

This chapter addresses the efforts that jurisdictions have made to achieve countywide housing objectives. We look at actions taken that respond to 14 Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) on housing, covering a wide range of strategies aimed at housing affordability, community acceptance of new development, proximity of housing and workplaces, and environmentally sensitive development.

In this evaluation, by “actions” we mean any adopted goals, policies, ordinances, regulations, works, or other measures taken to promote or implement housing objectives. The results or effectiveness of these actions is the focus of the Affordability chapter of this *Report*.

The Action chapter acknowledges many efforts that local governments of Snohomish County have taken. It also recognizes that achieving desirable housing outcomes often requires more than what local governments are able to do. Achieving housing goals and objectives often requires compatible economic conditions and private-sector actions that are beyond the control of local governments. Thus, a fair evaluation should look not only for desirable results, but also assess and understand the extent to which our cities and County have established housing goals or policies and acted on them.

This evaluation was conducted largely as a self-assessment; that is, cities and the County were asked to report their own efforts. As a collection of self-assessments, the research for this part of the study was much less extensive than that of the 2002 *Report*, which involved many interviews and other meetings with city staff and other officials and stakeholders. The previous *Report* also incorporated a detailed scan of the housing elements of local comprehensive plans, which wasn't repeated for this edition.

Each jurisdiction received an open-ended questionnaire asking about their use of 41 different strategies aimed at increasing

affordable housing.² Snohomish County and all cities except Darrington, Index, Gold Bar, Granite Falls, and Sultan returned questionnaires with updated strategy assessments. The information on these five cities has been carried over from the 2002 *Housing Evaluation Report*.

To analyze together all the self-assessments, we compiled the list of strategies into a matrix similar to one created for the 2002 *Housing Evaluation Report*. Chart 1 (pages 6–8) displays the survey responses characterized into categories of effort:

- Not in Use,
- In Comprehensive Plan (but not enacted as a program or code regulation),
- In Zoning Regulations (but not used in actual housing development),
- Used Some (that is, in no more than a few actual housing developments)
- Used Frequently

The survey asked for detailed information on whether the actual housing was affordable to lower-income households, but we obtained too little information for evaluation purposes. Therefore, Chart 1 does not tell us whether these efforts produced affordable housing.

Chart 2 summarizes Chart 1 by counting the jurisdictions that reported a given level of effort for each strategy. For instance, 15 cities and Snohomish County (total of 16 jurisdictions) reported that they have taken some action to permit housing on lots smaller than 9,600 square feet; five of those have enacted this into their code, but it hasn't been used, while ten others have had some use or frequent use. This chart

² Snohomish County Tomorrow (SCT) adopted this list of strategies in January 1994 in a document titled *Strategies to Achieve Affordable Housing Objectives*, as an aid (or “toolkit”) to jurisdictions trying to develop new Growth Management Act (GMA) comprehensive plans. SCT later recommended the *Strategies* as means of achieving Fair Share Housing Allocation targets in 1995 and 2005. The full *Strategies* document is included in the Appendix of this *Report*.

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Chart 1

Strategies Used or Identified for Promoting Affordable Housing

	Arlington	Bothell	Brier	Darrington*	Edmonds	Everett	Index*
Single Family							
Small lots (under 9,600 sq. ft.)	R	R			S	F	
Accessory dwelling units	R	R	R	F	S	S	
Preservation of existing affordable units	C	F			S	F	C
Minimum densities	C	R	C				
Lot size averaging		R	R		S	F	
Manufactured homes allowed	R	R	R	F	S	S	S
Other strategies		S	S			F	
MultiFamily							
Upzoning	C	S			S	F	
Preservation of existing affordable units	C	C			S	S	
No maximum densities	R	R			S	R	
Small units	C					R	
Other strategies		C				R	
Site Requirements							
Reduced parking requirements	R	R			S	R	
Street width reductions (less than 40 ft)		F			R	R	
Credits for preserving open space		R			R	R	
Zero lot line	C				R	R	
Flexibility with front and back setbacks	R	R	C	S	R	R	
Flexibility with sidewalk widths					R		
ROWs and easements	R				R	R	
Flexibility in stormwater requirements		R			R	R	
Flexible curb standards					R		
Other strategies							
Design							
Cottage housing	C	S	C		R	R	
PUD (a.k.a. PAD or PRD)		S			R	S	
Mixed-use	S	F	C	C	S	R	F
Infill	R	S	R	R	S	R	
Other strategies						R	
Incentives							
Density bonuses: in exchange for affordable units					S		
Impact fee waivers or deferral					S		
Priority permitting							
Other strategies						R	
Administrative Reform							
Regulatory reform		C			S	S	
Streamlined permitting	R	F			S		
Other strategies	S	F					
Other Organizations							
Active partnerships w/ nonprofit providers	S	F			S	F	C
Cooperate w/ other jurisdictions	S	F	S		S	F	
Other strategies							
Government Actions							
Financial assistance programs					C	S	
Displacement resources		R			C	S	
Pursue funding for housing	S	F			C	S	
Other strategies							

* Cities that did not respond to 2007 self-assessment.
The information above was extracted from the 2002 Housing Report

LEGEND	
Not in Use	
In Comp Plan	C
In Zoning Regs	R
Has Been Used Some	S
Used Frequently	F

Strategies Used or Identified for Promoting Affordable Housing

	Gold Bar*	Granite Falls*	Lake Stevens	Lynnwood	Marysville	Mill Creek	Monroe
Single Family							
Small lots (under 9,600 sq. ft.)		F		R	F	S	F
Accessory dwelling units			R	R	R	S	R
Preservation of existing affordable units				R	C	C	S
Minimum densities				R	C	R	
Lot size averaging				R	F	S	
Manufactured homes allowed		S	R	R	R	R	F
Other strategies		F	R		R		F
MultiFamily							
Upzoning			C	R	S	R	S
Preservation of existing affordable units			C			C	F
No maximum densities			R	R	S		R
Small units			R	C	R	S	
Other strategies				R	R		
Site Requirements							
Reduced parking requirements			R	R		S	R
Street width reductions (less than 40 ft)			R	R	R	S	R
Credits for preserving open space				R	S	S	R
Zero lot line			R	R	R	S	S
Flexibility with front and back setbacks			R	R	S	S	S
Flexibility with sidewalk widths			R			S	
ROWs and easements			R		S	S	
Flexibility in stormwater requirements					R	S	R
Flexible curb standards				R	S	S	
Other strategies							
Design							
Cottage housing			C	R	C	S	
PUD (a.k.a. PAD or PRD)		F	R	R	R	S	S
Mixed-use		S	R	S	S	S	R
Infill			R	F	S	S	F
Other strategies							
Incentives							
Density bonuses: in exchange for affordable units					R	C	R
Impact fee waivers or deferral		S	R	R		S	R
Priority permitting						C	
Other strategies				R			
Administrative Reform							
Regulatory reform			S	R	S	S	R
Streamlined permitting		F	S	R	S	S	R
Other strategies			S				
Other Organizations							
Active partnerships w/ nonprofit providers			C	S	C	S	S
Cooperate w/ other jurisdictions			C		S	S	S
Other strategies			S				
Government Actions							
Financial assistance programs			C	R		R	
Displacement resources						R	
Pursue funding for housing			C			R	
Other strategies				C			

* Cities that did not respond to 2007 self-assessment.
The information above was extracted from the 2002 Housing Report

LEGEND	
Not in Use	
In Comp Plan	C
In Zoning Regs	R
Has Been Used Some	S
Used Frequently	F

Action

Strategies Used or Identified for Promoting Affordable Housing

	Mountlake Terrace	Mukilteo	Snohomish, City of	Snohomish County	Stanwood	Sultan*	Woodway
Single Family							
Small lots (under 9,600 sq. ft.)	R	S	C	R	S	S	
Accessory dwelling units	R	C	R	R	R	S	R
Preservation of existing affordable units				R			
Minimum densities			C			C	
Lot size averaging		R		R	S		
Manufactured homes allowed	R	R	R	R	R		R
Other strategies				C		S	R
MultiFamily							
Upzoning			C	C	C		
Preservation of existing affordable units		C					
No maximum densities	R			R			
Small units			R	R			
Other strategies			R	C	C		
Site Requirements							
Reduced parking requirements	R	R	R	R	R	S	
Street width reductions (less than 40 ft)		R	C	R	R	C	R
Credits for preserving open space	R			R			
Zero lot line	R			R	R	C	
Flexibility with front and back setbacks		R		R	R	C	
Flexibility with sidewalk widths		R		R	R	C	
ROWs and easements					R		R
Flexibility in stormwater requirements			C	R			
Flexible curb standards		R		R		F	R
Other strategies				R		S	R
Design							
Cottage housing		S	C	R	S		
PUD (a.k.a. PAD or PRD)	R	F	R	R	S	S	
Mixed-use	R	S	R	R	R		
Infill		R	R			S	R
Other strategies	R					R	R
Incentives							
Density bonuses: in exchange for affordable units					C		
Impact fee waivers or deferral				R	C	S	
Priority permitting			R	R			R
Other strategies					C		
Administrative Reform							
Regulatory reform			S	R		C	
Streamlined permitting	S	C	S	C		C	S
Other strategies				R			
Other Organizations							
Active partnerships w/ nonprofit providers	S		S	S	S		
Cooperate w/ other jurisdictions			S				S
Other strategies							
Government Actions							
Financial assistance programs							
Displacement resources							
Pursue funding for housing							
Other strategies							

* Cities that did not respond to 2007 self-assessment.
The information above was extracted from the 2002 Housing Report

LEGEND	
Not in Use	
In Comp Plan	C
In Zoning Regs	R
Has Been Used Some	S
Used Frequently	F

Chart 2

Frequencies of Strategy Use

	In Comp Plan	In Zoning Regs	Used Some	Used Frequently	Total
Single Family	C	R	S	F	
Small lots (under 9,600 sq. ft.)	1	5	6	4	16
Accessory dwelling units	1	12	4	1	18
Preservation of existing affordable units	4	2	2	2	10
Minimum densities	5	3	0	0	8
Lot size averaging	0	5	3	2	10
Manufactured homes allowed	0	13	4	2	19
Other strategies	1	3	3	3	10
MultiFamily	C	R	S	F	
Upzoning	5	2	4	1	12
Preservation of existing affordable units	5	0	2	1	8
No maximum densities	0	8	2	0	10
Small units	2	5	1	0	8
Other strategies	3	4	0	0	7
Site Requirements	C	R	S	F	
Reduced parking requirements	0	11	3	0	14
Street width reductions (less than 40 ft)	2	10	1	1	14
Credits for preserving open space	0	7	2	0	9
Zero lot line	2	8	2	0	12
Flexibility with front and back setbacks	2	9	4	0	15
Flexibility with sidewalk widths	1	5	1	0	7
ROWs and easements	0	7	2	0	9
Flexibility in stormwater requirements	1	6	1	0	8
Flexible curb standards	0	5	2	1	8
Other strategies	0	2	1	0	3
Design	C	R	S	F	
Cottage housing	5	4	4	0	13
PUD (a.k.a. PAD or PRD)	0	7	6	2	15
Mixed-use	2	7	7	2	18
Infill	0	8	5	2	15
Other strategies	0	4	0	0	4
Incentives	C	R	S	F	
Density bonuses: in exchange for affordable units	2	2	1	0	5
Impact fee waivers or deferral	1	4	4	0	9
Priority permitting	1	3	0	0	4
Other strategies	1	2	0	0	3
Administrative Reform	C	R	S	F	
Regulatory reform	2	3	6	0	11
Streamlined permitting	3	3	7	2	15
Other strategies	0	1	2	1	4
Other Organizations	C	R	S	F	
Active partnerships w/ nonprofit providers	3	0	9	2	14
Cooperate w/ other jurisdictions	1	0	8	2	11
Other strategies	0	0	1	0	1
Government Actions	C	R	S	F	
Financial assistance programs	2	2	1	0	5
Displacement resources	1	2	1	0	4
Pursue funding for housing	2	1	2	1	6
Other strategies	1	0	0	0	1

Action

proves useful for spotting a few countywide patterns (keeping in mind that positive indications do not necessarily mean that a strategy is adopted or used specifically for low-cost housing).

Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 2

Make adequate provisions for existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the county.

HO 2 calls upon the county's jurisdictions to make sure that people of all income levels, present and future, are included in their housing efforts (plans and programs). It may be considered the overarching policy for most of the other housing CPPs. Using Chart 2, we determined that Snohomish County jurisdictions (on the whole) have taken action on 46% of the opportunities presented in the *Strategies*.³

Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 5

Each jurisdiction's comprehensive plan housing element will include strategies to attain the jurisdiction's fair share housing objectives. Jurisdictions will consider as appropriate the strategies for achieving affordable housing as described in OD-13. (Amended Mar. 31, 2004 – Amended Ord. 04-007)

HO 5 speaks directly to the Fair Share Housing Allocation of SCT. By referencing CPP OD 13, it directs cities and the County to consider specifically the *Strategies* described above.

Chart 2 suggests a few patterns. First, most of the jurisdictions' efforts or attention went into Single-Family and Design strategies. This is determined by looking at the total number of jurisdictions with any level of activity. A secondary tier of effort went to Administrative Reform, Multifamily, Site Requirements, and Other-Organization strategies.

³ That is, there are 41 strategies in the list, and 21 jurisdictions (including the county), for 861 "opportunities." The jurisdictions took action in 393 of those cases.

Second, Other-Organization strategies have received the most use (either "used some" or "used frequently"), followed by Single-Family, Administrative Reform, and Design efforts.

Third, many jurisdictions that have yet to see usage nevertheless have prepared themselves at the code level with Design, Site Requirement, and Single-Family strategies.

The strategies matrix (Chart 1) raises interesting findings by jurisdiction. Simply counting the number of responses indicates that Edmonds, Everett, Lake Stevens, Lynnwood, Marysville, Mill Creek, and Snohomish County have been the most active, or at least tried the greatest variety of these strategies. Everett, Mill Creek, and Monroe report the most usage of their strategies.

Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 7

Encourage the availability of adequate affordable housing in designated urban growth areas by implementing land use and density incentives as provided in RCW 36.70A.90 and in rural areas by means of cluster housing that minimizes infrastructure costs. (Amended Feb. 2, 1994 – Ord. 94-002; Amended Mar. 31, 2004 – Amended Ord. 004-007)

Section 36.70A.90 of the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) says that GMA Comprehensive Plans "should provide for innovative land use management techniques, including, but not limited to, density bonuses, cluster housing, planned unit developments, and the transfer of development rights." HO 7 directs cities and the County to implement these in Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), and specifically cluster housing outside the UGAs.

Nearly three-quarters of our jurisdictions offer some form of Planned Unit Development (PUD) option for new subdivisions. These often provide flexibility that can lead to less expensive development and homes. Although we do not have the research to determine the effects in actual development, the frequency table reports that seven communities have had either some or frequent use of their PUD codes.

Another option, which may be gaining in popularity (although it was not surveyed in the 2002 *Report*), is lot size averaging. This strategy permits developers to obtain the number of lots allowed in zoning that would otherwise be lost to critical areas or other restrictions, as long as the average lot size reaches the minimum stated in the code. Two entities (Everett and Mill Creek) have used this provision, and another seven have adopted it.

“Density bonuses,” in the context of this evaluation, means that a developer may build more units than otherwise allowed in return for making a certain number or percentage of those units affordable to buyers or renters of a certain income. Five jurisdictions have adopted this strategy, and one (Mill Creek) has reported development occurring from it.

Snohomish County and the City of Everett have both adopted transfer of development rights (TDR) programs, which provide incentives for rural land owners to sell unused residential development capacity to urban land owners, in order to preserve rural areas from development and to increase densities in urban areas.

Snohomish County, which of course is the only entity with rural area in its jurisdiction, has made extensive use of cluster housing as directed in HO 7. While there is some evidence (not presented here) that most new housing in rural cluster subdivisions has not been affordable to middle- and lower-income buyers, we do not have research to determine whether those homes are more or less expensive than homes that might have been built without the rural cluster subdivision provisions.

**Countywide Planning Policy
Housing Objective 8**

Implement policies and programs that encourage the upgrading of neighborhoods and the rehabilitation and preservation of the supply of existing affordable housing, including but not limited to mobile home park housing, single room occupancy (SRO) housing, and manufactured housing.

HO 8 urges jurisdictions to protect existing supplies of affordable housing. The County Assessor’s sales data supports the conventional wisdom that older housing tends to be smaller and less expensive for rent and purchase, and therefore represents our largest source of affordable housing.⁴ This CPP presents something of a dilemma faced in many older communities, where “upgrading” neighborhoods begins to make existing, low-cost housing unaffordable.

Five of our jurisdictions have adopted policies to preserve existing affordable housing (single-family, multifamily, or both), and another six have begun implementing them. Three of these (Bothell, Everett, and Monroe) report some or frequent use of this strategy, but we do not know how many housing units have been preserved.

**Countywide Planning Policy
Housing Objective 11**

Adopt a local planning process that reconciles the need to encourage and respect the vitality of established residential neighborhoods with the need to identify and site essential public residential facilities for special needs populations, including those mandated under RCW 36.70A.200.

“Essential public residential facilities for special needs populations” refers to housing that residents sometimes find objectionable for adding to their neighborhoods, such as group homes, transitional housing, and correctional facilities.

Lake Stevens appears to have the most directly stated policy in favor of special needs housing: “no residential neighborhoods (may) be closed to such facilities.” Mill Creek also expressly encourages providing housing for special needs populations, including congregate care facilities.

⁴ Although we are not presenting the evidence in this Report, Snohomish County plans to do so in a subsequent report.

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Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 12

Encourage a variety of housing types and densities that allow for infill using innovative urban design techniques to foster broad community acceptance. (Amended Mar. 31, 2004 – Amended Ord. 004-007)

As mentioned above, design strategies have been one of the most popular subjects of affordable housing effort. Every jurisdiction (except Gold Bar, which did not participate in the survey) has either adopted or tried to implement at least one of these strategies: cottage housing, Planned Unit Development, mixed-use, or encouraging infill housing. Nine of those jurisdictions report some or frequent development stemming from those activities. While none said whether those techniques have fostered broad community acceptance, Edmonds's updated design review process is expressly intended to promote this.

Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 13

Provide adequate, affordable housing choices for all segments of the County's work force within close proximity or adequate access to the respective places of work.

HO 13 implies that each jurisdiction will do its part to make sure that housing is available and affordable for those who would work in the jurisdiction, when travel costs and modes are considered. Snohomish County and Lynnwood have been particularly aggressive in planning for new high density, mixed-use, transit- and pedestrian-oriented urban centers to bring jobs closer to housing. Mountlake Terrace, Lake Stevens, and Mill Creek also promote mixed-use or transit-oriented development for this reason. Everett, on the other hand, is working hard to balance jobs and housing from the other direction; that is, to bring more housing close to existing jobs, especially downtown.

Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 14

Encourage the use of environmentally sensitive housing development practices in order to minimize the impacts of growth on the county's natural resource systems.

HO 14 is one of a select number of policies not directly aimed at housing affordability. It is intended not only to keep growth from unnecessarily reducing forest, farm, and mineral lands, but also to protect water resources, especially from overuse and pollution. Protecting water resources, however, can have the added long-term benefit of saving utility costs for residents.

Although lot size averaging or Planned Residential Development is available in most of our cities, only Lake Stevens promotes them specifically for this purpose. In addition, Marysville and Snohomish County have developed low-impact development standards that aim to protect water resources.

Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 15

Consider the economic implications of proposed building and land use regulations so that the broader public benefit they serve is achieved with the least additional cost to housing.

A number of cities and Snohomish County have policies in favor of knowing the cost impacts of development controls on housing prices. Nine said they have implemented regulatory reforms aimed at reducing the regulatory costs on housing, and another two have established that goal. No jurisdictions reported that they actually conduct a fiscal analysis of any proposed land use or development regulation.

**Countywide Planning Policy
Housing Objective 16**

Ensure the expeditious and efficient processing of development applications by endeavoring to process complete development applications consistent with the timelines established in state law and local ordinances. The jurisdictions shall maintain clear and specific submittal standards and the most current available information on wetlands, geologic hazardous areas, and fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas. The expeditious processing of development applications shall not result in the lowering of environmental and land use standards. (Amended Mar. 31, 2004 -Amended Ord. 04-007)

Fourteen cities and the County have streamlined permit processes in order to minimize the various costs that accrue to applicants as local governments determine the permissibility of their proposals. This represents significant cost savings to home builders and developers, who may then pass those savings on to buyers (but may not, depending on economic conditions).

**Countywide Planning Policy
Housing Objective 17**

Minimize housing production costs by considering the use of a variety of infrastructure funding methods, including but not limited to existing revenue sources, impact fees, local improvement districts, and general obligation bonds.

Snohomish County reported policies for reducing infrastructure costs through alternative funding methods and through cluster housing in rural areas, but no other jurisdictions mentioned such an approach for minimizing production costs.

**Countywide Planning Policy
Housing Objective 18**

Ensure that each jurisdiction's impact fee program adds no more to the cost of each housing unit produced than a fairly-derived proportionate share of the cost of new public facilities needed to accommodate the housing unit as determined by the impact fee provisions of the Growth Management Act cited in RCW 82.02.

The 2002 *Report* contained a thorough analysis of impact fees assessed by each jurisdiction for parks, roads, and schools. The survey used to collect that data was not repeated for this Report, and no jurisdictions reported conducting new impact fee studies or changing their impact fee programs

**Countywide Planning Policy
Housing Objective 19**

Require that adequate quantities of affordable housing for a broad range of income levels are provided in fully contained communities concurrent with the development of jobs, services, and other publicly-approved project improvements (This would be applicable only if the County has made provision for new fully contained communities.)

In 2005, Snohomish County did amend its Comprehensive Plan land use element with a Fully-Contained Communities (FCC) policy, and subsequently adopted an implementing ordinance. The new policy requires that at least 30% of the total housing with an FCC shall be affordable at or below 120% of the countywide median income, with some portions of that 30% affordable at 80% and 100%, which would be determined by the director of the County's Planning & Development Services department. This policy has yet to be applied.

Action

Countywide Planning Policy Housing Objective 21

Encourage local jurisdictions to implement housing relocation programs as provided under chapter 59.18 RCW.

Finally, HO 21 refers to a state law that enables local governments to require property owners to pay up to half of a resident's relocation costs when residents are forced to move because of "the demolition, substantial rehabilitation . . . , or change of use of residential property, or upon the removal of use restrictions in an assisted-housing development" or conversion from rental to condominium. Edmonds has such a policy, not implemented. Mill Creek has put its policy into code. Everett's policy has actually been applied in a small number of circumstances.