

PSRC PLAN REVIEW REPORT & CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

TOWN OF DARRINGTON COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

March 31, 2016



BACKGROUND

The Washington State Growth Management Act calls for coordination between local, regional, and state planning efforts. To advance this coordination, state law requires PSRC to certify that regional transit plans, countywide planning policies, and local comprehensive plans within the central Puget Sound region conform to: (1) established regional guidelines and principles, (2) the adopted long-range regional transportation plan, and (3) transportation planning requirements in the Growth Management Act. Within the central Puget Sound region, the multicounty planning policies in VISION 2040 have been established as the regional guidelines and principles under Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 47.80.026. Certification of local comprehensive plans is also a requirement for jurisdictions and agencies that intend to apply for PSRC funding or proceed with any project submitted into the Regional Transportation Improvement Program, regardless of funding source.

Within the central Puget Sound region, local governments and PSRC have worked together to develop an overall process ([Adopted Policy and Plan Review Process](#), Revised September 2003) for reviewing and certifying local, countywide, regional, and transit agency policies and plans.¹ This process also provides an opportunity to coordinate and share information related to local and regional planning. A set of materials, compiled in a [Plan Review Manual](#), provides details on the review and certification process, background, and framework. The manual also provides guidance and checklists for aligning plans and policies with [VISION 2040](#), [Transportation 2040](#), and [Growth Management Act](#) requirements.

DISCUSSION

This report summarizes the findings and recommendations regarding the periodic update to the comprehensive plan for the Town of Darrington, adopted by the town on December 30, 2015. PSRC last certified the Town of Darrington's comprehensive plan in 2004. PSRC staff reviewed the updated 2015 comprehensive plan and coordinated with town staff in the development of this report.

CERTIFICATION RECOMMENDATION

Based on the review of the Town of Darrington comprehensive plan, the following action is recommended to the PSRC Growth Management Policy Board, Transportation Policy Board, and Executive Board:

The Puget Sound Regional Council certifies that the transportation-related provisions in the Town of Darrington 2015 comprehensive plan update conform to the Growth Management Act and are consistent with the multicounty planning policies and the regional transportation plan.

The remainder of this report contains a summary of the PSRC review of the Town of Darrington comprehensive plan update. Under each heading, the scope of the certification review, as guided by the [Plan Review Manual](#) and

¹ The certification requirement in the Growth Management Act is described in RCW 47.80. The specific requirements for transportation elements in local comprehensive plans are spelled out in RCW 36.70A.070. PSRC's Interlocal Agreement, Section VII, also provides direction for the review of local comprehensive plans and countywide policies (Resolution A-91-01, amended March 1998). The Council's Executive Board last updated its process for Policy and Plan Review in September 2003. The process is also described in VISION 2040, Part IV: Implementation.

Local Comprehensive Plan Checklist, is listed in high-level bullets. Discussion in each topic area highlights exemplary provisions of the plan, as well as issues identified through the certification review where future work on the part of the town is needed to more fully address VISION 2040, Transportation 2040, and Growth Management Act planning requirements. PSRC recognizes that the timing and mechanism for addressing each of the comments will vary based on the jurisdiction, its resources and plan update process, and the nature of the comment.

Part I: Conformity with Growth Management Act Transportation Planning Requirements

SCOPE OF REVIEW

The Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070(6)) includes several requirements related to transportation elements in local comprehensive plans. These requirements are summarized as follows:

Land use assumptions and forecasts of travel demand that are internally consistent and consistent with growth targets.

Service and facility needs, including inventories of existing facilities, and level-of-service standards and concurrency provisions that address multiple modes of travel, planned land uses and densities, and state highways.

Financing and investments, including a multiyear financing plan and reassessment strategy to address potential funding shortfalls.

Intergovernmental coordination with neighboring cities, counties, and regional and state agencies.

Demand management, including programs to implement the Commute Trip Reduction Act.

Pedestrian and bicycle planning, including project funding and capital investments, education, and safety.

Land uses adjacent to airports, identifying relevant facilities, existing and planned uses, and policies that discourage incompatible uses.

Air quality is largely an interjurisdictional issue in which each jurisdiction's travel behaviors, measured through vehicle emissions, affect the regional airshed. The Washington Administrative Code (WAC) requires local transportation elements and plans to include "policies and provisions that promote the reduction of criteria pollutants" for mobile sources (WAC 173-420-080). When PSRC reviews plans, it also certifies that the comprehensive plans include air quality policies and provisions, including a commitment to meeting the requirements of applicable federal and state air quality legislation.

DISCUSSION: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Town of Darrington's comprehensive plan effectively addresses many of the transportation planning requirements of the Growth Management Act and includes adequate air quality policies and provisions.

Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan is well-written and complete in presenting a full range of topics in the transportation element that are required by statute. With limited resources available to a small jurisdiction, the town has adopted creative and common sense solutions to addressing technical requirements, such as travel demand estimates using land use assumptions consistent with other elements of the plan.
- ☑ The plan includes a comprehensive set of transportation demand management strategies promoted by policies T-3A to T-3F, to a degree that is notable for a small town.
- ☑ Goal T-5 sets an ambitious vision for future non-motorized facilities in the town. Policies T-5A through T-5G address desired improvements to enhance mobility by walking, bicycle, and even horseback. Policy T-5A further promotes interconnectivity, including with the regional trail system. In the land use element, Goal LU-7 and implementing policies promote development practices that address bicycle and equestrian

paths and connectivity within and between communities. Policy T-4C calls for improvements to enhance pedestrian access to the municipal airport.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The town should address the following comments at the earliest opportunity through future amendments to the comprehensive plan, subarea plans, or functional plans:

- To further full compliance with RCW 36.70A.070(6)(a), the plan should identify SR 530 as a Highway of Regional Significance with a level-of-service standard of C.
- The Growth Management Act (see RCW 36.70A.070(6)) requires that local comprehensive plans include a multiyear transportation financing plan for how the jurisdiction will meet the mobility needs identified for the planning period. The comprehensive plan addresses several aspects of this requirement, including a 20-year project list, cost estimates for short-term improvements, and general discussion of revenue options and a reassessment strategy to address funding shortfalls. The town should consider additional components to more fully address the requirement. First, as referenced on page 55 of the plan, the town should follow through in developing cost estimates for all of the improvements needed over the full 20-year planning period. Second, itemized revenue estimates should be summarized and compared with total estimated future costs to identify any potential gaps in needed funds. Finally, the reassessment strategy may be revised, as needed, based on the findings of this analysis. Further guidance on how to address the financial analysis in the plan can be found in the Department of Commerce's [Transportation Element Guidebook](#).
- Provisions in the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.510), Planning Enabling Act (RCW 36.70.547), and VISION 2040 (MPP-DP-51) require counties, cities, and towns to discourage the siting of incompatible uses adjacent to general aviation airports. Policy T-4B calls for the town to regulate uses near the municipal airport to ensure uses are compatible and supportive of airport operations. The town should ensure that its regulations address use and height restrictions. The town should review and use PSRC's updated Airport Compatible Land Use Program to ensure the plan also addresses state requirements and regional policies that discourage siting incompatible uses adjacent to general aviation airports. Resources and information on PSRC's [Airport Compatible Land Use Program Update](#) are available to assist the town. For additional information and guidance, the town can consult the Washington State Department of Transportation Aviation Division's [Land Use Compatibility Program](#).

Part II: Consistency with Regional Plans and Policies

OVERVIEW

This section discusses consistency with the multicounty planning policies (established regional guidelines and principles under RCW 47.80.026) adopted in VISION 2040, and Transportation 2040, the region's long-range transportation plan. In addition to the multicounty planning policies, VISION 2040 contains a regional growth strategy with a preferred distribution of the region's residential and employment growth, as well as a number of implementation actions for local governments to carry out. Each policy area addressed in VISION 2040 is discussed in turn below.

VISION 2040 Context Statement

VISION 2040 calls for local plans to include a context statement that describes how the comprehensive plan addresses regional policies and provisions adopted in VISION 2040. While the plan does a good job of explaining the importance of conformity with regional plans in the preface to the transportation element, the plan would be stronger with a full and comprehensive VISION 2040 statement in the introduction.

Environment

SCOPE OF REVIEW

VISION 2040 calls for local comprehensive plans to address the following environmental policy topics:

Stewardship, including addressing the natural environment throughout the plan, decisions based on best-available science, and regional environmental initiatives.

Earth and habitat, including open space protection, restoration and protection of native vegetation, and coordination with adjacent jurisdictions.

Water quality, including actions that maintain hydrologic functions and reduce water pollution in ecosystems, watersheds, shorelines, and estuaries.

Air quality and climate change, addressing federal and state laws, reduction of pollutants, Puget Sound Clean Air Agency policies, and reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation to climate change.

DISCUSSION: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Darrington comprehensive plan addresses the environmental policy topics in VISION 2040. Highlights include:

- Goals LU-2 and LU-3 along with implementing policies address environmental protection and resilience to natural hazards. Policies promote tailoring land development practices to environmental conditions and address flood and volcanic hazards.
- Housing policies broadly support development that protects the natural environment. For example, Policy HO-3D encourages environmentally friendly residential design. Policy HO-4A promotes energy efficient housing design through green site and building design and materials.
- Transportation policies address potential impacts of transportation improvements on the environment. For example, Policy T-6C encourages the use of permeable pavement and low-impact techniques in public and private improvements that serve new development.
- In consideration of the town's natural setting, Policy LU-10 directs the town to attract "non-polluting" light industrial development.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The town should address the following comment at the earliest opportunity through future amendments to the comprehensive plan, subarea plans, or functional plans:

- The multicounty planning policies in VISION 2040 and the strategies in Transportation 2040 call for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to impacts related to climate change. See page 42 of VISION 2040 for an overview of climate change and related policies and page 34 in Transportation 2040 for information on the four-part greenhouse gas reduction strategy (land use, user fees, choices, and technology). The plan already includes policies that support positive actions to reduce greenhouse gases, such as promoting transit and increasing nonmotorized transportation options and energy efficiency in private development. However, the plan could be strengthened by explicitly addressing climate change and including additional strategies such as emissions reductions from municipal operations.

Development Patterns – Including the Regional Growth Strategy

SCOPE OF REVIEW

VISION 2040 calls for local comprehensive plans to address the following development patterns policy topics:

Urban areas, including targets for housing and employment growth, compact communities that support transit and walking, and provisions for redevelopment of underused land.

Centers, including planning for one or more central places as locations for compact, mixed-use development, with policies that prioritize funding to centers to advance development.

Unincorporated urban areas, including policies that advance annexation and orderly transition of governance.

Resource lands, including identification of steps to limit development.

Regional design, addressing local provisions that apply the Transportation 2040 Physical Design Guidelines, energy efficient building, historic preservation, and enhanced sense of community.

Health and active living, addressing healthy environment, physical activity and well-being, and safety.

DISCUSSION: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The town's comprehensive plan effectively addresses many of the development patterns policies in VISION 2040. Highlights include:

- The plan accommodates future growth that is consistent with adopted growth targets and that furthers a future growth scenario that balances the needs of the community for investment, the local goal to retain a small town character, and the regionally defined role of Darrington as a Small City.
- The plan emphasizes land development that reinforces the existing character and values of the town, including promotion of outdoor recreation, open space (see Goal LU-6), and building design appropriate to small town settings (see Goal LU-5).
- A number of plan provisions further public health, including through expanded facilities for walking, biking, and horseback, policies such as HO-5A that allow and encourage private and community gardens, including as an important feature of senior housing, and general promotion of outdoor recreation.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The town should address the following comment at the earliest opportunity through future amendments to the comprehensive plan, subarea plans, or functional plans:

- The Growth Management Act requires local comprehensive plans to be updated to accommodate the growth that is anticipated for the succeeding 20-year planning period (see RCW 36.70A.070, .115, and .130), as allocated through the growth targets adopted within each county. The land use element of the plan clearly documents the population targets developed through the Snohomish County Tomorrow process. The economic development element documents the estimated capacity for additional employment in the town and UGA, along with forecasts developed by PSRC. The plan should be amended to also reference the adopted employment growth targets of 302 additional jobs in the town and 84 additional jobs in the UGA.
- VISION 2040 (MPP-DP-11) calls for each jurisdiction to plan for one or more central places as the location for compact, mixed-use development. The plan does not currently identify such a central place and the town is encouraged to do so. Downtown Darrington, for example, can be a focal point for economic and civic activity, investments in public realm amenities, and economic development.

Housing

SCOPE OF REVIEW

VISION 2040 calls for local comprehensive plans to address the following housing policy topics:

Increased housing production opportunities, including diverse types and styles for all income levels and demographic groups.

Affordable housing needs, including an assessment of existing and future housing needs based on regional and local factors, including household income, demographics, special needs populations, and adequacy of existing housing stocks.

Regional housing objectives in VISION 2040, including promotion of housing diversity and affordability, jobs-housing balance, housing in centers, and flexible standards and innovative techniques.

DISCUSSION: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The town's comprehensive plan effectively addresses the housing provisions contained in VISION 2040. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan includes a comprehensive housing needs assessment that highlights and quantifies key measures, such as cost burden, rental and ownership housing affordability gaps, and key housing types in the existing stock of units, such as manufactured housing.
- ☑ The plan promotes a greater variety of housing types to meet community needs. For example, Goal HO-2 and implementing policies promote a greater variety of housing choices within the community, including calling for a study of innovative tools such as cottage housing and lot size averaging. Policy HO-2C encourages mixed use residential as a component of new commercial development.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The certification review did not identify any major areas for improvement of the plan to better align with regional guidelines and principles on housing.

Economy

SCOPE OF REVIEW

VISION 2040 calls for local comprehensive plans to address the following economic development policy topics:

Include an **economic development element** that addresses: business, people, and places.

Retention and recruitment efforts that support family wage jobs, industry clusters that export goods and services, and small businesses that are locally owned.

Equitable benefits and impacts, including provisions and programs that promote economic vitality in distressed areas or areas with disadvantaged populations.

Adequate housing growth in centers through collaboration with the private sector and provision of infrastructure.

DISCUSSION: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The town's comprehensive plan effectively addresses many of the economic provisions of VISION 2040. Highlights include:

- ☑ The plan includes an economic development element that addresses the unique needs and opportunities for a small rural town with a history of reliance on resource-based industries.
- ☑ Economic development strategies include a focus on local natural and human resources, support for cottage industries, and multiple tools to promote tourism.
- ☑ Economic development aims to leverage key investments, such as proposed high speed internet and a proposed paving of the Mountain Loop Highway.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The certification review did not identify any major areas for improvement of the plan to better align with regional guidelines and principles on economic development.

Transportation

SCOPE OF REVIEW

VISION 2040 and Transportation 2040 call for local comprehensive plans to address the following transportation policy topics:

Maintenance, management, and safety, including clean transportation with reductions in pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, environmental factors, health and safety, stable and predictable funding sources, system and demand management strategies, and security and emergency response.

Support for the regional growth strategy, including system improvements that align with planned growth, prioritized investments that support compact development in centers, joint- and mixed-use development, complete streets and improvements to promote biking and walking, and context-sensitive design.

Improved transportation options and mobility, including alternatives to driving alone, facilities and services for special needs transportation, avoidance of new or expanded facilities in rural areas, and financing methods.

Linking land use and transportation, including integrating Transportation 2040 physical design guidelines in planning for centers and transit station areas, and land development tools that promote transportation alternatives.

DISCUSSION: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Darrington comprehensive plan addresses the major transportation emphases in VISION 2040 and Transportation 2040, including maintenance, management, and safety. It supports the regional growth strategy and provides greater options and mobility. Highlights include:

- ☑ Future transportation facilities needs are strongly weighted toward projects to maintain and enhance existing facilities. The plan tailors demand and system management approaches to a small town context.
- ☑ Policies address parking management. For example, Policy T-8D encourages side or rear parking on commercial development. Policy T-8F encourages shared parking models.
- ☑ The Darrington plan promotes the town's goal of securing improved transit service, above and beyond the very limited service currently available from Community Transit. New or improved services could include bus, carpool, or rideshare options. The plan envisions new pedestrian and bike investments along with a new park and ride facility to complement enhanced transit.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The certification review did not identify any major areas for improvement of the plan to better align with regional guidelines and principles on transportation.

Public Services

SCOPE OF REVIEW

VISION 2040 calls for local comprehensive plans to address the following public services policy topics:

Promote more efficient use of existing services, such as waste management, energy, and water supply, through conservation – including demand management programs and strategies.

Promote renewable energy and alternative energy sources.

Plan for long-term water needs, including conservation, reclamation and reuse.

DISCUSSION: EXEMPLARY PLAN PROVISIONS

The Darrington comprehensive plan update contains policies that address many of the public services provisions of VISION 2040. Highlights include:

- ☑ Policies under Goals CF-5 address a full range of measures to protect water quality and quantity to meet the needs of the town. These include promotion of water conserving practices, protections for critical aquifer recharge areas, and completing full connection of development in the town to the public water system.
- ☑ Policy UT-1D promotes conservation measures in the use and management of utilities that serve the town.

DISCUSSION: AREAS FOR FURTHER WORK

The town should address the following comment at the earliest opportunity through future amendments to the comprehensive plan, subarea plans, or functional plans:

- ☐ VISION 2040 (MPP-PS-9 through MPP-PS-11) calls for development within the urban areas of the region to be served, wherever possible, by sanitary sewer systems. Where sewers are not feasible, alternative technologies may be pursued where “it can be shown to produce treatment at standards that are equal to or better than the sewer system and where a long-term maintenance plan is in place.” Regional policy also calls for a high level of environmental protection in maintaining and replacing septic systems. The Town of Darrington is not currently sewered. Policies under Goal CF-6 help to ensure that land uses served by septic systems do not pose a threat to public health or the environment. The plan also identifies a site near the airport for a wastewater facility that may serve nearby commercial uses. However, the plan does not address alternative technologies nor does it set goals or policies in pursuit of financing for a town-wide sanitary sewer system to meet the town’s needs as it grows. The plan should be amended to more fully address the policy direction in VISION 2040, particularly MPP-PS-9.

Conclusion

PSRC staff thanks the town for working through the plan review and certification process. PSRC is available to provide assistance for future plan updates. Additional planning resources can also be found at <http://www.psrc.org/growth/planreview/resources/>. If the town has questions or needs additional information, please contact Michael Hubner at 206-971-3289 or mhubner@psrc.org.