



Community Development Department

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MEMORANDUM

To: Community Development Committee
From: Emily Arteche, Community Development Director
Date: March 11, 2024
Subject: Comprehensive Plan – Environmental Element Policy Review

Introduction

The Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) requires King County and cities within King County to update their comprehensive plans on or before December 31, 2024. The environment chapter (sometimes referred to as an “element”) is not a required element but provides the policy framework for the critical areas ordinance and is an important element to the City. Under the GMA Goals, RCW36.70A.020 Environment is goal 10 and is intended to Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.

The recommended Environment Element goals and policies, (see Attachment 1: Planning Commission Recommendation, dated March 28, 2024) will support the City’s critical area ordinance and future update efforts. Critical areas are defined in RCW 36.70A.030(6): include the following areas and ecosystems: Wetlands; critical recharging aquifers, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas; now known as riparian areas; frequently flooded areas and geologically hazardous areas. As the best available science continues to evolve; Riparian areas are now identified along rivers, perennial or intermittent streams as important elements of both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. More specifically, riparian areas have moist and mild microclimates and fertile soils that enhance plant growth and support complex food webs for wildlife species.

Background

The Element must be compliant with all the legislative changes made since the previous Comprehensive Plan completed over 8 years ago in 2015. Approximately 46 bills related to the Comprehensive Plan were passed during the time span. A complete list of legislation is attached, (see Attachment 2, GMA-amendments-1995-2023).

During the Planning Commission policy work, staff and consultants prepared color-coded policy presentations to identify more easily proposed policies of a regulatory nature, (see Attachment 3: Legislative Color-Coded Planning Commission from Previous Presentations on Environment Goals and Policies).

As background information the staff tracked the evolution of the draft goals and policies in a spreadsheet, (see Attachment 4: Environmental Policy Element Evolution Spreadsheet.) The workbook helps to demonstrate the evolution of goals and policies over time, i.e., new policies were added, combined, moved and/or revised to support new Environment and Utilities policies requirements, public comment, the needs of the City. This Element is rewritten and will fit into a Plan that is being reorganized.

The Planning Commission discussed a series of goals and policies that are intended to guide the City through the planning horizon of 2044 for the Environment Element at the following meetings:

- At the December 4, 2023, Planning Commission meeting, staff consultants presented an overview of the Environment chapter and its requirements under GMA.
- At the January 16, 2024, Planning Commission meeting, staff and consultants presented policies for the Environmental Protection and Climate Planning, (now deferred to a future Climate Change Element).
- On February 5, 2024, staff and consultants presented proposed policies on Water Resources, Aquifers and Critical Recharge Areas; Snoqualmie River, Stream Corridors and Wetlands; Geologic and Flood Hazard Areas; and Goals.
- On February 20, 2024, the Planning Commission meeting Commissioners reviewed Tribal revisions to the Goals and Policies.
- On March 18, 2024, the Planning Commission meeting staff presented recommended revision to the Goals and Policies based on Washington State Fish and Wildlife review comments.

Analysis

The Washington State Department of Commerce recent released Guidance on the new required Climate Change Element and draft policy language on this subject will be review by the Planning Commission during the preparation of the Climate Change Element and not part of the 2024 periodic update.

The draft recommended goals and polices were reviewed at the state and regional level for GMA and Vision 2050 consistency, including the Department of Fish and Wildlife, (DFW) and well as with the Snoqualmie Tribe. Review comments were recently received from the Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC), Liz Underwood-Bultmann Principal Planner, Growth Management Planning dated March 26, 2024, are included (see Attachment 5. Ms. Underwood-Bultmann praised the City's recommended policy: *Support programs that ensure that all residents, regardless of race, social, or economic status, have clean air, clean water, and other elements of a healthy environment, and prioritize the reduction of impacts to vulnerable populations that have been disproportionately affected by climate change* and recommended that the City extend its policy efforts to include another policy on "where" and "what". Additional comments provided by PSRC will be incorporated into the review process for Capital Facilities and Utilities and Parks, Open Space and Recreation Elements.

The below additional policy is recommended to be added:

As feasible, identify where vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by climate change currently live and what environmental impacts are more impactful.

The Snoqualmie Community continues to express concern over protecting the environment. The recommendations also reflect public comments received during the planning process. Two public open house events, on April 6 and October 16, 2023, as well as an on-going public online survey have generated 8 public comments to date related to this Element, (see Attachment 5: Environmental Element Public Comments Table). Comments received ask for City consideration of the impacts to Climate Change, the protection of trees and the preservation of the natural environment.

NEXT STEPS

Discuss signed draft goals and policy recommendations shown in Attachment 4 including the additional staff recommended policy shown above and make a motion to move the recommended draft goals and polices to a future City Council meeting for review and approval.

Attachment 1: Planning Commission Recommendation

Attachment 2: GMA amendments-1995-2023

Attachment 3: Legislative Color-Coded Planning Commission Presentation on Environment Goals and Policies

Attachment 4: Environment Element Evolution Spreadsheet

Attachment 5: PSRC Environment, Capital Facilities and Parks Review Comment Letter Dated March 26, 2024

Attachment 6: Environmental Element Public Comments Table