BACKGROUND

A major emphasis of the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) is the need to coordinate local, regional, and state planning efforts. Within the central Puget Sound region, local governments and the Puget Sound Regional Council have worked together to develop an overall process for reviewing local, countywide, regional, and transportation agency policies and plans for compatibility and consistency. This process also provides an opportunity to coordinate and share information related to local and regional planning.

VISION 2040, the region’s long-range environmental, growth management, economic development, and transportation strategy, calls for countywide planning policies to be updated to “address the multicounty planning policies” included in VISION 2040.

Updated Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County were adopted in early June 2011. The policies became effective on June 24, 2011. Snohomish County staff completed the PSRC reporting tool for countywide planning policies and submitted it in early July, along with a completed set of 2011 countywide policies. PSRC staff has worked with that information in the preparation of this report.

DISCUSSION

The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County have been updated to align with the multicounty planning policies. The updated Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County have been organized in a manner that parallels the policy categories in VISION 2040. In the statement of purpose, there is clear recognition of the important role the countywide policies play in implementing the state planning goals and adopted regional policy. Therefore, the recommendation included in this report is that PSRC take action to certify the Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County as consistent with VISION 2040 and the multicounty planning policies.

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1 The certification requirement in the Growth Management Act is described in Chapter 47.80, Revised Code of Washington (RCW). Additional guidance is provided in Section 365-196 of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC). The Regional Council’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 Executive Board’s adopted process for Policy and Plan Review is summarized in VISION 2040, adopted in April 2008.
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OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTYWIDE PLANNING POLICIES

On June 1, 2011, the Snohomish County Council took action to adopt the *Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County* (Amended Ordinance No. 11-011 and Amended Ordinance No. 11-021). Amendments were also adopted on June 8th (Amended Ordinance 11-015). Per the process established by Snohomish County and its cities and towns, the policies became effective June 24, 2011.

The updated *Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County*, along with a completed reporting tool, were submitted to PSRC and reviewed. Based on that review, the following recommendation is proposed for action.

RECOMMENDATION for CERTIFICATION:

The Puget Sound Regional Council should certify the Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County adopted in June 2011.

ORGANIZATION OF THIS REPORT

The remainder of the report is divided into two parts – based on the organization of VISION 2040, the region’s long-range strategy for environmental, growth management, economic development, and transportation planning.

**PART I** addresses consistency with VISION 2040’s multicounty planning policies, which provide a regional framework for ensuring consistency among regional, countywide and local plans and policies. This portion of the report addresses the following policy areas: environment, development patterns (including the Regional Growth Strategy), housing, economic development, public services, and transportation.

**PART II** addresses implementation and also provides a conclusion, which highlights efforts to coordinate regionally, at the countywide level, and locally.
PART I: CONSISTENCY WITH THE MULTICOUNTY PLANNING POLICIES

The multicounty planning policies in VISION 2040 provide an integrated framework for addressing environmental planning, development patterns and housing, economic development, transportation, and public services. The multicounty policies create a common framework to ensure consistency in planning regionally, at the countywide level, and locally. In addition to the multicounty policies, VISION 2040 also includes a Sustainable Environment Framework, the Regional Growth Strategy, and implementation actions and monitoring measures.

VISION 2040 CONTEXT STATEMENT

The introduction to the Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County clearly spells out the purpose, context, and principles for the policies. References are provided to both state law and administrative procedures for countywide planning policies. There is a full description of VISION 2040, including the overarching goals, Regional Growth Strategy, and multicounty planning policies. The process for refining or updating the countywide policies is stated clearly.

The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County satisfy the request for providing a VISION 2040 context statement. The context information is designed to connect explicitly the countywide policies to the Growth Management Act, VISION 2040, and local comprehensive planning. A noteworthy feature of Snohomish’s countywide policies is the provision of topic-specific context statements for each of the policy sections throughout the document.

Comment: There is a statement in this section, titled Organization of the Document, which says that the Growth Management Act “does not speak to the topic areas that must be included in the multicounty planning policies.” In fact, the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) states that “multicounty planning policies should address, at a minimum, the same topics identified for county-wide planning as identified in RCW 36.70A.210(3), except for those responsibilities assigned exclusively to counties. Other issues may also be addressed” (WAC 365-196-305(8)(d)). When the Countywide Planning Policies are next amended or updated, it would be appropriate to cite the provision in the Washington Administrative Code.

ENVIRONMENT—including Sustainable Environment Framework

VISION 2040 stresses the ecological, economic, and health benefits of preserving and restoring our natural environment. The theme of people, prosperity and planet recognizes the important relationship between our communities, our economy, and our environment.

The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County are consistent with VISION 2040’s Sustainable Environment Framework, as well as with the multicounty planning policies which address the environment. There are clear goals and policies addressing environmental stewardship, habitat and open space, water quality, air quality, and climate change.

The specific addition of a new section to the countywide policies to address the natural environment is a commendable step for planning for the future in a more sustainable and integrated fashion. This chapter, titled “The Natural Environment,” includes a goal statement which commits the county and its cities to “act as a steward for the natural environment.” The chapter addresses restoration and conservation, as well as the interface between the environment and other issues related to sustainability, including health and well-being. The policies call for enhancing natural ecosystems, including improving wildlife habitat, restoring freshwater and marine shorelines, protecting rural and resource lands, and promoting conservation in the provision of public services.
The policies call for the county and the cities to commit to work toward developing a common framework for analyzing climate change impacts. Additional policies call for reducing greenhouse gas emissions through energy conservation and alternative energy, reducing carbon in the atmosphere through programs and efforts to maintain and increase forest and vegetative cover, and establishing a planning framework to adapt to the likely impacts of climate change.

**Development Patterns—including the Regional Growth Strategy**

VISION 2040’s Regional Growth Strategy provides guidance for focusing population and employment growth within the designated urban growth area, particularly in cities, with less development occurring in rural areas. Centers are recognized for their benefits in creating compact, walkable communities that support transit and other services. The multicity planning policies further reinforce this guidance with provisions addressing compact urban development, urban unincorporated areas, rural and resource lands, regional design, health and well-being, concurrency, and incompatible land uses.

The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County are consistent with regional policy regarding development patterns. The policies provide well-defined direction for urban growth, rural protection and development, annexation of unincorporated urban areas, and improving people’s health and well-being.

The policies commit to limiting growth in rural areas to 10 percent or less (CPP-GF-6), consistent with the Regional Growth Strategy. The countywide policies call for protection of rural and resource areas and preservation of rural character. There is an emphasis on concentrating growth in urban areas—especially in centers and compact urban communities. The countywide policies provide a framework for cities to annex the unincorporated portions of the urban growth area (CPP-DP-5 and 8 and CPP-DP-17 through 22).

Particularly noteworthy are the steps the county and the countywide policies have taken to preclude fully contained communities. The policies adopted in 2011 strike an older policy (formerly UG-15), which allowed the consideration of fully contained communities (FCCs). The former policy was determined to be inconsistent with Snohomish County Council Ordinance No. 09-044 (adopted in 2009), which eliminates the county’s previous policy allowing fully contained communities. Also, eliminating the policy aligns with VISION 2040 guidance that calls for avoiding new fully contained communities (MPP-DP-23).

Jurisdictions in Snohomish County are encouraged to address community character, walkability, transit use, and historic preservation as they accommodate new development. The countywide policies promote health and well-being. The policies include urban design measures and also address local food production.

The policy addressing expansion of the county’s urban growth area contains a detailed list of conditions, including transfer of development rights, natural or cultural features, shortage of affordable housing, and economic development (CPP-DP-2).

**Comment:** As Policy CPP-DP-2 is currently worded, the rationale for the conditions to allow expansion of the county’s urban growth area is not totally clear or raises questions regarding compatibility with other regional or countywide policies, such as policies calling for a better jobs-housing balance and providing affordable housing opportunities near job centers. At a minimum, when the Countywide Planning Policies are next updated, clarity and additional definition would help explain the basic purpose and intent of these conditions. In addition, the county and its cities are encouraged to work together to develop common strategies and policy guidance for addressing vested development in rural areas of the county.
Targets for Population and Employment Growth

There is policy guidance in Snohomish’s countywide policies for establishing growth targets that align with VISION 2040’s Regional Growth Strategy (CPP-GF-5 and 6).

Appendix C of the Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County calls for a three-step process:

1. Initial growth targets
2. Target reconciliation
3. Long-term monitoring

To assist jurisdictions in Snohomish County in implementing VISION 2040’s Regional Growth Strategy as they amend and update their local comprehensive plans, Snohomish County Tomorrow prepared an information working paper. This information provides guidance for residential and employment growth on an interim basis as the county and its cities anticipate new projections from the state Office of Financial Management in 2012.

Comment: Once the county and its cities complete the next round of target-setting, the new residential and employment targets should be amended into the Countywide Planning Policies document. The expression of growth targets in housing units as stated in MPP-DP-3 provides a benefit for local decision-makers, citizens, and providers of housing in better understanding the relationship between population targets, the regional vision, and local planning.

HOUSING

VISION 2040 encourages housing production that meets existing and future needs. It calls for preserving and expanding housing affordability, incorporating quality and environmentally friendly design in homebuilding, and offering healthy and safe home choices for all the region’s residents.

The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County are consistent with the multicounty planning policies for housing. There is a strong commitment to meet the housing needs in the county and to ensure that residents have access to “safe, affordable, and diverse housing options” near jobs and transportation. The section on housing in the policies is introduced with a discussion of the county’s housing challenges, including affordable housing, proximity of housing to employment, infill housing, and changing demographics. There is guidance for the county and cities to participate in a multi-jurisdictional affordable housing program and to provide incentives to encourage affordable housing. Achieving a “jobs-housing” balance, encouraging the use of “green building” practices, and respecting the vitality of existing neighborhoods are also addressed.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

VISION 2040 guides the Regional Economic Strategy and integrates economic development with growth management, environmental, and transportation objectives. The economic provisions in VISION 2040 are organized around the topics of business, people and places.

The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County address economic development in a way that is consistent with and supportive of regional policy. The economic development section recognizes the nexus between land uses, transportation and other infrastructure, and the economic well-being of Snohomish County communities and their citizens. Particularly noteworthy is the way in which the countywide policies address the Paine Field-Boeing Manufacturing-Industrial Center. There is policy guidance for the county’s regionally designated Manufacturing-Industrial Center at Paine Field-Boeing to ensure that long-term aerospace employment and associated activities will be maintained and accommodated.
The policies speak to the economic priorities of the Prosperity Partnership and the related industry clusters. Local jurisdictions are asked to include economic development policies in their comprehensive plans and are encouraged to work with business and organizations in crafting economic development elements in their comprehensive plans. The policies call for local jurisdictions to process development requirements “expeditiously” without “lowering” environmental or land use standards.

**PUBLIC SERVICES**

VISION 2040 calls on the region to support development with adequate public facilities and services in a coordinated, efficient, and cost-effective manner that supports local and regional growth management planning objectives.

The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County are consistent with the multicounty planning policies in VISION 2040. The county and its cities commit to providing adequate and efficient public services in a manner that ensures health and safety, conservation of resources, and economic vitality.

The policies call for providing infrastructure that will serve the desired growth and housing patterns. The policies acknowledge that without infrastructure and amenities to attract people to core urban areas, achievement of the Regional Growth Strategy in VISION 2040 may not succeed. There is direction provided that “state and federal economic development and transportation funding should be prioritized to regionally designated centers and sub-centers” (CPP-ED-4). The policies state that sewers “shall not be extended” outside the designated urban growth area except in limited situations (as per the Growth Management Act and the multicounty planning policies).

The countywide policies call for reduction of solid waste and promotion of recycling. In addition, there are policies calling for jurisdictions to support cities as the preferred providers of urban services and to support the county as the preferred provider of certain regional services, as well as rural and resource-based services.

**TRANSPORTATION—including Transportation 2040**

VISION 2040 provides a framework for long-range transportation in the region by integrating planning for freight, ferries, roads, transit, bicycling, and walking. Maintenance, management, and safety are emphasized. Better integration of land use and transportation planning is called for and priority is placed on transportation investments that serve centers. VISION 2040 commits to increasing transportation choices while improving the natural environment. Transportation 2040, the region’s transportation plan, provides detailed guidance for improving mobility and accessibility through efficiency, coordinated land use and transportation planning, strategic investments, and pricing.

The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County address the major transportation issues in VISION 2040 and Transportation 2040, including maintenance and preservation, serving the Regional Growth Strategy, and providing greater options and mobility. The policies by and large reinforce the multicounty planning policies.

Of particular note is the treatment of innovative measures for providing needed revenues to maintain the existing system and improve overall mobility. The countywide policies specifically state that transportation needs should be prioritized based on the extent to which they fulfill the objectives of the VISION 2040’s Regional Growth Strategy, which supports funding focused on centers, along with local comprehensive plans, and long-range transit agency plans. The policies describe that revenues should come from traditional measures, such as fuel taxes, as well as innovative measures, such as vehicle miles traveled assessments.
Demand management is one of the strategies for reducing the need for capital improvements by improving the efficiency of the current transportation system, and is also a control measure for designated transit emphasis corridors in the county. These corridors are served by public transportation, planned for transit-oriented development, and connect all designated mixed-use urban centers. The policies address clean transportation by stating that adverse impacts of transportation facilities and services on the environment should be mitigated and minimized.

Policy CPP-DP-25 calls for the county to establish “infrastructure and road standards that are consistent with appropriate development patterns and densities in rural and resource areas to maintain rural character.” This policy appears to be written – at least in part – to address multicounty planning policies calling for avoiding the construction of new highways and major roads in rural areas (MPP-DP-27) and for avoiding capacity expansion of existing roads in rural and resource areas (MPP-T-28). The latter multicounty policy does state that when increased roadway capacity is warranted, “appropriate rural regulations and strong commitments to access management should be in place prior to authorization of such capacity expansion.”

Comment: When the Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County are next updated, the county and its cities should consider language which more clearly aligns with the multicounty planning policies (MPP-DP-27; MPP-T-28).
PART II: IMPLEMENTATION AND CONCLUSION

IMPLEMENTATION

VISION 2040 includes more than 60 implementation actions, several of which are directed to counties and their cities to work on collaboratively. The Countywide Planning Policies for Snohomish County provide guidance for addressing key implementation actions in VISION 2040 that require the collaboration of the county with its cities. Examples of implementation tasks that the countywide planning policies address include:

Critical Areas, Habitat and Water Quality. The countywide policies include several new provisions that address protecting critical areas, habitat, and water quality (for example, CPP-Env-1 through 5). These policies provide for greater coordination among local jurisdictions and other responsible agencies. Snohomish County and its cities identify improved coordination as a first step toward achievement of the actions envisioned in VISION 2040 (En-Action-8 through 10).

Brownfield Clean-up. DP-Action-14 in VISION 2040 calls for counties and cities to work together to identify redevelopment sites. Snohomish’s countywide policies call for intensification of underutilized “greyfield” sites along major thoroughfares by promoting new “transit emphasis corridors.” Such corridors would result in comprehensive plan changes to promote redevelopment to higher density uses (CPP-DP-14 and CPP-TR-4, -12, and -17). Work by the county and cities to redevelop underutilized sites along these corridors represents an important step in local application of the VISION 2040 implementation action.

Coordinated Planning in Unincorporated Areas. DP-Action-15 in VISION 2040 encourages coordinated planning in urban unincorporated areas. Many of Snohomish’s countywide policies address issues relating to coordination. For example, CPP-DP-5 and 8 address expectations and roles during coordination, and CPP-JP-1 identifies interlocal agreements as key mechanisms for county-city coordination. These policies provide a useful framework to ensure that the county and its cities work together in planning for urban unincorporated areas.

CONCLUSION

Snohomish County and its cities are to be commended for crafting a thorough, cohesive, and well-integrated set of countywide planning policies to provide a consistent framework for county-level and local planning. The document is organized in a coherent and straight-forward manner, making it easier to use. VISION 2040 and the Regional Growth Strategy are referenced in a manner which plainly communicates the relationship between, regional, countywide, and local planning and how they work together to address state growth management planning goals.