

# Local Comprehensive Plans Certification Report King County Comprehensive Plan

June 26, 2025



The Puget Sound Regional Council conducted a certification review of the King County comprehensive plan. King County adopted its 2024 comprehensive plan update on December 10, 2024. PSRC staff provided comments on the draft plan in April 2024 to inform the final plan adopted by the county.

This document is organized into two primary parts: a statement of certification and any applicable conditions to certification; and a discussion of conformity with the Growth Management Act and consistency with VISION 2050 by topic area.

## Certification Action

The Puget Sound Regional Council certifies that the transportation-related provisions in the King County 2024 comprehensive plan conform to the Growth Management Act and are substantially consistent with multicounty planning policies and the Regional Transportation Plan.

Within the central Puget Sound region, local governments and PSRC have worked together to develop an overall process for reviewing and certifying local, countywide, regional center, and long-range transit plans.<sup>1</sup> Transportation-related provisions that are key for certification are based on RCW 47.80.026 and the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A). This report may recommend additional work to fully address the requirements of the Growth Management Act, VISION 2050, or the Regional Transportation Plan, although such revisions may not be strictly required for certification. Jurisdictions are encouraged to address those items during upcoming comprehensive plan updates and other planning efforts.

## Conformity with Growth Management Act Transportation Planning Requirements and Consistency with Regional Plans and Policies

### OVERVIEW

This section discusses conformity with the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070(6)) and the transportation-related requirements for local comprehensive plans. It also discusses consistency with the adopted multicounty planning policies (established regional guidelines and principles under RCW 47.80.026) adopted in VISION 2050 and the Regional

<sup>1</sup> 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 2050: Implementation](#).



Transportation Plan. In addition to the multicounty planning policies, VISION 2050 contains a regional growth strategy with a preferred distribution of the region's residential and employment growth, as well as several implementation actions for local governments to carry out. Each policy area addressed in VISION 2050 is discussed in turn below. More information about the requirement to review and certify local plans is provided in the [Adopted Policy and Plan Review Process](#).

Plans are reviewed using PSRC's [VISION 2050 Consistency Tool](#). This report documents where the plan meets requirements, highlights outstanding provisions of the plan, and identifies where additional work is needed to fully address VISION 2050, the Regional Transportation Plan, or Growth Management Act planning requirements. This section is organized by the sections in VISION 2050. While this may align with plan elements, many of these concepts may be addressed in various parts of local comprehensive plans.

## Regional Collaboration

### Scope of Review

The Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070(6)) and VISION 2050 call for local comprehensive plans to:

- **Coordinate** with other jurisdictions, agencies, tribes, ports, military installations, and special purpose districts.
- Prioritize **access to opportunity** for people of color, people with low incomes, and historically underserved communities.
- Address opportunities and challenges related to **military installations** when applicable.
- Prioritize investments in **centers**.
- Explore **funding sources** and fiscal tools to meet infrastructure and other needs.

### Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses regional collaboration policies in VISION 2050. The plan includes policies on consultation with Tribes on the planning process. The plan also includes policies to collaborate with jurisdictions, agencies, subregional partners, and other organizations on planning issues. Throughout each plan element, the plan emphasizes equitable processes and outcomes to expand access to opportunities.



# Regional Growth Strategy

## Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Incorporate **housing and employment targets**.
- Use **land use assumptions** substantially consistent with countywide growth targets.
- Demonstrate sufficient zoned **development capacity** to accommodate targets.
- Use consistent **land use assumptions** throughout plan.
- Maintain a **stable urban growth area** with densities that support the Regional Growth Strategy.
- Support growth in designated **centers and high-capacity transit station areas**.
- Manage and reduce **rural growth** and protect natural resource lands.

## Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the Regional Growth Strategy policies in VISION 2050. The plan provides capacity to accommodate another 5,412 housing units and 3,340 jobs in the urban unincorporated area by 2044, consistent with adopted growth targets. The plan focuses planning for existing growth in the urban growth area and in urban unincorporated areas that are connected to the region's high-capacity transit system. The plan includes policies to reduce the rate of rural growth, including policies to avoid the conversion of rural lands into commercial uses. The plan also includes a policy to prohibit master planned resorts in the rural area.

The county should address the following comments in future updates to the plan:

- The county adopted a "rural growth forecast" of 4,200 additional housing units through 2044 in the comprehensive plan. However, rural growth numbers for housing and employment were not included in the countywide planning policies. While the housing unit forecast appears to be consistent with the allocation provided by the Regional Growth Strategy, any adopted growth targets or forecasts should be included in the King County countywide planning policies to provide transparency about the growth that is anticipated and planned for in the rural area.
- While the whole of King County's urban unincorporated area has sufficient capacity for allocated growth, the county's capacity analysis shows a shortage of 127 units for the target allocated to the Black Diamond Potential Annexation Area. The comprehensive plan commits the county to work with the Growth Management Planning Council to update the countywide planning policies to reassign growth to urban unincorporated areas that have sufficient development capacity. The county should promptly follow-through with this commitment.
- Reducing the rate of rural growth will be a long-term effort, and the county should continue to identify strategies, tools and development regulations to help reduce rural growth consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy. Please see comments on p. 6 regarding rural densities.



## Environment

### Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Ensure **air quality standards** are met and reduce emissions of air toxics and greenhouse gases.
- Protect **critical areas and habitat** through coordination and environmental stewardship.
- Plan for **park, trail, and open space** resources and needs.
- Protect and enhance **tree canopy and native vegetation**.
- Protect and restore **water quality**, including actions to restore shorelines and estuaries, remove fish-passage barriers, reduce toxic products, and manage stormwater.
- Ensure **access to healthy environments** for all residents, prioritizing the reduction of impacts for vulnerable residents.

### Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the environmental policies in VISION 2050. The plan includes policies to connect and conserve habitat, provide conservation incentives, protect air quality, and retain forests and open space. The plan includes policies to protect Puget Sound and to work with regional partners and programs to support ecosystem recovery. The plan includes a policy to reduce stormwater contaminants and incentivize regional stormwater investments to achieve optimal outcomes for pollution reduction.

## Climate Change

### Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Reduce **greenhouse gas emissions** in support of state, regional, and local reductions goals.
- Protect and restore natural resources that **sequester and store carbon**.
- Address impacts to **vulnerable populations** that have been or will be impacted by climate change.
- Retrofit **existing buildings** to reduce building energy use.
- Increase **resilience** by identifying and addressing the impacts of climate change and natural hazards.
- Address **rising sea levels** by siting and planning for relocation out of the floodplain.



## Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the climate change policies in VISION 2050. The county incorporates greenhouse gas emission reduction goals and has completed a Strategic Climate Action Plan that seeks to reduce emissions, support resilient communities and prepare for climate change. The comprehensive plan prioritizes climate equity through investing in long-term partnerships that build capacity in communities most at risk for climate impacts, investing in green job pathways, strengthening culturally relevant food systems and prioritizing climate-resilient transit infrastructure. The plan also includes policies to plan for the likely impacts of climate change on county-owned infrastructure, facilities, and operations.

The county should address the following comment in future updates to the plan:

- The county has made important progress on addressing climate change in the comprehensive plan. The Department of Commerce plans to release final guidance on climate planning consistent with House Bill 1181 in 2025, which will apply to the implementation progress report for jurisdictions in the Puget Sound region. The county should be aware of this upcoming deadline and monitor whether the plan's current state reflects the new requirements.

## Land Use/Development Patterns

### Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Build **thriving urban communities** through inclusive engagement.
- Support **centers** as connections to opportunity.
- Address **healthy environment**, physical activity and well-being, and safety, while reducing disparities.
- Support **annexation and incorporation** by planning for phased growth of communities.
- Preserve **rural areas and natural resource lands**.
- Evaluate potential **residential and commercial displacement** and mitigate impacts.
- Limit **incompatible uses** adjacent to military lands, industrial centers, and tribal reservation lands.

## Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the land use and development patterns policies in VISION 2050. The plan promotes coordination on land use issues, including a policy to coordinate with cities permitting more than 50 dwelling units adjacent to rural or resource lands. The plan supports annexation by working with cities to develop pre-annexation agreements to transition services, engage in joint planning processes, and consult on rezone requests in Potential Annexation Areas.



The county should address the following comment in future updates to the plan:

- Multicounty planning policy DP-33 states that counties must not allow urban net densities in rural and resource areas, and the Growth Management Act similarly states counties should not allow urban densities in rural areas. King County's Housing Needs Assessment documents zoning for both moderate and high-density development in the county's designated "rural towns" (Vashon, Fall City, and Snoqualmie Pass), which are fully located in the rural area. The Vashon-Maury Subarea Plan also includes a policy to provide incentives for high density residential housing affordable to extremely low and very low-income residents in the rural area. All types of communities are challenged by housing costs, but rural areas should provide affordable housing at an appropriate scale and density that meets state and regional requirements. King County has made significant progress to reduce the rate of rural growth over time, but further progress could be undermined by permitting potentially high-density development in these areas. The county should review allowable uses and densities in the rural area to ensure consistency with VISION 2050 and the Growth Management Act.

## Housing

### Scope of Review

The Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070) and VISION 2050 call for local comprehensive plans to:

- Provide an **inventory and analysis** of existing housing and housing needs at each income level.
- Document **sufficient land capacity** to accommodate housing for all income levels and emergency shelters.
- Identify **actions** to provide housing for all income levels.
- Identify and address **racially disparate impacts, displacement, or exclusion** in housing.
- Expand housing capacity for **moderate-density housing**.
- Promote **jobs-housing balance**.
- Support the **development and preservation of affordable housing** by considering inclusionary and incentive zoning and promoting affordable housing near high-capacity transit.
- Promote **homeownership** opportunities.

### Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the housing policy topics in VISION 2050. The plan documents capacity to accommodate the county's allocated share of countywide housing need in the unincorporated area, including emergency housing. The county amended development regulations during the plan update to accommodate its allocated share of emergency housing. The plan provides supporting data and analysis on racially disparate impacts, exclusion, and displacement, and provides detailed analysis on gaps in housing production. The plan includes policies to preserve existing housing units,





including exploring incentives and subsidy programs to preserve affordable housing threatened by market forces and expiring federal subsidies.

The county should address the following comment in future updates to the plan:

- The region is facing a housing crisis, and jurisdictions should act with urgency to address the housing needs of all residents. PSRC encourages the county to continue to work with regional partners to monitor housing conditions, to implement housing strategies, and to amend the plan periodically to adjust to changing conditions.

## Economy

### Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Identify and enhance **industry clusters**, including those that provide goods and services for export.
- Support retention and recruitment of **family wage jobs** and small businesses that are **locally, women-, and minority-owned**.
- Develop a **range of employment opportunities** to create a closer balance between jobs and housing.
- Address and prevent potential **physical, economic, and cultural displacement** of existing businesses.
- Expand **access to opportunity** and remove barriers for disconnected communities.
- Recognize and empower the contributions of the region's **culturally and ethnically diverse communities**.

### Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the economy policies in VISION 2050. The plan emphasizes economic growth in the urban growth area, cities and designated centers. The plan includes policies to support diversified employment opportunities in middle-wage jobs, reduce inequities, and build economic resiliency. The plan also includes a policy to stabilize and prevent displacement of small or culturally or ethnically diverse businesses during periods of growth, contraction, and redevelopment.



## Transportation

### Scope of Review

The Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.070(6)) requires local comprehensive plans to:

- Use **internally consistent land use assumptions** and forecasts of travel demand and that are consistent with growth targets.
- Provide **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.
- Include a **multiyear financing plan** and reassessment strategy to address potential funding shortfalls.
- Direct **demand management**, including programs to implement the Commute Trip Reduction Act.
- Plan for **pedestrians and bicycles**, including capital investments, education, and safety.
- Discourage **incompatible uses adjacent to airports**.
- Address **air quality** and the reduction of pollutants consistent with WAC 173-420-080.

VISION 2050 also calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Plan for **system maintenance, safety and emergency management**.
- Support the **Regional Growth Strategy**.
- Provide **alternatives to driving alone**.
- Plan facilities and services for **special needs transportation**.
- Avoid the creation of new and expanded facilities in **rural areas**.
- Identify **racial and social equity** as a core objective when implementing transportation projects.
- Protect the **environment** and reduce stormwater pollution.

### Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the transportation planning requirements of the Growth Management Act and the transportation policies in VISION 2050. The Transportation Needs Report includes a detailed long-range project list with cost estimates. The report underscores the financial challenges the county faces in addressing infrastructure needs. The plan includes policies to encourage walk, bike, and transit trips and a variety of strategies to manage transportation demand.

The county should address the following comment in future updates to the plan:

- VISION 2050 calls for multimodal level of service standards, and the Growth Management Act will also require these standards by 2029 (MPP-DP-52- 53). The county includes many policies supportive of walking, biking and transit, and the county should work to develop policies, standards, and regulatory approaches that





incorporate multiple travel modes. PSRC's [Transportation Element Guide](#) provides minimum standards for addressing multimodal level of service standards. Additional guidance may be available in the future to refine adopted standards.

## Public Services

### Scope of Review

VISION 2050 calls for local comprehensive plans to:

- Promote **coordinated and efficient** use of public services.
- Protect **water quality** by serving urban development with sewer systems and replacing failing septic systems.
- Consider the **impacts of climate change on public facilities** and promote renewable energy.
- Promote **affordable and equitable access to public services**, especially for underserved communities.
- Promote working with school districts on **school siting and design** to support safe, walkable access.

### Certification Findings

The King County comprehensive plan effectively addresses the public services policies in VISION 2050. The plan includes policies to consider historical inequities and historically underinvested communities in determining priority areas for capital facilities and services. The plan promotes coordinated and efficient use of public services, for example striving to work with Tribes, cities and hospital districts on health and human service facilities and services. The plan also includes policies to consider impacts from climate change on existing essential public facilities, including potential long-term relocation of facilities that are not water-dependent from the 500-year floodplain.

### Conclusion and Next Steps

PSRC found the King County comprehensive plan is substantially consistent with the transportation-related provisions of the Growth Management Act, VISION 2050 and the Regional Transportation Plan.

PSRC encourages the county to address areas identified for additional work in upcoming plan updates and other planning efforts. These may be areas where additional work would make the plan more consistent with the Growth Management Act or VISION 2050 and areas that may be necessary to address prior to the 2029 Growth Management Act Implementation Progress Report.

PSRC is available to provide assistance with future plan updates. Find additional planning resources on [PSRC's Plan Review webpage](#). If the county has questions or needs additional information, please contact Liz Underwood-Bultmann at 206-464-6174 or [LUnderwood-Bultmann@psrc.org](mailto:LUnderwood-Bultmann@psrc.org).

