

Planning for Deeply Affordable Housing

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Washington State
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Outline

Planning framework in Washington

Comprehensive planning requirements and housing need

Steps to planning for deeply affordable housing

Regulations that support deeply affordable housing

Case studies

Resources

Land use planning in Washington state

- The Growth Management Act (GMA) **provides a framework** for local governments to plan for growth in **land use, transportation, housing, natural resources and the environment.**
- Most cities and counties must now **prepare to review and update their:**
 - Comprehensive plans and
 - Development regulationsby the dates on the map

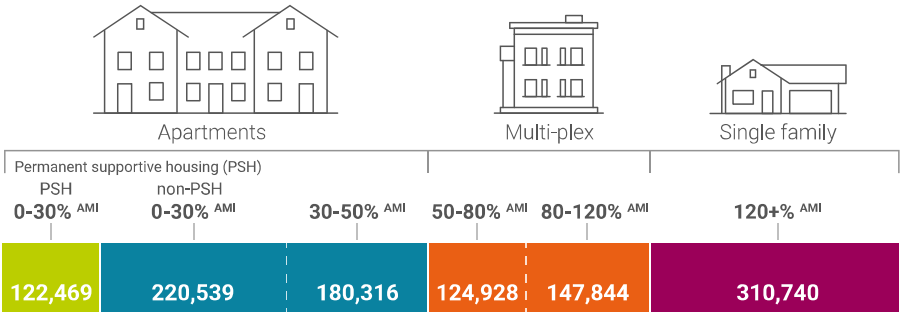


Cascading GMA policy framework



We need 1.1 million new homes over the next 20 years

Future housing needs broken down by area median income (AMI) groups



1.1 Million new homes will be needed in the next 20 years

We also need **91,357** emergency housing beds over the next 20 years.

Comprehensive Plan Housing element requirements

Commerce must provide projected housing needs to local governments by income bracket and for permanent supportive housing (PSH) and emergency housing

Local housing element for identified housing needs must:

- **Conduct an inventory and analysis of housing needs by income**
- **Identify sufficient land capacity for all housing needs**
- **Make adequate provisions for all housing needs, including “document barriers to housing availability”**
- **Identify and undo racially disparate impacts, such as displacement and exclusion, in local policies and regulations**
- **Identify areas at higher risk of displacement and establish anti-displacement policies**

RCW 36.70A.070(2)

Zoning must have enough capacity for needed housing types

- **Jurisdictions must do an analysis to show enough places to build all housing**
 - *Jurisdictions will need to show they have sufficient zoning for multifamily development (which is the primary form of housing for lowest income housing needs)*
 - *Jurisdictions will also need to allow a variety of housing types (PSH, transitional housing, emergency housing and emergency shelter)*
- **Deeply affordable housing (<50% AMI) is not suitable outside of Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) or Local Areas of More Intense Rural Development (LAMIRDs)**

Identify and remove barriers (Adequate Provisions)

RCW 36.70A.070(2)(d): "Makes adequate provisions for existing and projected needs of all economic segments of the community, including:

- **(ii) Documenting programs and actions needed to achieve housing availability including gaps in local funding, barriers such as development regulations, and other limitations;**

There is [an Adequate Provisions checklist](#) to help identify these barriers.

Possible barriers to evaluate

- **Development regulations**
 - Limiting maximum densities
 - High off-street parking requirements
 - Unclear development regulations
 - Building height limits
 - Ground floor retail requirements
- **Process obstacles**
 - Conditional use permit
 - Lack of clear and accessible information on process
 - Permit fees, impact fees, and utility connection fees
 - Processing times
 - SEPA
- **Funding tools within the local governments control**
- **Barriers for STEP**
 - Spacing requirements (e.g., minimum distances from other facilities)
 - Arbitrary limits on occupants
 - Requiring too many additional plans or conditions (operations plans, staffing plans, background checks, sobriety, etc.)
 - Any different requirements than general housing development

Removing barriers to deeply affordable housing

- *Develop strong policies to encourage deeply affordable housing*
- *Allow higher density housing, which is typically more affordable on a per unit basis*
- *Allow at a minimum: emergency shelters, transitional housing, emergency housing and PSH (STEP) in as many zones as possible*
- *Identify sufficient land capacity for all housing needs at all income levels (including emergency housing)*
- *Identify and remove barriers to housing*
- *Incentivize deeply affordable housing*

"STEP" includes:

- *Emergency shelters (S)*
- *Transitional housing (T)*
- *Emergency housing (E)*
- *Permanent supportive housing (P)*

Incentivize deeply affordable housing

In exchange for deeply affordable housing:

- *Allow additional density*
- *Fee waivers and exemptions*
- *Waive other regulatory requirements (parking, height, bulk, setbacks, etc.)*
- *Expedite permitting*
- *Provide free or highly discounted land*

A few cities with incentives for affordable housing:

- *Seattle*
- *Redmond*
- *Bellevue*
- *Burien*
- *Bothell*
- *Sammamish*
- *Marysville*
- *Anacortes*

Incentivize deeply affordable housing

- *Allow religious organizations more flexibility (per law)*
 - See [Supportive Housing Types Review Checklist](#)
- *Partner with non-profit partners and religious organizations*
- *Infrastructure improvements*
- *Provide a liaison to support permitting or a regional liaison to support funding applications*
- *Use available local affordable housing funds and pool funds with neighboring jurisdictions*
- *Encourage creative housing types – house sharing, co-housing, SROs, etc.*

Regulations that support deeply affordable housing

- *Allow multifamily housing*
 - *Allow a variety of housing types and intensities*
 - *Typically, 3-story walk-up apartments are the most affordable, but 3-6 story housing is affordable on a per unit basis*
- *Allow emergency housing and emergency shelters in all zones that allow hotels, OR allow these uses in a majority of zones within one-mile of transit.*
- *Allow permanent supportive housing and transitional housing in all zones with where residential uses and hotels are allowed*

[See: RCW 35A.21.430, RCW 35.21.683](#)

Regulations that support deeply affordable housing

- **Reasonable** occupancy, spacing, and intensity of use requirements may be imposed by ordinance on STEP **to protect public health and safety**.
- Requirements on occupancy, spacing, and intensity of use may not prevent the siting of a **sufficient number** of STEP necessary to accommodate each code city's projected need for such housing and shelter

See: [RCW 35A.21.430](#), [RCW 35.21.683](#)

Regulations that support deeply affordable housing

- Review other special housing types (assisted living facilities, adult family homes, SROs, etc.) and allow in as many zones as possible
- A local governmental **may not adopt, impose, or enforce requirements on an affordable housing development that are different than those imposed on housing developments generally** (RCW 36.130.020(1))
- Affordable housing development =
 - Permanent supportive housing (PSH)
 - Transitional housing and emergency housing with leases

Case study: Tacoma

- **Inclusionary Zoning – aimed at 50% AMI and below**
 - First IZ units completed in July 2023
- **Leverage publicly and partner-owned land for affordable housing:**
 - Three surplus properties were awarded to Affordable housing developers through a surplus property RFP
- **Establish a dedicated source of funding for the Tacoma Housing Trust Fund**
 - Use sales and use tax revenue authorized under SHB 1406
- **Priority permitting program for affordable housing projects**
- **City authorized and supported emergency shelter sites**

Tacoma's [Affordable Housing Action Strategy website](#) with more details

Case study: Burien

Affordable Housing Demonstration Program

- 2003 Comp Plan policy, codified in 2019
- Allows for a variety of housing types across all zones that allow residential uses
- Provides flexibility from development regulations
- Establishes affordability requirements (Affordable to <50% AMI; 50-year affordability term)
- Program allows the city to see which development regulations may be inhibiting new affordable housing



DESC 6-story project

- 95 units of PSH
- Affordable at 0-30% AMI

Case study: Langley

- *Tiny House Zoning Code and adopted the International Tiny House Building Code*
- *9 tiny homes on permanent foundations and 1 renovated single-family home*
- *Individuals, businesses, organizations and churches sponsor the building of each tiny home*
- *The units will be rented on a sliding scale to low-income tenants*



Images courtesy
Thinc Whidbey

Planning for STEP housing Proposed House Bill 2474 (2024)

- *Focused on addressing housing for STEP* (shelters, transitional, emergency, permanent supportive housing)*
- *Addressed barriers local regulations posed to these housing types and required Commerce to “certify” STEP regulations*
- *Bill did not pass, but proviso to:*
 - *Provide technical assistance to remove barriers AND*
 - *Dispute resolution between local governments and service providers seeking to site supportive and emergency housing facilities*

STEP resources coming in July

1. **State of the Practice Report** to summarize existing local practices and best practices for the siting and development of STEP.
2. **Model ordinance** to help local jurisdictions develop their own ordinances.
3. **User's Guide and Best Practices Report** to supplement the model ordinance and provide best practices.
4. **Four case studies** on successful local implementation from King County and the Cities of Spokane, Vancouver, and Wenatchee.
5. **Communications toolkit** to help jurisdictions communicate the benefits, challenges and best practices associated with STEP.

Resources

- [Guidance for Updating your Housing Element \(Book 2\)](#)
- [Adequate Provisions Checklist](#)
- [Enhanced housing checklist \(checklist for housing element\)](#)
- [STEP types review checklist](#)

Forthcoming STEP Resources:

- [State of the Practice](#)
- [Model Ordinance, User Guide and Best Practices Guide](#)
- [Communications Tools, including PSH Communication Tools](#)
- [Implementation Case Studies](#)



Questions?

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Updating GMA Housing Elements

Growth Management Act housing element updates and requirements created by HB 1220 are presented below.



Quick Links

- Growth Management
- Governor's Smart Communities Awards Program
- Collaborative Roadmap Phase III
- Climate Program
- GMA Laws and Rules
- GMA Periodic Update
- Growth Management Grants
- Growth Management Topics
- Guidbooks and Resources
- Civilian-Military Compatibility
- Defense Community Compatibility
- Regional Planners' Forums
- Short Course on Local Planning
- Submitting Materials to the State for Review

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Planning for Housing in Washington State

In 2021, the Washington Legislature changed the way communities are required to plan for housing. House Bill 1220 (HB 1220) amended the Growth Management Act (GMA) to instruct local governments to "plan and accommodate" for housing affordable to all income levels. This significantly strengthens the previous goal, which was to encourage affordable housing. HB 1220 also made significant updates to how jurisdictions are to plan for housing in the housing element of their comprehensive plans.

<https://www.commerce.wa.gov/serving-communities/growth-management/growth-management-topics/planning-for-housing/updating-gma-housing-elements/>