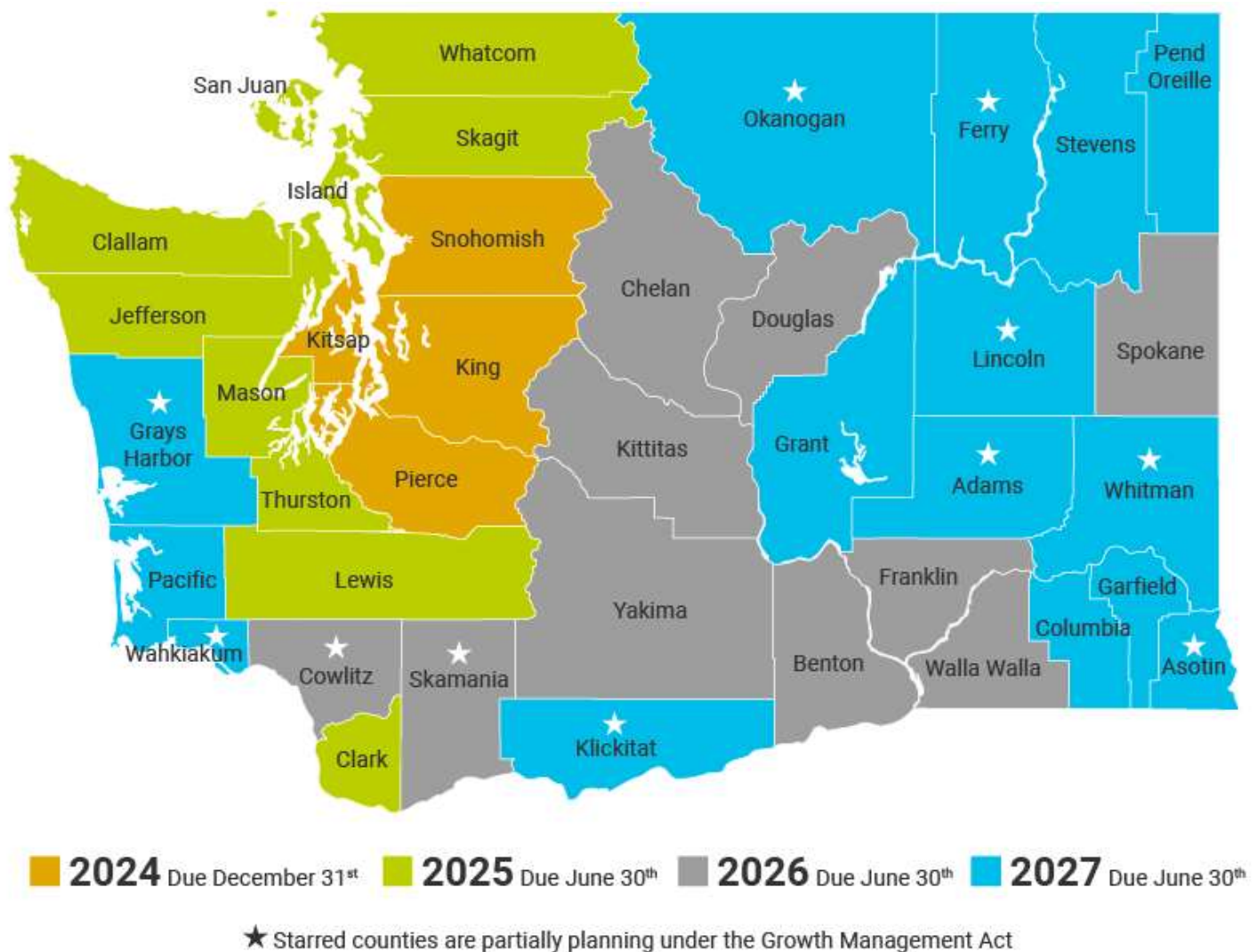


When is the update due?

The Legislature established a deadline schedule for periodic updates in RCW 36.70A.130.⁷ Except for certain small and slow-growing communities, each county and its cities must complete the periodic update by the dates shown in [Figure 2](#), and every ten years after that. See also [Section V: The Review and Update Process](#) of this guidebook for steps to complete the update.

In the 2022 legislative session, [HB 1241](#) changed the update cycle due date for 2024 jurisdictions to December 31, 2024. Jurisdictions whose updates are due in 2025-2027 are still required to submit completed Update materials by June 30th of their respective year.

Figure 2. Periodic Update Schedule for Fully & Partially Planning Counties



⁷ Periodic review schedule: RCW 36.70A.130(5)

Deadline Extensions

Every city and county in the state is eligible for additional time to make substantial progress toward completion of development regulations that protect critical areas (i.e., critical areas ordinance (CAO)). With the exception of smaller or slower growing jurisdictions, all cities and counties are allowed an additional year (twelve months).

Smaller or slower growing counties and cities that meet growth criteria outlined in [RCW 36.70A.130 \(b\) or \(c\)](#) may be eligible for a two year (24 months) extension for all periodic update requirements (including CAO).

Deadline extensions are automatic and Commerce will determine which jurisdictions are eligible.⁸ Deadline extensions are calculated from the dates shown in [Figure 2](#).

For assistance with approaching deadlines or overdue periodic update submittals, please see the Regional Assistance Map on [Commerce's Growth Management webpage](#) to contact the planner assigned to your area. No formal application is required and no discretionary action by Commerce is needed. Please also visit [Commerce's Critical Areas webpage](#) for further information.

What is a small or slow-growing jurisdiction?

A **county** with a population of no more than 50,000 and a growth rate of no more than seventeen percent in the ten years preceding the deadline shown in Figure 2.⁹



A **city** with a population of 5,000 or less and has had its population increase by the greater of either no more than one hundred persons or no more than seventeen percent in the ten years preceding the deadline shown in Figure 2.

Growth rates are measured using the ten-year period preceding the regular due date.¹⁰

Official **population** estimates are provided by the [Washington State Office of Financial Management \(OFM\)](#), released in June of each year, reflecting counts from April. A county or city will not know for certain what their population is until nine months before the statutory

deadline if a jurisdiction is close, or expects any large annexations close to the due date, the population information should be monitored closely. Commerce can help you make this determination.

Can a jurisdiction complete the update early?

Yes, a jurisdiction may complete the periodic update process before its deadline¹¹. The deadline for its next periodic update would still remain as ten years from the original deadline established in the GMA, with a planning horizon extended twenty years from the periodic update deadline. For example, if a jurisdiction has an update deadline of December 31, 2024, but it completes its update in 2023, then it would not be subject to

⁸ [RCW 36.70A.130 \(7\)\(a\) and \(b\)](#)

⁹ Periodic Update cycle and deadline years are listed in: [RCW 36.70A.130\(5\)](#)

¹⁰ [RCW 36.70A.130 \(6\)\(e\) and \(f\)](#)

¹¹ [RCW 36.70A.130\(6\)\(a\)](#)

another required periodic update until 2034. In this example, the planning horizon of the updated comprehensive plan would extend a total 21 years to 2044: 20 years from the periodic update deadline.

To help alleviate any confusion, Commerce recommends that the final legislative action taken upon completion of the periodic update process clearly note the early adoption and the due date of the next scheduled periodic update according to statute.

III: What's new for the 2024-2027 cycle

The Governor and the Legislature made a historic investment in GMA planning during the 2022 Legislative Session. These new bills represent an investment in supporting growth management and addressing the problems all of our communities are facing. The new bills are summarized below:¹²

HB 1220	Jurisdictions must plan for and accommodate, rather than encourage the availability of, emergency and affordable housing
HB 1241	Changes the Periodic update and SMP cycles from 8 to 10 years. Requires a 5-year implementation progress report and an annual work program for select jurisdictions
HB 1717	New regulations for cities and counties to include local and regional tribes in planning processes and decisions
HB 2001	Expands the ability to build tiny houses
SB 5042	Changes the initial effective date of certain actions under the GMA
SB 5118	Supports successful reentry for juveniles, amending the definition of “essential public facilities”
SB 5235	Increasing housing unit inventory by removing arbitrary limits on housing
SB 5275	Enhances opportunity in LAMIRDs
SB 5368	Encourages rural economic development
SB 5593	Allows a county to make revisions to a UGA boundary to accommodate patterns of development
SB 5818	Promoting housing construction in cities through amendments to and limiting appeals under SEPA and GMA

¹² 2021-2022 Growth Management Legislative Reports: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/bi/report/topicalindex/?biennium=2021-22&topic=GROWTH%20MANAGEMENT>

IV: Mandatory topics to review & revise

The GMA calls out a number of specific items that must be reviewed as part of the periodic update.

Amendments to the GMA

The primary purpose of the periodic update is to ensure local plans and regulations are consistent with recent changes to state law and updates to countywide planning policies, and to update information such as population changes and infrastructure investments and needs. Although the basic structure of the GMA has remained intact over the years, the state legislature has amended it frequently. Commerce reviews and updates the administrative rules for the GMA and expects to finalize rulemaking by 2022 so that local governments have clear guidance on how to implement GMA requirements before the 2024-2027 update cycle.

Commerce has created checklists for counties and cities to use throughout the process. The checklists include all requirements and highlight recent changes to state law. Commerce has also prepared a summary of amendments by year to help you identify what needs to be updated, based on when your plans and regulations were last amended.

Fully planning jurisdictions will need to conduct a review of all comprehensive plan provisions and development regulations, and if needed, make revisions. One component of this requirement is that jurisdictions must establish a public participation program to engage with residents, stakeholders, tribes and state agencies early and often.

Jurisdictions often combine the annual comprehensive plan docket (annual amendments) with the periodic update review when both are considered in the same year. When doing so, it is crucial to emphasize that the amendments include periodic update review as established in the public participation program, including notices for public hearings and legislative action(s). Hearings Board cases have faulted jurisdictions for not informing the public about what actions are related specifically to the periodic update.

See the [Periodic Update webpage](#) for checklists, guidebooks and other resources. See the Growth Management [Laws and Rules webpage](#) for links to state statutes and other amendment resources.

Urban growth areas & population projections

All fully planning counties, in conjunction with cities, must review UGAs as part of the periodic update.

Counties that fully plan under the GMA must designate urban growth areas (UGAs), which creates areas for additional urban development and outside of which growth may occur only if it is not urban in nature. Planning jurisdictions must include within their UGAs sufficient areas and densities to accommodate projected urban growth for the succeeding 20-year period. In addition, cities must include sufficient areas to accommodate the broad range of needs and uses that will accompany the projected urban growth, including, as appropriate, medical, governmental, institutional, commercial, service, retail, and other nonresidential uses.

UGAs, which by definition include all cities, must allow development densities sufficient to accommodate the next twenty years of projected population and employment growth. If zoning regulations don't authorize the densities to accommodate this growth,



jurisdictions need to increase allowed densities, expand the size of the UGA, or both.¹³ In the next round of updates, cities must plan for and accommodate housing needs by income band, so communities will need to make assumptions about the densities that will provide housing at various price points, and adjust accordingly to meet housing need.

The GMA requires that jurisdictions use twenty-year population projections from the Washington State OFM. These projections are developed every five years.¹⁴ The most recent twenty-year population forecasts from OFM were issued in 2012 and 2017, with new projections expected to publish by the end of 2022.¹⁵

Mandatory Elements of the Comprehensive Plan

Fully planning cities and counties must include, at a minimum, the following mandatory elements in a comprehensive plan, as outlined in [RCW 36.70A.070](#). All elements must be consistent with each other and the future land use map. [RCW 36.70A.080](#) contains examples of optional elements.

- Land Use
- Housing
- Capital Facilities Plan
- Utilities
- Rural
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Parks & Recreation¹⁶

Development Regulations

As defined in the GMA under [RCW 36.70A.030](#), "Development regulations" or "regulation" means the controls placed on development or land use activities by a county or city, including, but not limited to, zoning ordinances, critical areas ordinances, shoreline master programs, official controls, planned unit development ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and binding site plan ordinances together with any amendments thereto. A development regulation does not include a decision to approve a project permit application, as defined in [RCW 36.70B.020](#), even though the decision may be expressed in a resolution or ordinance of the legislative body of the county or city.

Some jurisdictions develop "unified development codes" (or land use codes) that contain a range of development procedures regulating how land is subdivided, used, and developed. Other jurisdictions have separate titles of their codes for zoning, subdivision, environmental regulations, etc. In communities that are planning under the GMA, development regulations are required to be consistent with adopted comprehensive plans. To explore types of development regulations and to ensure your jurisdiction is compliant with the GMA, please visit [MRSC's Development Regulations and Zoning webpage](#).

¹³ [RCW 36.70A.130\(3\)\(a\)](#)

¹⁴ [RCW 43.62.035](#)

¹⁵ OFM "Growth Management Act county projections" [Growth Management Act county projections | Office of Financial Management \(wa.gov\)](#)

¹⁶ As of 2022, these elements have not received state funding to aid local jurisdictions in implementation. Therefore, these elements are not required to be added to comprehensive plans at this time. Commerce encourages jurisdictions to begin planning for these elements, pending the future mandate.

Critical Areas



The GMA requires all counties and cities to review and evaluate critical areas ordinances during the periodic update.¹⁷ The GMA requires that best available science (BAS) be included in developing regulations to protect critical area functions and values.¹⁸ Meeting the BAS requirement has been challenging for many jurisdictions. Commerce and other state agencies, including the departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife, have published guidance for local communities on how to identify what constitutes BAS for critical areas protection and how local governments can include science in their policies and development regulations. Counties and cities should consult these

state agency recommendations for possible changes since their last periodic update. In addition, they should include any other scientific information that may apply directly to their jurisdiction. It is recommended that local governments check Commerce's [Update EZ View site](#) for potential updates to WAC 365-195 (BAS) during planning efforts for the 2024-2027 update cycle. Visit Commerce's [Critical Areas webpage](#) for further resources and links.

Resource Lands

Resource lands, as defined in RCW 36.70A.030 are: agriculture, forest and mineral lands. Each county that is required or chooses to plan under RCW 36.70A.040, and each city within such county, shall adopt development regulations on or before September 1, 1991, to assure the conservation of agricultural, forest, and mineral resource lands designated under [RCW 36.70A.170](#). Regulations adopted under this subsection may not prohibit uses legally existing on any parcel prior to their adoption and shall remain in effect until the county or city adopts development regulations pursuant to RCW 36.70A.040. Such regulations shall assure that the use of lands adjacent to agricultural, forest, or mineral resource lands shall not interfere with the continued use, in the accustomed manner and in accordance with best management practices, of these designated lands for the production of food, agricultural products, or timber, or for the extraction of minerals.



¹⁷ [RCW 36.70A.060](#)

¹⁸ [RCW 36.70A.172](#)

V. The review and update process

Steps of the process:

Tips for completing steps in the process are included in this section. The summary of steps below is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all requirements local jurisdictions may need to complete in order to finalize the periodic review of comp plans and development regulations. Each step below is shown in numbered-order, but many can be worked on concurrently throughout the process. Working alongside local staff and stakeholders is essential for a thorough and transparent update process. Please contact Commerce's [Growth Management Regional Assistance Team](#) for additional guidance.

1. Create a work program

Before undertaking the update it is helpful for county and city staff to establish a work program that outlines the entire periodic update process. See the [Periodic Update webpage](#) for an example work program. Commerce encourages local governments to complete a checklist when designing a work program for the update. As a required component of the periodic update, counties and cities must establish a program that identifies procedures and schedules for the public to participate in the periodic update.¹⁹ The program should clearly identify the scope of the review and identify when legislative action on the review and update component are proposed to occur. Counties and cities must ensure that notice of the update process is broadly and effectively disseminated.²⁰

The program must also provide for *early and continuous public participation*.²¹ The best way for a county or city to complete this requirement is to publish a complete public participation program (see step 5) or schedule at the beginning of the update process. However, it is not required that a county or city establish the entire schedule at the beginning of the process, as long as a program is established and effective notice is provided for all update steps.

2. Capital facilities data gathering and planning

Planning for capital facilities²² is critical in the process of designating or expanding UGAs. Too often, GMA Capital Facilities Plans (CFPs) have been prepared as an afterthought, rather than as an integral part of the planning process. A particularly critical weakness of many CFPs has been the failure to demonstrate that designated UGAs could be supported by adequate public facilities that would sustain urban development. Visit [Commerce's Capital Facilities Planning webpage](#) and the [Municipal Research and Services Center \(MRSC\)](#) for capital facilities and UGA planning resources.

Capital facilities plans can help jurisdictions use limited funding wisely and most efficiently to maximize funding opportunities. By planning ahead to identify what each capital facilities' needs are, including operation and maintenance, local planners and elected officials can prioritize projects, coordinate related projects, and apply successfully for loan and grant opportunities.

¹⁹ [RCW 36.70A.035](#) and [130\(2\)\(a\)](#)

²⁰ [RCW 36.70A.035](#)

²¹ [RCW 36.70A.140](#)

²² Capital Facilities element: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=36.70A.070>

What does a capital facilities plan include?

- An inventory of existing capital facilities owned by public entities, showing the locations and capacities of the capital facilities;
- A forecast of the future needs for such capital facilities;
- The proposed locations and capacities of expanded or new capital facilities;
- At least a six-year plan that will finance such capital facilities within projected funding capacities and clearly identifies sources of public money for such purposes, often referred to as the Capital Improvement Plan, or the financing implementation plan that is tied to the Budget; if a capital improvement is not listed in the CIP or CFP, it should not be prioritized for funding.
- A requirement to reassess the land use element, and future land use patterns, if probable funding falls short of meeting existing needs and to ensure that the land use element, capital facilities plan element, and financing plan within the capital facilities plan element are coordinated and consistent. Park and recreation facilities shall be included in the capital facilities plan element.
- Recent updated requirements to addressing nutrients at Puget Sound wastewater treatment facilities, as identified in Ecology’s General Permit, should be considered when updating the Capital Facilities Plan, where applicable.

3. Initiate county-city collaboration

At least two years prior to the update and continuously throughout the process, county-city collaboration is crucial. Local governments must coordinate on regional issues such as: population projections, population allocations, development of a countywide economic forecast, and the [new housing forecast allocations](#).

Coordination of GIS data between counties and cities should be considered early in the process (for Buildable Lands counties, Review & Evaluation data collection and methodology must be established in CWPPs).

Completion of the periodic update may result in changes to spatial data and it is important to coordinate with GIS staff, consultants and affected agencies early to ensure updated maps can ‘go live’ soon after the periodic update is adopted and codified.

4. Begin review of existing regulations

The statute does not exempt any portion of a comprehensive plan or any development regulations from being subject to review and evaluation. However, local governments may use common-sense factors in determining the level of review, taking into account when the plan and regulations were adopted and whether and how the GMA has been amended in the intervening time.

The Department of Commerce periodic update checklists should be the foundation of your review. These checklists provide a concise summary of the GMA requirements.

See the [Periodic Update webpage](#) for the latest checklists and guidebooks.

Filling out the checklists will help compare your local plan and regulations against the latest requirements, determine what needs to be reviewed in greater detail, and identify what may need to be added, deleted, and amended in plans and codes to maintain compliance with the act. The checklist can also be used at the very



end of the update process to document what changes are proposed for adoption. Submitting a completed checklist to Commerce, ideally with your update plans and materials **during the 60-day review period**, is strongly recommended.

Counties and cities may elect to adopt an ordinance or resolution after reviewing and analyzing what will be updated and determining the scope of changes needed. This is a formal way to let the public know early “what is on the table” as part of the update. It also may help in limiting appeals. If there are no challenges to the scope of revisions within 60 days after the legislative action, challenges to the jurisdiction’s final ordinance will be limited to the subjects defined in the ordinance. See examples of legislative actions establishing the scope of an update on the [Periodic Update webpage](#).

Buildable Lands counties and cities are required to identify reasonable measures necessary to fix inconsistencies identified by the Buildable Lands Reports, and if applicable, incorporate those reasonable measures into their periodic update.

5. Develop a community engagement plan

“Effective community engagement practices create a vehicle for participatory local democracy by giving members of the public the opportunity to become directly involved in guiding policy decisions that will shape the future of their community. Meaningful engagement that is based upon a two-way communication process between the public and their elected community leaders can play an important role in efforts to restore and build trust in government. Community engagement and outreach programs will also be key components of any efforts by local governments to address social equity and inclusion.”²³

Local jurisdictions may want to formally adopt the public participation program by resolution or ordinance to formalize the update process and help to meet the GMA requirements for early and continuous public involvement. A public participation plan can be adjusted over time if needed. The GMA provides that “errors in exact compliance with the established program and procedures shall not render the comprehensive land use plan or development regulations invalid if the spirit of the program and procedures is observed.



Participation levels typically range from **inform, consult, involve, and collaborate, up to empower**. The engagement frameworks are usually presented in a matrix, which can be helpful in deciding on the types of meeting formats and engagement techniques that may be best suited for specific engagement needs and objectives. There are no one-size-fits-all approaches to community engagement efforts. Local governments have a range of options and methods from which they can choose depending upon their particular needs and circumstances.

New and rapidly evolving **communications technologies** are creating more ways for local governments to connect and engage with the public through remote meetings, email and text alerts, social media, mobile apps, and more. More people are online today and local governments that take advantage of digital technologies will be more effective at engaging with them.”²⁴

²³ [RCW 36.70A.140](#)

²⁴ MRSC “Community Engagement Resources” <https://mrsc.org/Home/Explore-Topics/Governance/Citizen-Participation-and-Engagement/Community-Engagement-Resources.aspx>

Workshops, open houses and public hearings on draft iterations are crucial to a successful and transparent periodic update process. Local staff should provide opportunities for the public to participate in ideas for the future of their community and weigh-in on choices that may or may not be compatible with priorities or visions for the future.

Partnerships with state agencies should also be initiated early in the process. In addition to Commerce, many state agencies are stakeholders in updates made to local comp plans and development regulations. For example, agencies such as Ecology and the Department of Fish and Wildlife may have interests in draft changes to critical area codes and the Departments of Transportation and Health may want to participate in analysis of utilities and essential public facilities elements. Commerce recommends including state agencies *early and often* in development of a community engagement plan to ensure adequate time for research and analysis prior to their review during the 60-day comment period.

Some helpful resources for getting started: [MRSC's Community Engagement Resources webpage](#) and [WAC 365-196-600](#)

6. Conduct SEPA environmental review & checklist

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), [RCW 43.21C](#), requires all governmental agencies to consider the environmental impacts of a proposal before making decisions. The Washington State Department of Ecology (Ecology) is responsible for overseeing rules that implement SEPA. The environmental review process involves the identification and evaluation of probable environmental impacts, and the development of mitigation measures that will reduce adverse environmental impacts. Please review Ecology's [SEPA Guidance](#) and [State Environmental Policy Act Handbook](#) and contact your [regional Ecology office](#) to get started.

7. Draft staff reports and maps

Staff reports and supporting documents such as maps, exhibits and individual studies are required elements in the periodic update. They must be legally defensible, factual and easy to understand. Staff reports join all of the information of the process, findings of fact, stakeholder resources, conclusions, etc. into a transparent and complete document for the public record. It may be helpful to draft a staff report outline early on to help guide staff through documentation of the process. Tips for writing an effective staff report can be found on [MRSC's site](#).

8. Issue public notices

Public notices are required and are essential to the periodic update process, allowing for an inclusive and transparent path to successfully-adopted plans. Public notices for proposed updates to comprehensive plans and development regulations must be issued in designated legal publications ([RCW 65.16](#)) and may be issued on other platforms, such as social media outlets authorized by the local jurisdiction. Publishing environmental review under SEPA is required and can be issued as a separate noticing period or in conjunction with the public notice of the project. Check your local adopted policies prior to issuing public/SEPA notices.

9. Make SEPA determination

After conducting environmental review and meeting the requirements for public notice, a local jurisdiction must make a SEPA determination in accordance with policies established by Ecology. Following local approval of draft changes required by the periodic update, some local governments choose the SEPA/GMA integrated comment period which aligns with Commerce's 60-day notice requirements. Review your local policies regarding SEPA review and noticing.

Please review Ecology’s [SEPA Guidance](#) and [State Environmental Policy Act Handbook](#) or contact your [regional Ecology office](#)

10. Submit notice to Commerce for 60-day review

Each county and city planning under the GMA is required to notify the Commerce Growth Management Services office when adopting or permanently amending its comprehensive plans and/or development regulations. State agency notice must be submitted to Commerce at least **sixty (60) days prior** to the scheduled final adoption by the local government. The purpose of this notice requirement is to allow Commerce and other state agencies the opportunity to participate during the public review process and may provide comments on the proposed changes.

For more information on this notice requirement, please see [RCW 36.70A.106](#) and [WAC 365-196-630](#).

Notice of intent to adopt an amendment under the GMA is a statutory procedural requirement. It should be in writing and include, at a minimum:

- A copy of the proposed amendment text;
- A description of the amendment, the local government contact person, the contact phone number and address, and proposed adoption date; and
- Transmission to Commerce, Growth Management Services online via the [PlanView Data System](#) or by email: reviewteam@commerce.wa.gov
- Completed Commerce Checklist (first deliverable under your periodic update grant)
- Copies of *adopted* development regulations and critical areas ordinances

Please note:

Documents such as noticing flyers, adoption announcements or SEPA materials, when submitted alone, **do not** represent adequate 60-day notice of intent to adopt because they fail to provide sufficient materials for Commerce and other state agencies to review and provide comment.

Commerce no longer accepts paper copies of submittals.

11. Take legislative action

Adopt an ordinance or resolution finding that a review has occurred and that identifies revisions made or concludes that revisions were not needed ([RCW 36.70A.130\(1\)\(b\)](#)). Follow your local policies and processes for preparing and taking legislative action. See examples of resolutions of adoption along with examples of adopted comprehensive plans and development regulations on the [periodic update webpage](#) and in [PlanView](#).

12. Submit notice of adoption to Commerce and publish updates

Submit a copy of the signed adopted ordinance or resolution to Commerce, Growth Management Services not more than ten days after adoption. (RCW 36.70A.106)

Jurisdictions are encouraged to submit their completed Commerce checklist with the final package to be eligible for periodic update grants. Completed checklists also help Commerce planners provide more informed technical assistance across the state. Please contact our [Regional Assistance Team](#) anytime throughout the process. Work with your department and code publishing service to codify and publish the updates.

VI: Additional Considerations

Periodic Update Grants

The governor and Legislature made a historic commitment to GMA planning during the 2022 legislative session. As a result, Commerce will provide grant funding to all counties and cities before upcoming comprehensive plan and development regulation periodic updates (2024-2027 cycle).

Grant timelines and requirements

Grants will be awarded to counties and cities based on their scheduled deadlines under RCW 36.70A.130(5), with funding available two years before these statutory deadlines for review and revision of comprehensive plans and development regulations.

Starting July 1, 2022, counties and cities with a 2024 deadline, which are King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties and the cities within them, are eligible to receive the first half of their grant. The second half of this grant is scheduled for the next state fiscal year.

Periodic update grant award notifications and instructions will be issued to counties and cities with 2024 updates in 2022. Commerce will work with you to finalize the grant agreements. Jurisdictions will be eligible to request grant reimbursement for all periodic update grant work, defined in the grant agreements, beginning July 1, 2022.

Grants are available to counties and cities based on fully planning or partially planning status under the GMA, as well as population.

Periodic update grants are available under the following formula:

Fully Planning	
• Counties with 100,000 population and over	\$700,000
• Counties under 100,000 population	\$350,000
• Cities with 100,000 population and over	\$325,000
• Cities with 50,000 to 99,999 population	\$175,000
• Cities with 3,000 to 49,999 population	\$125,000
• Cities under 3,000 population	\$100,000
Partially Planning	
• Counties with 10,000 population and over	\$150,000
• Counties under 10,000 population	\$100,000
• Cities (No population limits)	\$20,000

More information on GMA update grants (including middle housing and climate program grants) will be added to the [Growth Management Grants webpage](#) as it becomes available.

Comprehensive plan optional elements

A comprehensive plan may include additional elements, subarea plans, or studies dealing with subjects relating to the physical development within its jurisdiction. Optional elements may include, but are not limited to: climate change mitigation and resiliency, recreation and community-based behavioral health facilities. These and other optional elements can be separate elements in a comprehensive plan, integrated into mandatory elements or part of a subarea plan.

Please reference [RCW 36.70A.080](#) and visit Commerce’s [Growth Management webpage](#) for additional topics and resources.

Coordination with military bases

When developing and updating comprehensive plans and development regulations, analysis for compatibility with area military bases and ranges is essential.

GMA [RCW 36.70A.530](#) cites the military’s significant role in the economy and declares a state priority to prevent incompatible development near military installations. Incompatible development also poses health and safety concerns for neighboring community members and military personnel operating or training for active duty.



Ongoing communication and collaborative planning is critical to understanding civilian-military interests in the landscape they share. Since 2015, Commerce has developed supportive resources for coordinated planning to help address the unique needs of areas around military bases and ranges. Please visit Commerce’s [Civilian-Military Land Use Compatibility webpage](#) and [Defense Community Compatibility Account webpage](#) for further information.

Tribal Participation in Planning



Tribal communities have been the stewards of the lands of Washington State since time immemorial. The Department of Commerce respects their continued stewardship and actively work to honor their Tribal Sovereignty by engaging in meaningful government to government work as illustrated by the Centennial Accord.

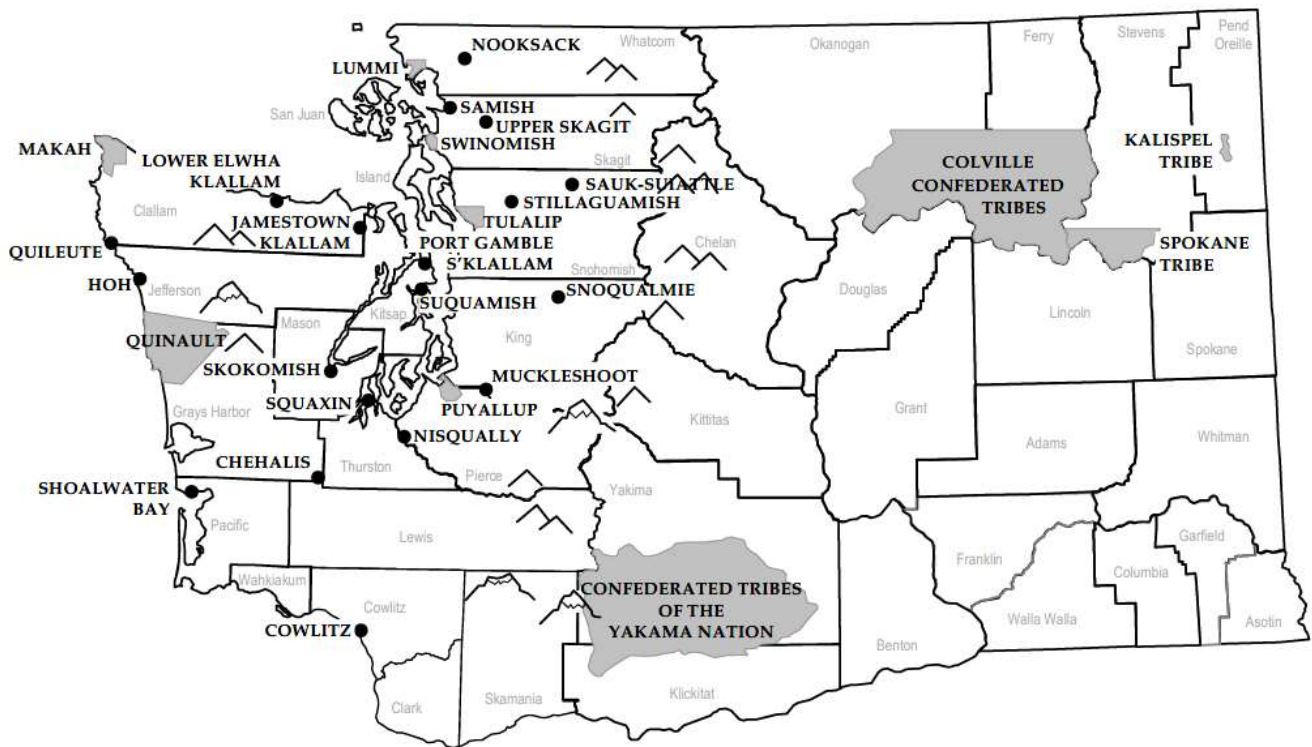
Tribes are partners in the planning process through public participation, project noticing requirements and critical area development.²⁵ [HB 1717](#) was passed in the 2021-2022 legislative session, bringing new requirements for better collaboration with tribes in the planning process.

Please see [Figure 3](#) on the following page for a map of the “Federally Recognized Tribes of Washington State.” Also review the RCWs in the footnote below, [HB 1717](#) and visit the Washington State [Governor’s Office of Indian Affairs webpage](#) and Commerce’s [Tribal Engagement webpage](#) for further resources.

²⁵ [RCW 43.376](#), [RCW 36.70A.035](#), [RCW 36.70A.040](#), [RCW 36.70A.210](#), [RCW 36.70A.710](#), [RCW 36.70A.715](#) and [RCW 36.70A.720](#)

Figure 3. Federally Recognized Tribes

FEDERALLY RECOGNIZED TRIBES OF WASHINGTON STATE



Resources:

Department of Commerce Growth Management Services: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/>

Department of Commerce Growth Management Act Laws and Rules: <https://www.commerce.wa.gov/about-us/rulemaking/gma-laws-rules/>

Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC): <https://mrsc.org/Home.aspx>

Puget Sound Regional Council: <https://www.psrc.org/>

Washington State GMA RCW: <https://apps.leg.wa.gov/rcw/default.aspx?cite=36.70A>

Washington State GMA WAC: <https://app.leg.wa.gov/wac/default.aspx?cite=365-196>