
CITY OF MERCER ISLAND

COMMUNITY PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT

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PLANNING COMMISSION

TO: Planning Commission

FROM: Alison Van Gorp, CPD Deputy Director
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DATE: July 20, 2022

SUBJECT: Comprehensive Plan Update
Land Use Element – First Draft

Attachments A. First Draft Land Use Element

PURPOSE

To get the Planning Commission’s comments on the first draft of the Land Use Element of the Comprehensive Plan (Attachment A).

STRIKEOUT/UNDERLINE FORMAT

The draft Land Use Element in Attachment A shows all proposed amendments in strikeout/underline format. This is a way to track changes made to the original document in the current draft. Strikeout/underline format can be difficult to read at times, but it is valuable because it maintains the original text. Text that is proposed to be deleted is ~~struck out~~ and new text is underlined. An example is provided below.

Original Text: The Land Use Element is one piece of the Comprehensive Plan.

Strikeout/Underline: The Land Use Element is ~~one piece~~ the second element of the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan.

Clean Amended Text: The Land Use Element is the second element of the Mercer island Comprehensive Plan.

Elsewhere in the draft Land Use Element there are places where additional edits are expected when either new data are available, or another planning document is finished. These are noted in the attached draft with **bold text and green highlighting**. The note text will be deleted before the final draft.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Please submit written public comments or questions on the Land Use Element by 4:00 PM on August 31. Please send comments to comp.plan@mercerisland.gov. Public comments submitted by the deadline will be provided to the Planning Commission at their next meeting scheduled for September 28.

BACKGROUND

The City of Mercer Island is updating its comprehensive plan as part of the periodic review required by the WA Growth Management Act (GMA). The periodic review will be a targeted “surgical” update, focusing on those technical updates required to maintain compliance with the GMA. The existing Land Use Element already meets most of the GMA requirements and only requires limited technical amendments during this periodic review.

LAND USE ELEMENT

The Land Use Element is a component of the Comprehensive Plan that establishes goals and policies to guide City decision making regarding regulation of land uses. The Land Use Element is made up of goals, policies, and a Land Use Map. Goals state the objectives that the policies are intended to achieve. The Policies establish direction for how the City will work to achieve the goals. The Land Use Map identifies the locations for future land uses throughout the City. Each of these three components are discussed below.

Goals

The goals in each element state the purpose behind the policies. They are statements of the intention behind policies adopted in the Comprehensive Plan. For example, Land Use Goal 5 states the goal for housing in Town Center as follows:

“Encourage a variety of housing forms for all life stages, including townhomes, apartments and live-work units attractive to families, singles, and seniors at a range of price points.”

The goals of the Comprehensive Plan state the objectives the City aims to achieve. In the above example, a key part of the goal for housing in Town Center is a mix of housing types so that Town Center can accommodate the housing needs for diverse household configurations. The policies that follow detail the different ways the City will achieve this goal.

Policies

The policies that follow each goal establish the strategies for achieving that goal. For example, Land Use Policy 5.1 states one of the City’s positions on regulating housing in Town Center in pursuit of Goal 5 as follows:

“Land uses and architectural standards should provide for the development of a variety of housing types, sizes and styles.”

This policy statement then informs decisions the City makes regarding how residential uses are regulated in zoning code (Title 19 Mercer Island City Code (MICC)). Specifically, if the City eventually decides to amend the zoning code in a way that would affect housing in Town Center, this policy will help ensure that those amendments continue to allow diverse housing forms. Goal 5 has five associated policies. Where there are multiple policies that address the same goal, all policies are considered together in the decision-making process.

Land Use Map

The Land Use Map is a key piece of the Land Use Element because it links the policy statements and goals in the element with specific areas. Places throughout the City are designated for different land uses on the Land Use Map based on the policies established in the Land Use Element. The Land Use Map provides an important foundation for zoning because it designates which areas are planned for specific categories of uses. In this way, it informs which areas will be zoned for different types of land uses. For example, areas

designated for single-family residential uses on the Land Use Map will in-turn be zoned under one of the single-family residential zones established in the development code.

Compared to the Zoning Map, the Land Use Map is less likely to be amended regularly because it is adopted as part of the Comprehensive Plan, which can only be amended once a year. The Zoning Map, which is adopted as part of the development code, can be amended by the City Council at any time. The Land Use Map is one mechanism that ensures that as the Zoning Map is amended the Land Use Element remains the stable foundation for making those decisions.

Growth Targets

The primary purpose for updating the Land Use Element is to incorporate the new growth targets to extend the Comprehensive Plan’s planning period to the year 2044. King County sets housing and employment growth targets for towns and cities throughout the County in the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs). The 2044 housing growth target is 1,239 housing units. The employment growth target is 1,300 new jobs by 2044. The GMA requires that Comprehensive Plan must allow sufficient development capacity to accommodate the growth targets. To that end, King County prepared the 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report to determine the development capacity in cities throughout the County. The 2021 Urban Growth Capacity Report found that the Mercer Island Comprehensive Plan allows sufficient development capacity to accommodate the growth targets. Because the existing Comprehensive Plan allows enough development capacity to accommodate the City’s growth targets, the City can focus on a surgical update to the Land Use Element.

Implementation and Unified Development Code

One of the principal ways the Land Use Element is implemented is through the adoption of the Unified Development Code (UDC). The City’s UDC is codified in [Title 19 MICC](#). The UDC establishes the land use regulations that translate the high-level policy direction in the Comprehensive Plan into standards that all new development must conform to. The policies in the Comprehensive Plan give direction for how the UDC should regulate different uses in different areas of the City.

In the Goal 5/Policy 5.1 example above, the City is stating that Town Center should be the location of diverse housing types to accommodate diverse households. That policy direction is then translated into the UDC in the form of standards and regulations that allow for multifamily, mixed-use, and townhomes. That goal is further realized when new development occurs consistent with the UDC, which in turn is based on the policies in the Land Use Element. The UDC is a key tool to ensure that the Land Use Element goals, policies, and land use map are made manifest in the built environment.

SCOPE OF WORK

The City Council approved a scope of work for the Comprehensive Plan periodic review with [Resolution 1621](#). The adopted scope of work for the Land Use Element primarily focuses on the technical amendments needed to update the growth targets and maintain GMA compliance. Table 1 lists the Land Use Element tasks listed in the scope of work. The amendments in the first draft of the Land Use Element were based on the scope of work tasks listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Land Use Element Tasks from the Comprehensive Plan Scope of Work.

Task Number	Task Description	Required or Local Choice
LU-1	Revise Land Use Element Section III to incorporate new growth projections	Required
LU-2	Add policy to Land Use Element Goal 18 to adopt the City Stormwater Management Plan by reference	Required
LU-3	Update capacity discussion in Land Use Element Section III to incorporate forecasted growth in population and employment.	Required
LU-4	Update Figure TC-1 with new map, relocate figure to be under Goal 2. Include policy referencing Figure TC-1	Local Choice
LU-5	Review Town Center policies under Goal 2 to be consistent with the 2021 commercial use requirements update, including ‘no net loss’ of commercial land in Town Center policy.	Local Choice
LU-6	Add policy(s) to Land Use Element Goal 14 regarding preserving existing commercial use square footage in Town Center.	Local Choice
LU-7	Adopt Climate Action Plan by reference in Land Use Element Section V, Goal 28	Local Choice
LU-8	Review and, if necessary, amend climate change policies in response to the Climate Action Plan	Local Choice
LU-9	Revise symbology of Figure 1 Land Use Map to optimize the map for web viewing	Local Choice
LU-10	Review Land Use Goals and Policies for consistency with planning actions taken since the previous update.	Local Choice
LU-11	Add a goal and policy(s) regarding the creation of a parks zone to the Land Use Element.	Local Choice

The majority of scoped tasks the Land Use Element are technical updates to incorporate the updated growth targets and extend the 20-year planning period to the year 2044. The other tasks are amendments to ensure consistency with other planning efforts undertaken since the previous Comprehensive Plan update. For example, Town Center policies were added to reflect the recent regulatory changes directed at preserving commercial square footage in Town Center.

PLANNING COMMISSION FEEDBACK

The July 27 Planning Commission will be a briefing on the initial draft of amendments. Staff is requesting written comments on the initial draft from members of the Planning Commission no later than the end of the day on August 31. Staff will compile all individual comments for the Planning Commission to discuss at their next meeting in September.

NEXT STEPS

The Planning Commission can consider the comments on the Land Use Element at their September meeting.