

## Introduction

# King County Comprehensive Plan 2008

### A. About King County

King County has some of the most beautiful scenery in the country, some of the most productive farmlands, and one of the most vibrant economies. The King County Comprehensive Plan 2008 establishes a vision that preserves this incredible diversity while continuing to acknowledge that citizens want options as to where they live, work and play. The plan guides growth and development throughout the unincorporated areas of the county and establishes King County's position on major issues such as transportation, annexations, regional water supply and environmental protection.

#### **King County Geography**

King County, covering 2,130 square miles, is the size of the state of Delaware, but much more geographically diverse. It extends from Puget Sound in the west to 8,000-foot Mt. Daniel at the Cascade crest to the east. King County's various landforms include saltwater coastline, river floodplains, plateaus, slopes and mountains, punctuated with lakes and salmon streams. Lake Washington, covering 35 square miles, and Lake Sammamish with 8 square miles are the two largest bodies of fresh water. Vashon-Maury Island in Puget Sound and Mercer Island in Lake Washington provide different island environments.

The north-south trending shapes of the lakes and hills make east-west travel more difficult than north-south travel. Four major river basins with salmon-bearing streams are separated by step-sided plateaus whose slopes are subject to landslides and erosion.

#### **King County Jurisdictions**

As of 2008, there are 39 cities ranging in size from Seattle with 586,000 people to Skykomish and Beaux Arts with less than 350 each. Since December 1994, five new cities have incorporated, shifting 120,000 people into city limits. King County's 39 cities cover 387 square miles, or 18% of the county's total land area. The incorporated population has increased by a total of 401,000

since 1994, primarily due to new cities and large annexations as well as growth within existing boundaries.

Unincorporated King County, the territory outside any city, now has about 368,000 people, or 20% of the county's population, on 82% of its land area. The unincorporated population has decreased by 139,000 since the 1994 Comprehensive Plan was initially adopted, chiefly through the incorporation of new cities.

### **King County Demographics**

In 2007, with more than 1,860,000 people, King County is the largest county in Washington State and the 14th largest in the nation. As a populous, large county with a major central city, King County constitutes the majority of the "Seattle-Bellevue-Everett" metropolitan area of more than 2.5 million persons. King County exhibits growing diversity: 70% of the population is non-Hispanic white, 14% Asian or Pacific Islander, 5.6% African-American, 1% Native American and 6.8% Latino (2005 census data).

King County's population has grown by a quarter-million residents, or 16%, since 1994; a modest rate compared with Sunbelt metro areas and nearby Puget Sound counties. However, given the large population already here, the growth numbers are significant. The population increase since 1994 equals the total existing population of the cities of Bellevue, Renton and Shoreline together. King County is forecasted to grow by an additional 188,000 persons (10%) to about 2,049,000 by 2022.

The number of housing units in King County is growing at about the same rate as its population. Now estimated at 800,000 houses, apartment and condominium units, and mobile homes, housing has increased by 108,000 units (16%) since 1994. Household size has stabilized after declining in the 1970s and 1980s and is now estimated at 2.39 persons per household. A slight decline in household size is anticipated in coming years to about 2.30 in 2022.

### **King County Economy**

King County is truly the economic engine of Washington State and the Pacific Northwest. Also, King County's economy is larger than that of several U.S. states. Nearly 1.2 million workers are employed within the borders of King County, at nearly 70,000 business firms, excluding sole proprietorships. King County's \$61.5 billion payroll is 50.3% of Washington State's \$122.3 billion payroll and 72.6% of the region's \$84.7 billion payroll.

King County has a cyclical economy, with booms and recessions typically on a ten-year cycle. During the 1990s, the number of jobs grew by 26% to almost 1.2 million, then edged downward after 2001. Employment began to rise again in 2004, and by 2006, nonagricultural employment had almost returned to 2000 levels, increasing by 65,400 jobs. Manufacturing employment remains important, but aerospace, the largest sector, lost 11,100 jobs between 2001 and 2006. The economy has diversified from the traditional aerospace and resource bases to high tech, services and trade, both local and international. County unemployment rates have fallen steadily in 2006 and 2007 from the relative highs experienced in the five previous years. Given the county's complement of healthy, innovative businesses and its industrial diversification, its future unemployment rates should be lower than in the state and the nation.

## **B. Planning in King County**

King County's comprehensive land use planning dates back to 1964. Its first comprehensive plan under the State Growth Management Act (GMA) was adopted in 1994. The GMA, passed by the Washington State Legislature in 1990, seeks to further protect the quality of life in the Pacific Northwest. The GMA directs the state's most populous and fastest growing counties and their cities to prepare comprehensive land use plans that anticipate growth for a 20-year horizon. Comprehensive plans adopted in accordance with GMA must manage growth so that development is directed to designated urban areas and away from the Rural Area and Resource Lands. The GMA also requires jurisdictions to designate and protect critical areas and commercially significant forestry, agriculture, and mining areas. The GMA requires each comprehensive plan to adhere to a set of thirteen goals and to include the following elements: land use, housing, capital facilities, utilities, rural, and transportation. The King County Comprehensive Plan 2000 represented the first major review and the first set of substantive changes since the county's first comprehensive plan under GMA was adopted in 1994. The 2008 update is the third major review of the comprehensive plan.

The King County Comprehensive Plan provides a legal framework for guiding regional growth and making decisions about land use in unincorporated King County. Public and private agencies, property owners, developers, community groups and King County staff use the comprehensive plan in several ways.

First, the plan is the framework for other plans and regulations such as subarea plans and the King County Code that govern the location and density of land uses and provide framework for development. It provides guidance to county officials for decisions on proposals such as zoning changes and developments. It also gives the public direction on the county's position on proposed changes in land use or zoning, environmental regulations, or broader policy issues.

The plan also provides a basis for decisions about public spending on facilities and services. And, the plan presents other agencies, such as cities and special purpose districts, with King County's position on large-scale matters such as annexation, use of resource lands, environmental protection and others.

The GMA allows local comprehensive plan amendments to be considered once each year. In King County, those annual amendments allow technical changes only, except for once every four years. Then, during the "Four-Year Cycle review process," substantive changes to policies, land use designations and the Urban Growth Area boundary can be proposed and adopted.

The King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) set the framework for the county's and cities' comprehensive plans. The CPPs, adopted by the county and cities in 1992 and amended several times since 1992, establish an Urban Growth Area (UGA) within the western one-third of King County where most growth and development is targeted. The goals of the policies include: reducing urban sprawl, protecting the Rural Area, providing affordable housing throughout the county and coordinating protection of environmentally critical areas.

Another piece of the planning puzzle in King County is the multi-county planning policies (MPPs), which the GMA requires of the largest counties with adjacent urban areas. The Puget Sound Regional Council has developed the MPPs through extensive collaboration with four counties in the central Puget Sound region: Snohomish, King, Pierce and Kitsap counties. Vision 2040 is an integrated strategy that takes on regional issues that cannot be comprehensively addressed within a single jurisdiction. The Vision 2040 document outlines the regional growth strategy and specifies policies to help us achieve the strategy. The MPPs provide guidance and direction to regional, county, and local governments on such topics as setting priorities for transportation investment, stimulating economic development, planning for open space, making city and town centers more suitable for transit and walking, and improving transportation safety and mobility.

### **C. New and Emerging Issues: Toward a Sustainable King County**

The Comprehensive Plan has been based on the principles of creating walkable neighborhoods, preserving open space and farmland, directing development toward existing communities, and providing a variety of transportation choices as the driving forces that determine the distribution of funding, creation of programs and projects, and for how the county interacts with local, state and federal agencies.

The impact of implementing these principles has been to: improve air quality through the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions (King County operates the largest hybrid transit fleet in

the nation and is using 20% biodiesel in its bus fleet), reduce fuel consumption, create higher urban densities by directing 96% of the growth into the urban cores of the region (Urban Growth Area), preservation of irreplaceable resource lands, park and critical areas, improving mobility by making transit service more accessible and sustaining a vibrant economy.

Three new framework policies - 1) health, equity, social and environmental justice; 2) climate change; and 3) measurement and monitoring—are being introduced into the Comprehensive Plan to address new issues or expansions of existing issues. These new framework policies represent a commitment to adapt growth management strategy to take advantage of new ideas. More importantly, they also form the broad foundation for more detailed and substantive implementing policies in the topical chapters of the Comprehensive Plan.

### **Health, Equity, Environmental and Social Justice**

Despite broad economic and social gains in society and in this country in recent history, major differences exist and continue to persist for significant segments of our population—particularly for communities of color and poor people—across the continuum of measures of health, well being and quality of life. King County is not immune to the national trends and statistics, despite its location in the relatively prosperous Puget Sound area. In the United States and in King County, children and adults who live at the bottom of the social ladder face life threatening and debilitating conditions far more often than those in the middle, who in turn are more at risk than those at the top.

Land use patterns and transportation investments can play key roles in making communities healthier. Well-planned neighborhoods have features like connected street networks, nearby shopping, walking paths, and transit service. These amenities reduce dependency on cars, increase opportunities to be physically active, decrease the likelihood to be overweight, and improve air quality.

Food is as essential to our health and well-being as air and water. For example, King County is experiencing a rise in the rate of obesity, and at the same time, an increase in food insecurity and malnutrition. Both can be caused by lack of access to adequate amounts of nutritious food, and both can lead to the same thing - a diminished quality of life that ends with premature death due to diet-related chronic disease. King County plays an important role in guiding and supporting system improvements that will result in King County residents eating local, healthy food. King County supports food systems that are ecologically and economically sustainable and that improve the health of the county's residents.

King County's groundbreaking *Land Use, Transportation, Air Quality and Health Study* (now known as HealthScape)—the first study of its kind for a local government—shows that low density, separated land uses, and poor street connectivity is associated with: (1) reduced transit ridership, walking, and physical activity; (2) increased auto use, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions, and energy consumption; and (3) increased obesity, which increases the likelihood of cardio vascular disease, type II diabetes, and colorectal cancer. HealthScape literally draws the link between sprawl, poor health, and greenhouse gas emissions.

Using data generated in King County, this study specifically concluded the following:

- People walk more in neighborhoods with a wide variety of retail services and easy access to those services. This improves health and reduces pollutants.
- Transit use is highest where walking is most prevalent, and walking is most prevalent where transit is convenient and efficient.
- Residents of more walkable areas are less likely to be overweight or obese and more likely to report being physically active.
- Residents in the most interconnected parts of the county drive 25% fewer miles than those who live in the most sprawling areas of the county.

With obesity rates rising at alarming rates, King County can use the findings from this study to update policies and plans to incorporate health and air quality into land use and transportation planning.

Equity and social justice are traditionally linked to land use planning through the concept of environmental justice. Generally, environmental justice encompasses the presence of industrial or commercial land uses that carry substantial adverse impacts to low-income and minority communities. But, environmental justice can also refer to *lack* of facilities and services and other amenities. The White Center Community Enhancement Initiative begun in 2005 is one example of a concerted community process that seeks to add infrastructure necessary for making a place safe, livable, and health-promoting. Collectively, these factors are the foundation of prosperity for all people and communities. In White Center, this is being accomplished through improving sidewalks, pedestrian connections, and spurring economic development in the neighborhood's commercial core. Land use planning brings the principles of community participation and community visioning to the equity and social justice movement, thus setting the stage for infrastructure improvements and policies that underpin achieving equity and social justice.

King County will work to reduce inequities and address concerns of social justice by incorporating these values into the daily practice of developing policies and programs, making funding decisions and delivering services. Further King County will identify and address the conditions at

the root of disparities, engage communities to have a strong voice in shaping their future, and raise and sustain the visibility of equity and social justice. The goal is to start by tackling problems further upstream than is typically done to get at the fundamental cause of the disparities in order to have a greater overall impact.

**FW-101      King County will seek to reduce health disparities and address issues of equity, social and environmental justice when evaluating its land use policies, programs, and practices.**

## **Climate Change**

*“Global warming is a ‘modern’ problem—complicated, involving the entire world, tangled up with difficult issues such as poverty, economic development, and population growth. Dealing with it will not be easy. Ignoring it will be worse.” UN Framework Convention on Climate Change*

There is consensus among the world’s leading scientists that global warming caused by human emission of heat-trapping, greenhouse gases is among the most significant problems facing the world today. Climate scientists at the University of Washington predict average temperatures in the northwest will increase approximately one degree Fahrenheit per decade in the twenty-first century. Climate change in the northwest is expected to result in reduced snowpack and associated drinking water supplies, changes in winter flooding patterns, reduced summer stream flows for fish, altered habitat for other wildlife, and increases in infectious diseases for humans and wildlife.

King County is working locally, regionally, and nationally to reduce fossil fuel consumption and to survive the inevitable changes climate change will bring. At the local and regional levels, King County is building a green fleet of hybrid buses and cars, enacting major energy and resource conservation management programs, and requiring consideration of the impact of development proposals on greenhouse gas emissions using the State Environmental Policy Act.

At the national level, King County is forming Urban Leaders, a small coalition of large cities and counties to influence how infrastructure projects, such as floodplain management and water reuse, are funded at the federal level. In partnership with the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington, King County is writing a guidebook for regional governments on how to adapt to climate change impacts.

King County has joined several large counterparts across the country in partnering with the Sierra Club to form the Cool Counties Climate Stabilization Initiative, a major new strategy to combat

global warming. In 2006, King County joined the Chicago Climate Exchange (CCX), one of the first local governments and the only transit agency to do so. The CCX is a voluntary market in which members commit to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and work actively with other government members to advocate for a United States federal cap on greenhouse gas emissions.

While greenhouse gas emissions produced within the King County region constitute only a small percentage of national and global quantities, our region can play a critical role in pioneering the policies, practices and investments that inform climate change mitigation efforts worldwide.

King County is uniquely positioned among local governments to be a leader in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and preparing for the impacts of climate change. Using four levers of change—land use planning, transportation, environmental management and renewable energy - King County government has become a successful living laboratory and national model of strategies to reduce and prepare for global warming impacts.

**FW-102      King County will be a leader in prevention and mitigation of, adaptation to, climate change effects.**

### **Performance Measurement and Management**

*“An acre of performance is worth a whole world of promise.” William Dean Howells*

As part of a growing national movement at all levels of government, King County is embracing performance measurement and management. Performance measurement is measuring and reporting performance data while *performance management* is using performance information to inform management decisions. Successful organizations rely on performance management to inform leadership about how well they are reaching their goals and where improvements can be made.

King County is doing performance management for several important reasons:

- Ensure county goals are being met;
- Improve county services, where necessary;
- Increase transparency with the public;
- Increase use of data for more informed public discussion and decision-making; and
- Increase accountability at all levels of government.

In support of public access, King County publishes an annual performance report entitled *King County AIMs High: Annual Indicators and Measures* to accompany the budget. Providing

additional public access to performance reporting, the AIMs High website ([www.kingcounty.gov/exec/aimshigh](http://www.kingcounty.gov/exec/aimshigh)) emphasizes the relationship between community-level conditions and agency performance. The website is organized primarily by themes (such as natural resources), but the public can also access information by department.

In addition to public measurement reporting, the King County Executive initiated a performance management program called “KingStat” in 2006. KingStat is a set of regularly held, data-focused meetings between the County Executive and department managers to discuss agency performance. KingStat is designed to assist department directors in managing their operations, improve decision-making at all levels, and ensure that departments stay focused on top priorities.

**FW-103 King County will develop appropriate performance measurement tools, based on best management practices, in order to assess agency performance and the achievement of Countywide Planning Policies and Comprehensive Plan goals.**

## **D. Summary of the King County Comprehensive Plan**

### **Chapter One: Regional Planning**

The vision and goals of this plan are based on the 13 planning goals specified in the Washington State Growth Management Act, the Countywide Planning Policies, the region’s Vision 2040 and the values voiced by the citizens of King County. The official King County Land Use Map is included in this chapter. This chapter also describes the county’s process for amending the Comprehensive Plan and outlines and distinguishes the annual cycle and the four-year-cycle amendments.

### **Chapter Two: Urban Communities**

The Urban Communities chapter brings together several of the major elements necessary to make a community whole: housing, business centers, and human services. By merging these elements into one chapter, King County emphasizes the importance each plays as a part of a livable community. A major tenet of the GMA is to target growth in the urban areas, so the policies in this chapter better facilitate urban development where infrastructure and facilities exist or can be readily provided. This chapter also draws the connection between urban form and public health.

### **Chapter Three: Rural Communities and Natural Resource Lands**

Protecting a rural way-of-life in King County is a major thrust of the comprehensive plan. This chapter delineates the county's approach to conserving rural and natural resource lands integral to providing diversity in lifestyle choices, continuing farming and forestry economies, protecting environmental quality and wildlife habitat, and maintaining a link to King County's resource-based heritage. This chapter also includes the policy basis for King County's Transfer of Development Rights Program.

### **Chapter Four: Environment**

With Chinook salmon, Puget Sound and Coastal Bull trout, and Puget Sound Orca Whales listed as threatened species under the Endangered Species Act, with other species about to join the list, protecting the environment is a priority. King County's programs for protecting the environment are some of the most advanced in the country. Protecting and restoring air quality, water resources, soils, and plant, fish and animal habitats are among King County's primary goals. King County's approach to mitigating the effects of climate change and adapting to the inevitable changes that climate change will bring to the region are centered in Chapter Four. This chapter also establishes policies to protect the environment and enhance the region's high quality of life.

### **Chapter Five: *Reserved***

### **Chapter Six: Parks, Open Space and Cultural Resources**

Protecting and enhancing King County's communities through public funding while encouraging continued stewardship for county parks, open spaces, recreation, and cultural resources is the central focus of this chapter. The Regional Trails Needs Project map and corresponding project list are also included in this chapter.

### **Chapter Seven: Transportation**

King County will continue to promote a transportation system that provides residents with a range of transportation choices that respond to both community needs and environmental concerns including encouraging healthful transportation choices and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from transportation sources. This chapter also includes the policy guidance for the Transportation Concurrency Program, as required by the GMA.

## **Chapter Eight: Service, Facilities and Utilities**

The Growth Management Act requires coordinated planning so that the services required by new residents and their homes and businesses are available as growth occurs. Needed services include many that are not provided by King County, such as water supply, local sanitary sewers, fire protection, schools, energy facilities, and telecommunications. King County does provide services such as regional wastewater treatment, regional solid waste management, and local stormwater management. This chapter guides service provision.

## **Chapter Nine: Economic Development**

Economic Development is moved from a section in the Urban Communities Chapter to a stand alone chapter to reflect the nature of economic development as a countywide priority encompassing the Urban, Rural Area, and Resource Lands. King County's economy is the largest and most significant economy in Washington State. This chapter addresses business retention and development, workforce development, public-private partnerships, and the rural economy.

## **Chapter Ten: Community Planning**

King County's community plans (except for the Vashon Town Plan, West Hill, and White Center) are no longer in effect as separately adopted plans. In many cases, however, the plans contain valuable historical information about King County's communities and often provide background for the land uses in effect today. Policies from the community plans were retained as part of the comprehensive plan to recognize the unique characteristics of each community.

## **Chapter Eleven: Implementation**

The comprehensive plan policies, development regulations and countywide planning policy framework have been adopted to achieve the growth management objectives. This chapter explains the relationship between planning and zoning.

## **D. Technical Appendices**

Integral to the vision and goals of the comprehensive plan are the detailed inventories, forecasts, finance plans and Urban Growth Area analysis required by the Growth Management Act. Four technical appendices (Volume 1) are adopted as part of the plan to implement these Growth Management Act requirements (RCW 36.70A.070, 36.70A.110), 36.70A130). Technical

Appendices A, B, C, and D were updated in 2008. *Beginning with 2004, Technical Appendix D was moved to Volume 1.*

### **Volume 1**

Technical Appendix A. Facilities and Services

Technical Appendix B. Housing

Technical Appendix C. Transportation

Technical Appendix D. Growth Targets and the Urban Growth Area

Additional important information also supports the plan vision and goals. Nine technical appendices (Volume II) were prepared to provide supporting documentation to the 1994 plan:

### **Volume 2**

Technical Appendix D. Growth Targets and the Urban Growth Area

Technical Appendix E. Washington State Laws

Technical Appendix F. History of Planning in King County

Technical Appendix G. Economic Development

Technical Appendix H. Natural Resource Lands

Technical Appendix I. Natural Environment

Technical Appendix J. Potential Annexation Areas

Technical Appendix K. King County Functional and Community Plans

Technical Appendix L. Public Involvement Summary

Information that supported amendments subsequent to 1994 are included as follows:

### **Volume 3**

Technical Appendix M. Public Participation Summary 2000

### **Volume 4**

Technical Appendix N. Public Participation Summary 2004

### **Volume 5**

Technical Appendix O. Public Participation Summary 2008

## **E. The Regulations**

The King County Comprehensive Plan is implemented through the adopted regulations. These include the King County Zoning Code and other code titles such as Water and Sewer Systems, Roads and Bridges, and Land Segregation. All development proposals in King County must meet the requirements of the code.

## **F. For More Information**

Copies of the plan are available in all King County libraries. Please visit the website of the King County Department of Development and Environmental Services at <http://www.metrokc.gov/permits/codes/CompPlan/> for current information on planning in King County and to view electronic versions of the plan and related documents.

As required by the GMA, King County maintains a docket for recording comments on the King County Comprehensive Plan and associated development regulations. Comments logged on the docket are reviewed by the county and made available for review by the public. The docket is available on the King County Website at <http://www.metrokc.gov/permits/codes/CompPlan/docket/>.