



Chapter 1. Introduction

Purpose of the Comprehensive Plan

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is an official public document that guides policy decisions related to the physical, social, and economic growth of a city. It provides a framework for future growth, development, and public decision-making. The City of Longview's Comprehensive Plan is a 20-year guide for the future of the City. The Plan provides direction for how the City will grow and evolve over time and establishes the goals, objectives, and policies that the City should pursue to improve its quality of life, preserve and promote the community's assets, and ensure that Longview is an attractive, safe, and prosperous place to live and work now and into the future. The Comprehensive Plan assesses the opportunities and challenges facing the City and sets priorities for implementing the recommended actions of the Plan. A Comprehensive Plan is not a regulatory document. Rather, it is a guiding document which includes the goals, objectives, and policies that are then implemented through development regulations such as the City's zoning code.

Why Should We Update the Comprehensive Plan?

Cities evolve over time—the Comprehensive Plan should be a living document that is updated periodically to reflect changing development patterns, population, market and employment trends, and increased demand for services. The City’s previous Comprehensive Plan was prepared in 1993. Since then, the community has changed due to population growth, new residential development, increased traffic congestion, and changes in businesses and local industries.

The Comprehensive Plan has been updated to reflect these changing conditions and to reassess population and employment trends. Through the Comprehensive Plan, the City plans for its existing population as well as future population growth to provide adequate housing, roads, parks, utilities, and services. The update will help to address emerging community issues. Public participation in the update of this Plan was important in defining and shaping the direction of the City’s future growth and included residents, business owners, and community organizations.

What Are the Benefits of a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan is beneficial because it provides a road map for how a city will grow. Planning helps to produce better communities, healthier environments, and stronger economies. A well-planned community provides compatible land uses, a range of housing, an efficient and functional transportation network, and adequate public facilities and parks; and protects environmental and historic resources. The Plan is an effective management tool for the City. It incorporates goals and policies, provides the opportunity for community-defined direction, and provides greater predictability to property owners.

Effective Management Tool

For the Comprehensive Plan to be an effective management tool, the City must plan for the future by analyzing today’s growth and development patterns and determining priorities for future capital improvements and investments. The Plan is a tool for elected officials to make more informed choices about future land use. Informed land use decisions will ideally result in more orderly and predictable growth and cost-effective delivery of services to City residents. A Comprehensive Plan typically has a 20-year planning horizon and provides continuity for future decision-making, despite fluctuations in the local economy or changes in elected officials. The horizon for the Longview Comprehensive Plan is the year 2025.

Community-Defined Direction

A Comprehensive Plan allows City residents to take control over their destiny, as opposed to responding to changes around them and reacting to that change. The Plan provides the opportunity to identify, consolidate, and synthesize the major themes

and issues present in the City by creating a venue for the public to contribute and provide guidance on the City’s future direction, including preserving the characteristics that make Longview unique.

Greater Predictability

A Comprehensive Plan provides greater predictability to private property owners, businesses, and developers in making long-term decisions about the future use and enjoyment of their property. The plan can inform land investments by defining the general location, direction, type, and extent of residential, commercial, and industrial development into the future.

Who Has Authority for Planning?

In 1990, the Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management Act (GMA) (RCW 36.70A). The GMA requires Washington counties to comply with its requirements if they meet the following criteria:

- the county has a population over 50,000 persons; and
- after May 16, 1995, the county has also experienced a population increase by more than 17% in the previous 10 years.

At the time GMA was passed, Cowlitz County “opted out” of the requirements of GMA, because it did not meet the population criteria that would require the County to fully plan under the requirements of GMA. As such, the County and its incorporated cities are not required to fully plan under GMA; however, all cities and counties in Washington State are required to do a minimum of planning with regard to natural resource lands and critical areas, which includes preparing and maintaining a critical areas ordinance addressing aquifer protection areas, flood hazards, geologic hazards, fish and wildlife conservation areas, and wetlands (applies to all cities and counties in Washington State). Most recently, GMA requires that counties and cities include the Best Available Science (BAS) in developing policies and development regulations to protect the functions and values of critical areas.

Communities not fully planning under GMA are still required to prepare a comprehensive plan for the orderly physical development of the jurisdiction. At a minimum, a land use element and circulation element must be prepared. For land use, these requirements are specified per RCW 35A.63.061(1) Comprehensive Plan-Required Elements:

A land use element that designates the proposed general distribution and general location and extent of the uses of land. These uses may include, but are not limited to, agricultural, residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, educational, public, and other categories of public and private use of land. The land-use element shall also include estimates of future

population growth in, and statements of recommended standards of population density and building intensity for, the area covered by the comprehensive plan. The land use element shall also provide for protection of the quality and quantity of ground water used for public water supplies and shall review drainage, flooding, and storm water run-off in the area and nearby jurisdictions... (RCW 35A.63.061[1]).

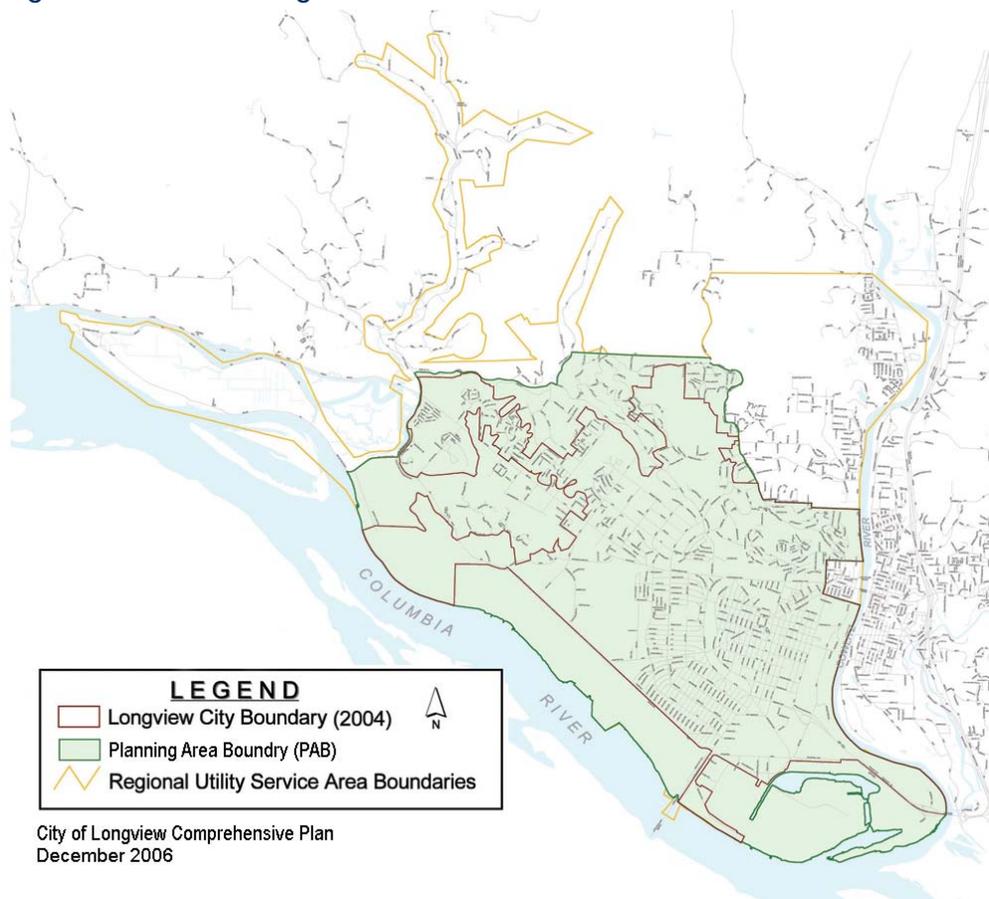
The City's 1993 Plan addressed land use and transportation, as well as housing, economic development, public services and facilities, historic resources, and other elements. Similarly, this Comprehensive Plan addresses a broad range of issues important for the City of Longview today and in the future.

Planning Area

The Planning Area includes the City limits and unincorporated land, which may be annexed by the City to accommodate growth in the future. Detailed analysis for the Comprehensive Plan is focused on properties within the City's existing City limits as of 2005. A second layer of analysis focuses on the "Planning Area Boundaries," which comprises the urban area located in unincorporated Cowlitz County just outside of City limits (Figure 1-1).

The Planning Area Boundaries include lands where urban services are already provided or can be readily provided over the planning horizon. Many of the County residents in the Planning Area currently have access to City services and resources such as the local road network, water and sewer service, and facilities such as public parks and the library. Although these residents are not physically located within the City, they create a demand for City services; thus, it is important for the City to plan for growth in surrounding areas to better understand demands on its resources. The City has a logical interest in guiding the land use and development patterns immediately outside City limits to ensure efficient provision of services and cost-effective capital improvements. In addition, with the pressures of growth, portions of the Planning Area may become annexed to the City during the 20-year planning horizon. Planning for the growth and development in the Planning Area will ensure that the City can adequately provide for members of this population if and when they become City residents.

Figure 1-1. Planning Area Boundaries



Source: City of Longview GIS

Citizen Participation

Public participation has been an essential component throughout the Comprehensive Plan update process. Key public outreach opportunities to date include the following:

- Community Preference Survey conducted in February/March 2005
- Public Workshops:
 - Open House #1: February 8, 2005, held at St. Helens Elementary School
 - Open House #2: February 9, 2005, held at Mt. Solo Middle School
 - Open House #3: February 15, 2005, held at Cascade Middle School
 - Open House #4: February 16, 2005, held at Cowlitz County PUD Auditorium
 - Open Houses #5 and #6: October 25, 2005, held at the Cowlitz Expo Center
 - Open Houses #7 and #8: June 28, 2006, , held at the Cowlitz Expo Center
- Economic Forum: June 15, 2005, held at the Lower Columbia Community College
- Joint Meetings of the City Council and Planning Commission: October 6, 2005
- Planning Commission Workshops and Public Meetings: September and November 2005 and February 2006
- Planning Commission Hearing on the Preliminary Parcel Specific Land Use Map, January 11, 2006
- City Council Briefings and Public Meetings: December 2005 and January and February 2006
- Meetings with City department heads, county staff and regional council of government (Cowlitz-Wahkiakum Council of Governments) staff
- Comprehensive Plan Update Newsletters and Postcards: January and October 2005 and June 2006
- News articles, City Web site updates and public service announcements
- Comprehensive Plan Public Hearings and Meetings:
 - Planning Commission: September 13 and 27, 2006
 - City Council: October 26, November 9, November 30, and December 21, 2006

Vision Statement

A vision statement expresses community values and ideas for the future. It depicts in words, images, or statements what the community seeks to become—how it will look, function, and evolve over time. “Longview 2023: Our Preferred Future” is the City’s preferred future vision for Longview, as established by the City Council in January 1995 and updated in 2005. The City’s vision describes five elements of Longview’s preferred future:

- **Community Character and Spirit.** Longview in 2023 is a mid-sized “All America” city. Characterized by volunteerism and unity, Longview is a great town in which to raise children or retire. Reduced crime, strong sports recreational programs, cohesive neighborhoods, care for all citizens, and appreciation of other cultures all contribute to a healthy community. A spirit of pride and celebration is the result.
- **A Vital Economy.** Longview in 2023 is a vibrant regional economic center. Support for traditional industries and health care services, a strengthened port, and flourishing new industries result from an environment that welcomes business. Tourism, improved productivity, and paperless business transactions through the use of applied technology reflect change and growth. A vital downtown that is safe, inviting, and historic complements the entire region.
- **Physical Environmental and Structure.** Longview in 2023 continues to be an attractive, carefully planned and well-maintained city. Tree-lined streets, parks, bike paths, river access, and quality housing make the city inviting. Multi-use neighborhood centers, new bridges, and a convention and conference center add to the physical environment.
- **Educational and Cultural Opportunity.** Longview in 2023 has become a successful learning community with world-class education and sports recreation programs for all ages and enhanced cultural arts as well. Excellent public schools, access to higher and vocational education, and a school-to-work transition program are the result of cooperative efforts by the schools and colleges, business, labor, government agencies and the City.
- **Regional Cooperation.** Longview in 2023 is a vital participant in regional cooperation on growth, transportation, and telecommunications issues, as well as economic development, education, utilities, public safety, and meeting the needs of families and youth.

A vision statement is important to the Comprehensive Plan process, because it gives us a big-picture view of Longview’s community values and the qualities we hope to see in our communities. Many of the topics addressed in “Longview 2023: Our Preferred Future” are directly tied to growth and development in the City and are relevant for the Plan horizon of 2025. The Comprehensive Plan helps to realize this

vision by addressing how Longview will develop over time and establishes the goals, policies, and programs that the City should pursue to improve the quality of life, preserve and promote the County’s rural assets, and ensure that Longview is a safe and prosperous place to live and work now and into the future.

Contents of the Plan

This Plan contains several “elements” or “chapters” of the Comprehensive Plan, each addressing important concerns in Longview, including the following:

- Chapter 1: Introduction,
- Chapter 2: Land Use Element,
- Chapter 3: Housing Element,
- Chapter 4: Economic Development Element,
- Chapter 5: Natural Environment Element,
- Chapter 6: Energy and Telecommunications Element,
- Chapter 7: Public Facilities, Utilities, and Services Element,
- Chapter 8: Transportation Element,
- Chapter 9: Historic Preservation Element, and
- Chapter 10: Action Plan.

Chapters 1 through 9 of the Plan share a common format, use similar terms and references, and are intended to interrelate. Each chapter summarizes background information from the “Final Existing Conditions Report,” prepared in June 2005 on specific subjects, to make the Comprehensive Plan more useful as a reference document and to provide the technical basis for its policies and programs. Some chapters contain maps that provide current information about the City or graphic illustrations of the City’s policies for specific geographic areas or infrastructure. Each chapter includes goals, objectives, and policies that are the essence of the Plan and are intended to be consulted to guide decisions on a wide range of issues, including permitting and resource allocation. It is important to remember that the goals, objectives, and policies in this Comprehensive Plan are just as important as the maps in making land use and development decisions. To be consistent with the Plan, a project must also meet the intent of the Plan’s policies, not just the land use designation.

The goals, objectives, and policies guide the planning efforts, permitting, and resource allocation to further the community vision. As used in this plan, goals, objectives, and policies are defined as follows:

- **Goal.** Goals are broad, general statements of the desired long-term future state toward which the Plan aims. They indicate what should exist in a community or what is desired to be achieved in the future.
- **Objective.** Objectives are statements of the desired short-term and more measurable aims of the Plan; the objectives show how a goal will be pursued.
- **Policy.** A policy describes a particular course or method of action to accomplish the purposes of the Comprehensive Plan. Policies are decision-oriented statements that guide the legislative or administrative body while evaluating a new project or proposed change in the ordinance.

Chapter 10 (Action Plan) lists all objectives, needed resources, and responsible departments to ensure that the Plan is implemented.

Implementing the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan will be implemented through the actions of City staff, the Planning Commission, City Council, and other Boards or Commissions. Objectives and policies will be carried out through the adoption and revision of regulations, including zoning and critical areas, annual budgeting and capital improvement programming, empowering neighborhood and community groups, and ongoing decisions on future development proposals.

Amending the Comprehensive Plan

Long-range planning in Longview does not end with the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is a living document. In order to respond to changing conditions in between Comprehensive Plan updates, the City allows periodic Comprehensive Plan Amendments. Property owners, City staff, the Planning Commission, or the City Council may initiate amendments. All amendments require public notice, a public hearing, and an evaluation of the environmental impacts in accordance with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). Because the City is required to make its regulations consistent with the Comprehensive Plan, some Comprehensive Plan Amendments will require corresponding zoning map and regulation amendments. Comprehensive Plan policies are intended to assist the City in determining whether to approve Comprehensive Plan and zoning amendments consistent with the City Vision.

Only through continuing to use, evaluate, and, when necessary, amend the Comprehensive Plan can the City move toward the vision sought by all of the people who have contributed to the development of this Plan.