



# HOUSING ELEMENT PLANNING FRAMEWORK

State, Regional, Countywide, and Local  
Information

## SUMMARY

This document is a summary of the general housing planning framework under state law, regional planning efforts, King County policies, and local sources of information. This paper is a primer for the City of Mercer Island Planning Commission to review the Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

City of Mercer Island, WA  
Community Planning and Development Department  
Adam Zack, Senior Planner  
March 14, 2024

## Housing Element Planning Framework

This document is a summary of the general housing planning framework under state law, regional planning efforts, King County policies, and local sources of information. This paper is a primer for the City of Mercer Island Planning Commission to review the Housing Element of the Comprehensive Plan.

### Statewide – Growth Management Act (GMA)

Adopted in 1990, the WA State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires most cities and counties in the state to adopt and periodically review a comprehensive plan. The City of Mercer Island adopted its first GMA compliant comprehensive plan in 1994 with [Ordinance A-122](#). The City's GMA compliant Comprehensive Plan has been updated several times in the intervening 30 years. The GMA is codified in [Chapter 36.70A Revised Code of Washington \(RCW\)](#).

#### Statewide Planning Goals and Mandatory Elements

The GMA establishes fifteen statewide planning goals to guide the development of local comprehensive plans. The statewide planning goals are the foundation of what comprehensive plans should seek to accomplish. Statewide planning goal 4 established in RCW 36.70A.020(4) addresses housing, stating:

“Housing. Plan for and accommodate housing affordable 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.”

In addition to outlining the goal for planning for housing, the GMA requires the City adopt a Housing Element as part of its comprehensive plan. The GMA Housing Element requirement includes direction on what must be included in a Housing Element in RCW 36.70A.070(2) – Mandatory Elements, which states:

[...]

(2) A housing element ensuring the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods that:

(a) Includes an inventory and analysis of existing and projected housing needs that identifies the number of housing units necessary to manage projected growth, as provided by the department of commerce, including:

(i) Units for moderate, low, very low, and extremely low-income households; and

(ii) Emergency housing, emergency shelters, and permanent supportive housing;

(b) Includes a statement of goals, policies, objectives, and mandatory provisions for the preservation, improvement, and development of

housing, including single-family residences, and within an urban growth area boundary, moderate density housing options including[,] but not limited to, duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes;

(c) Identifies sufficient capacity of land for housing including, but not limited to, government-assisted housing, housing for moderate, low, very low, and extremely low-income households, manufactured housing, multifamily housing, group homes, foster care facilities, emergency housing, emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing, and within an urban growth area boundary, consideration of duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes;

(d) Makes adequate provisions for existing and projected needs of all economic segments of the community, including:

(i) Incorporating consideration for low, very low, extremely low, and moderate-income households;

(ii) Documenting programs and actions needed to achieve housing availability including gaps in local funding, barriers such as development regulations, and other limitations;

(iii) Consideration of housing locations in relation to employment location; and

(iv) Consideration of the role of accessory dwelling units in meeting housing needs;

(e) Identifies local policies and regulations that result in racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing, including:

(i) Zoning that may have a discriminatory effect;

(ii) Disinvestment; and

(iii) Infrastructure availability;

(f) Identifies and implements policies and regulations to address and begin to undo racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing caused by local policies, plans, and actions;

(g) Identifies areas that may be at higher risk of displacement from market forces that occur with changes to zoning development regulations and capital investments; and

(h) Establishes antidisplacement policies, with consideration given to the preservation of historical and cultural communities as well as

investments in low, very low, extremely low, and moderate-income housing; equitable development initiatives; inclusionary zoning; community planning requirements; tenant protections; land disposition policies; and consideration of land that may be used for affordable housing.

In counties and cities subject to the review and evaluation requirements of RCW 36.70A.215, any revision to the housing element shall include consideration of prior review and evaluation reports and any reasonable measures identified. The housing element should link jurisdictional goals with overall county goals to ensure that the housing element goals are met.

### **RCW Sections**

[36.70A.020 – Planning Goals](#)

[36.70A.030 – Definitions](#)

[36.70A.070 – Mandatory Elements](#)

### **Washington Administrative Code (WAC)**

The WA Department of Commerce (Commerce) has established additional Housing Element requirements and recommendations in WAC 365-196-410 - Housing Element. The Commerce guidance and expanded housing checklist also provide information about recommendations and requirements at the state level.

[WAC 365-196-410 – Housing Element](#)

### **Commerce Guidance**

Between May and August 2023, Commerce published three housing guidebooks. These documents updated the Commerce guidance for complying with GMA given the significant changes enacted in 2021, when the WA Legislature passed House Bill 1220. The Commerce guidebooks are available on the Commerce website:

**Book 1 - [Establishing Housing Targets for Your Community](#)**

**Book 2 – [Guidance for Updating Your Housing Element](#)**

**Book 3 – [Guidance to Address Racially Disparate Impacts](#)**

### **Commerce Expanded Housing Checklist**

Commerce has published the [Expanded Housing Checklist](#) for updating the housing elements to ensure that the element is consistent with the GMA requirements. The Expanded Housing Checklist includes items in the Land Use Element and development regulations that need to be updated. The requirements from the Expanded Housing Checklist are:

## Land Use Element

- LU-1** The land uses on the future land use map must reflect projected growth including future housing needs.
- LU-2** Include table or other documentation of local allocation of population and housing needs by income bracket from the countywide process.
- LU-3** Population estimates should include assumed densities to accommodate housing needs.
- LU-4** Review and potentially amend goals and policies to address racially disparate impacts. Land use goals and policies identified for potential amendment in the Racially Disparate Impacts Evaluation: Goal 15, Policies 15.1, 15.2, 15.3, 15.4, 16.5, and 30.6.
- LU-5** Land Use Map should show higher density housing located near employment (commercial) and/or adjacent to high quality transit.

## Housing Element

- COM-1** Ensure there are policies addressing a variety of moderate density housing types, such as duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes.
- COM-2** Include text and/or policies that address the potential for ADUs to meet housing needs.
- COM-3** Table or other documentation of local allocation of housing needs by income bracket.
- COM-4** Statement showing there is sufficient capacity of land for all income housing needs, including a table showing the breakdown of capacity in zones which adds up to housing needs for all income brackets.
- COM-5** Documentation that the City allows the siting of a sufficient number of units and beds necessary to meet projected needs for Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) and Emergency Housing.
- COM-6** The Zoning Map must be consistent with and implement the Land Use Map and land capacity findings.
- COM-7** Include a list of barriers to affordable housing needs, including barriers to emergency housing and permanent supportive housing.
- COM-8** Documentation of programs and actions intended to remove barriers to affordable housing.
- COM-9** Include a statement of whether data shows if there are disparate impacts.
- COM-10** Review of housing element policies and regulations that have led to these impacts.
- COM-11** Include policies that address development of more affordable housing, preservation of existing affordable housing, and protection of existing households from displacement.

**COM-12** Map of areas that may be at risk of displacement.

## Development Regulations and Zoning Code

**COM-13** Zoning map and text allow for the housing types and densities in the land capacity analysis.

**COM-14** Any limitations on permanent supportive housing and transitional housing must be connected to public health and safety and allow the siting of a sufficient number of units and beds necessary to meet projected needs.

## Regional – Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC)

The PSRC is a regional planning agency that coordinates decisions about regional growth, transportation and economic development planning in King, Kitsap, Pierce, and Snohomish counties. The PSRC is a Regional Transportation Planning Organization (RTPO), which reviews locally adopted comprehensive plans to transportation planning goals are met ([RCW 47.80.026](#)). The PSRC will review the City's adopted Comprehensive Plan update to ensure that it is consistent with regional plans.

### Vision 2050

From the [PSRC website](#):

VISION 2050 is the region's plan for growth. By 2050, the region's population will reach 5.8 million people. The region's cities, counties, Tribes, ports, agencies, businesses, and communities have worked together to develop VISION 2050 to prepare for this growth and serve as a guide for sustaining a healthy environment, thriving communities and a strong economy. VISION 2050 is a plan for the long-term that can be adjusted as the region changes.

Vision 2050 establishes Multicounty Planning Policies (MPPs), which help guide the formulation of countywide and local comprehensive plan policies.

[Vision 2050 – MPPs: Housing](#)  
[Vision 2050 – Housing Element Guide](#)  
[Vision 2050 – Full Plan](#)

### PSRC Vision 2050 Consistency Tool

The PSRC has published a [Vision 2050 Consistency Tool for Local Comprehensive Plans](#), which includes items that must be addressed in local housing elements. The requirements from the Vision 2050 Consistency Tool are:

**PSRC-1** Address affordable housing needs by developing a housing needs assessment and evaluating the effectiveness of existing housing policies, and documenting strategies to achieve housing targets and affordability goals. This includes documenting programs and actions needed to

achieve housing availability including gaps in local funding, barriers such as development regulations, and other limitations.

- PSRC-2** Increase housing supply and densities to meet the region’s current and projected needs at all income levels consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy. [Source: Multicounty Planning Policy (MPP)-H-1]
- PSRC-3** Expand the diversity of housing types for all income levels and demographic groups, including low, very low, extremely low, and moderate-income households. [Source: MPP-H-2-6, H-9]
- PSRC-4** Expand housing capacity for moderate density housing, i.e., “missing middle”. [Source: MPP-H-9]
- PSRC-5** Promote jobs-housing balance by providing housing choices that are accessible and attainable to workers. Include jobs-housing balance in housing needs assessments to better support job centers with the needed housing supply. [Source: MPP-H-1, H-6, H-Action-4]
- PSRC-6** Expand housing choices in centers and near transit. [Source: MPP-H-7-8]
- PSRC-7** Promote flexible standards and innovative techniques to encourage housing production that keeps pace with growth and need. [Source: MPP-H-10]
- PSRC-8** Use inclusionary and incentive zoning to provide more affordable housing when creating additional housing capacity. [Source: H-Action-5]
- PSRC-9** Jurisdictions planning for high-capacity transit stations: Create and preserve affordable housing near high-capacity transit. [Source: MPP-H-8, H-Action-1]
- PSRC-10** Identify potential physical, economic, and cultural displacement of low-income households and marginalized populations and work with communities to develop anti-displacement strategies when planning for growth. [Source: MPP-H-12, H-Action-6]
- PSRC-11** Promote homeownership opportunities while recognizing historic inequities in access to homeownership opportunities for communities of color. [Source: MPP-H-5]
- PSRC-12** Identify and begin to undo local policies and regulations that result in racially disparate impacts, displacement, and exclusion in housing, including zoning that may have a discriminatory effect and areas of disinvestment and infrastructure availability.

## King County

Under the GMA, counties serve an important role to coordinate planning among cities, setting urban growth area boundaries, analyzing land capacity, and regulating land use to preserve natural resource lands for farming and timber production.

## Urban Growth Capacity (UGC) Report

In 2021, King County issued the [Urban Growth Capacity Report](#) (UGC Report). This report provides the development capacity for all cities within the County, including Mercer Island. The UGC Report analyzes development trends, vacant and redevelopable lands, and achieved densities by jurisdiction to determine each city's capacity to accommodate the 20-year housing and employment growth targets. The UGC Report found that the City of Mercer Island had sufficient capacity to accommodate both its employment and housing growth targets in the next twenty years:

**Mercer Island Housing Capacity – 1,429 housing units**  
**Mercer Island Employment Capacity – 961 jobs**

## Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs)

The [CPPs](#) coordinate planning among cities throughout King County. They do this by setting standards and establishing growth targets, so all cities are planning for their proportionate share of the projected countywide growth. The CPPs were most recently updated by King County by [Ordinance 19660](#). One of the aspects of the CPPs that influence the Housing Element the most are the setting of both an overall growth target and the housing need, which is a disaggregation of the growth target into a number of housing units needed at varying household income levels. Table 1 provides the housing needs as established in the CPPs amended by King County Ordinance 19660.

**Table 1. Mercer Island 2044 Housing Growth Target and Housing Needs.**

	Total Housing Growth Target	0-≤30% AMI <sup>3</sup>			>30-≤50% AMI	>50-≤80% AMI	>80-≤100% AMI	>100-≤120% AMI	>120% AMI	Emergency Housing <sup>2</sup>
		PSH <sup>1</sup>	Non-PSH <sup>1</sup>	Total ≤30% AMI						
20-years Total Need	1,239	339	178	517	202	488	4	5	23	237

Source: King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs), current through Ordinance 19660.

Notes:

1. Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH)
2. Emergency Housing need is its own metric and not part of the housing need or housing growth target.
3. Area Median Income (AMI).

## Countywide Planning Policies

[King County Website – CPPs](#)

## Permanent Supportive Housing and Emergency Housing

Under the GMA the City must plan for two types of housing for households with income at or below 30 percent of the AMI: permanent supportive housing (PSH) and non-permanent supportive housing. Housing need for extremely low-income housing is split into these two categories because these are two distinct housing types. PSH is intended to house people who need support services whereas non-PSH extremely low-income housing is meant for people at the lowest income level that do



not necessarily need additional services. For reference, PSH is defined in [RCW 36.70A.030\(31\)](#).

In addition to planning for PSH, the City must also plan for emergency housing. Emergency housing provides temporary indoor accommodations for individuals or families who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless that is intended to address the basic health, food, clothing, and personal hygiene needs of individuals or families ([RCW 36.70A.030\(14\)](#)). Emergency housing is different from housing for extremely low-income households and PSH in that it is intended to be shorter-term accommodations such as shelter space.

### **CPP Housing Element Requirements**

All city comprehensive plans in King County must be consistent with the CPPs. They were most recently updated in August 2023, by King County [Ordinance No. 19660](#). The 2023 update included amendments to address the new GMA housing requirements. The Housing Element requirements from the CPPs are summarized below:

- CPP-1** Include an inventory of the existing housing stock and assessment of housing needs and analysis to demonstrate that the jurisdiction can accommodate its projected housing need. [Source: CPP H-3]
- CPP-2** Evaluate the effectiveness of existing housing policies and strategies to plan for and accommodate their allocated share of countywide need. This includes identifying gaps in existing partnerships, policies, and dedicated resources for meeting countywide needs and eliminating racial and other disparities in access to housing and neighborhoods of choice. [Source: CPP H-4]
- CPP-3** Document the local history of racially exclusive and discriminatory land use and housing practices, consistent with local and regional fair housing reports and other resources. This includes evaluating housing policies for potential racially disparate impacts. Cities must demonstrate how current strategies are addressing impacts of those racially exclusive and discriminatory policies and practices. [Source: CPP H-5]
- CPP-4** Adopt intentional, targeted actions that repair harms to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color households from past and current racially exclusive and discriminatory land use and housing practices (generally identified through Policy H-(5). Promote equitable outcomes in partnership with communities most impacted. [Source: CPP H-9]
- CPP-5** Adopt policies, incentives, strategies, actions, and regulations that increase the supply of long-term income restricted housing for extremely low-, very low-, and low-income households and households with special needs. [Source: CPP H-10]
- CPP-6** Adopt and implement policies that improve the effectiveness of existing housing policies and strategies and address gaps in partnerships, policies, and dedicated resources to meet the jurisdiction's housing needs. [Source: CPP H-12]

- CPP-7** Implement strategies to overcome cost barriers to housing affordability. Strategies to do this vary but can include updating development standards and regulations, shortening permit timelines, implementing online permitting, optimizing residential densities, reducing parking requirements, and developing programs, policies, partnerships, and incentives to decrease costs to build and preserve affordable housing. [Source: CPP H-13]
- CPP-8** Prioritize the use of local and regional resources (e.g., funding, surplus property) for income-restricted housing, particularly for extremely low-income households, populations with special needs, and others with disproportionately greater housing needs. Consider projects that promote access to opportunity, anti-displacement, and wealth-building for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color. [Source: CPP H-14]
- CPP-9** Increase housing choices for everyone—particularly those earning lower wages—that is co-located with, accessible to, or within a reasonable commute to major employment centers and affordable to all income levels. Ensure there are zoning ordinances and building policies in place that allow and encourage housing production at levels that improve jobs-housing balance throughout the county across all income levels. [Source: CPP H-15]
- CPP-10** Expand the supply and range of housing types at densities sufficient to maximize the benefits of transit investments. [Source: CPP H-16]
- CPP-11** Support the development and preservation of income-restricted affordable housing that is within walking distance to planned or existing high-capacity and frequent transit. [Source: CPP H-17]
- CPP-12** Adopt inclusive policies intended to increase the ability of all residents to live in the neighborhood of their choice, reduce disparities in access to opportunity, and meet the needs of current and future residents by:
- Providing access to affordable housing with a focus on areas of high opportunity;
  - Increasing capacity for moderate density housing;
  - Evaluating the feasibility of inclusionary zoning to provide affordable housing; and
  - Providing access to housing types that serve a range of household sizes, types, and incomes. [Source: CPP H-18]
- CPP-13** Lower barriers to and promote access to affordable homeownership for extremely low-, very low-, and low-income, households. [Source: CPP H-19]
- CPP-14** Adopt and implement policies that address gaps in partnerships, policies, and dedicated resources to eliminate racial and other disparities in access to housing and neighborhoods of choice. [Source: CPP H-20]
- CPP-15** Adopt policies and strategies that promote:

- Equitable development and mitigate displacement risk, with consideration given to the preservation of historical and cultural communities;
- Investments in low-, very low-, extremely low-, and moderate-income housing production and preservation;
- Dedicated funds for land acquisition;
- Manufactured housing community preservation, inclusionary zoning; community planning requirements;
- Tenant protections;
- Public land disposition policies; and land that may be used for affordable housing;
- Mitigation of displacement that may result from planning efforts;
- Large-scale private investments, and market pressure; and
- Implementation of anti-displacement measures prior to or concurrent with development capacity increases and public capital investments. [Source: CPP H-21]

**CPP-16** Implement fair housing policies so that every person has equitable access and opportunity to thrive in their communities of choice regardless of their race, gender identity, sexual identity, ability, use of a service animal, age, immigration status, national origin, familial status, religion, source of income, military status, or membership in any other relevant category of protected people. [Source: CPP H-22]

**CPP-17** Adopt and implement policies that protect housing stability for renter households; expand protections and supports for moderate-, low-, very low- and extremely low-income renters and renters with disabilities. [Source: CPP H-23]

**CPP-18** Adopt programs and policies that ensure healthy and safe homes. [Source: CPP H-24]

**CPP-19** Plan for residential neighborhoods that protect and promote the health and well-being of residents by supporting equitable access to parks and open space, safe pedestrian and bicycle routes, clean air, soil and water, fresh and healthy foods, high-quality education from early learning through kindergarten through twelfth grade, affordable and high-quality transit options and living wage jobs and by avoiding or mitigating exposure to environmental hazards and pollutants. [Source: CPP H-25]

**CPP-20** Cities and the County must collaborate with the County to monitor and continually review the effectiveness of local strategies at meeting the countywide need. [Source: CPP H-28]

## **Mercer Island Housing Information**

Throughout the Comprehensive Plan periodic review, the City of Mercer Island has prepared several documents to inform goal setting and drafting policies.

### **Housing Needs Assessment**

In 2022, the City prepared a Housing Needs Assessment (HNA). The HNA analyzes conditions, trends, and gaps in Mercer Island’s housing stock. The HNA describes the current housing stock in the city and evaluates how the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan will accommodate the projected growth in housing.

In addition to analyzing housing needs, the HNA includes a list of recommended actions to address housing during the Comprehensive Plan update. The list of recommended actions includes policy recommendations, possible city programs, and other implementation actions to address identified housing needs.

The HNA was presented to the City Council and Planning Commission during a joint briefing with [Agenda Bill 6107](#). The City Council and Planning Commission made comments on HNA and were provided with an updated version in November 2022. That updated version will be adopted as an appendix of the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Land Capacity Analysis (LCA) Supplement**

In August 2023, Commerce issued its housing guidebook 2 “Guidance for Updating Your Housing Element” (see page 5 above). This guidance recommended steps for cities to analysis development capacity for their housing needs at varying household income levels. This guidance was issued to address new GMA planning requirements established by HB 1220.

In 2021, King County prepared the UGC Report, which analyzed land capacity in King County urban growth areas. The UGC Report did not consider the capacity for housing at affordable at different income levels. Further analysis is needed to determine whether there is adequate capacity to accommodate the housing need at each affordability level. The analysis that follows will make that determination and identify potential alternatives for addressing any capacity deficits at a given affordability level.

Based on the Commerce guidance, the City decided to conduct additional analysis to supplement the LCA conducted in the UGC Report. The LCA Supplement was prepared in the latter months of 2023 and was provided to the City Council with [Agenda Bill 6385](#). The LCA Supplement found that the City needed to increase development capacity by 143 multifamily and mixed-use housing units to accommodate its housing needs established in the King County CPPs. That capacity deficit will be addressed during the Comprehensive Plan periodic review.

### **Racially Disparate Impacts (RDI) Evaluation**

In May 2023 Commerce published “Guidance to Address Racially Disparate Impacts” (see page 6 above). This guidance recommended a process for cities to evaluate housing policies to comply with new requirements enacted by HB 1220 (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(e)-(h)). Based on the guidance, the City prepared the RDI Evaluation to determine whether housing policies have had a racially disparate impact and propose

steps the City can take to begin undoing those impacts. The RDI Evaluation also identified areas that have elevated risk of displacement as zoning changes and development occurs. The RDI Evaluation was presented to the City Council with the LCA Supplement in [Agenda Bill 6385](#). Updates to the Housing Element during the periodic review will address the findings of the RDI Evaluation.