

TO: City of Everett Planning Commission
FROM: Yorik Stevens-Wajda, Planning Director
DATE: April 29, 2021
RE: **2021 Buildable Lands Report**

Snohomish County, in partnership with the cities within, is approaching completion of the [2021 Buildable Lands Report](#). Planning staff will brief the planning commission at its May 4 meeting on the buildable lands program, progress to date in the 2021 reporting cycle, initial results, and next steps.

Buildable Lands Program

PURPOSE

The purpose of the buildable lands program (RCW [36.70A.215](#)), established in 1997, is to answer two questions:

Is development going according to plan? Determine whether cities and counties are achieving urban densities within urban growth areas by comparing growth and development assumptions, targets, and objectives contained in the countywide planning policies and the city and county comprehensive plans with actual growth and development that has occurred in the cities and the county.

If not, what are we going to do about it? Identify reasonable measures, other than adjusting urban growth areas, that will be taken to comply with the requirements of this chapter. Reasonable measures are those actions necessary to reduce the differences between growth and development assumptions and targets contained in the countywide planning policies and the county and city comprehensive plans with actual development patterns. The reasonable measures process shall be used as part of the next comprehensive plan update to reconcile inconsistencies.

HISTORY

Snohomish County has completed three buildable lands reports:

- 2002 Buildable Lands [Report](#)
- 2007 Buildable Lands [Report](#)
- 2012 Buildable Lands [Report](#) and [Supplemental Map Book](#)

NEW PROGRAM REQUIREMENTS

The state legislature [modified](#) the statutory requirements for the program in 2017. The updated requirements are provided in:

- State law (RCW [36.70A.215](#) and WAC [365-196-315](#))
- Updated [Buildable Lands Program Guidelines](#) from the [Department of Commerce](#)
- Snohomish County [Buildable Lands Procedures](#)

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2021 Buildable Lands Report

Snohomish County and the cities within collaborate on the buildable lands program through Snohomish County Tomorrow, pursuant to the countywide planning policies (see policy GF-7 below).

CPP-GF-7 Maintain the review and evaluation program, which includes an annual data collection component, pursuant to RCW 36.70A.215 (“Buildable Lands Program”). Complete the evaluation component required by the Buildable Lands Program at least once every eight years. This evaluation may be combined with the review and evaluation of County and city comprehensive land use plans and development regulations required by RCW 36.70A.130(1), and the review of Urban Growth Areas required by RCW 36.70A.130(3).

- a. Use the procedures report in Appendix E for the Buildable Lands Program.
- b. A list of reasonable measures that may be used to increase residential, commercial, and industrial capacity in UGAs, without adjusting UGA boundaries, is contained in Appendix D. The County Council shall use the list of reasonable measures and guidelines for review contained in Appendix D to evaluate all UGA boundary expansions proposed pursuant to DP-2.

Snohomish County staff, with the help of consultants, coordinate the development of the buildable lands report on behalf of the county and the cities within. Work on the report began in earnest in late 2019, starting with a review of the methodology against the new program requirements, and a validation study that reviewed the accuracy of the 2012 Buildable Lands Report.

DRAFT RESULTS

The buildable lands project team recently completed draft results, which are under review by the Snohomish County Tomorrow Planning Advisory Committee.

Housing & population

The current growth targets for the city, contained in Appendix B of the countywide planning policies, are a total of 165,000 people, in 70,000 housing units, in 2035. [State estimates](#) for the city indicate 112,000 people live in 47,000 housing units in Everett in 2019.

	Observed	Growth Target	Draft Buildable Lands Capacity
	2019	2035	2035
Population	112,000	165,000	151,000
Housing units	47,000	70,000	68,572

These draft results indicate that the city is facing a shortfall in capacity for population, although less so for housing¹. The city produced its own capacity analysis as part of the 2015 comprehensive plan update that indicated higher capacity (as much as 180,000 people if certain conditions were met), but the assumptions and methodology used in the buildable lands report have legal status within state law and the shortfall in capacity will need to be addressed through reasonable measures.

¹ Converting population forecasts and targets into housing targets is a complicated exercise that considers average household size, which changes over time (long term regional trend of smaller households) and differs by structure type (apartments and condos tend to have smaller households than houses); vacancy rates (2%-8% long term average depending on structure type); and so-called group quarters population such as dormitories and shelters. City and county staff will continue to investigate these relationships, including new data from Census 2021.



Employment

The current growth targets for the city, contained in Appendix B of the countywide planning policies, are a total of 140,000 jobs in 2035. Estimated 2019 employment for the city is 100,000 jobs.

	Observed	Growth Target	Draft Buildable Lands Capacity
	2019	2035	2035
Employment	100,000	140,000	141,000

These draft results indicate that the city has just enough capacity to accommodate targeted employment growth, meaning no reasonable measures will likely be necessary for employment.

REASONABLE MEASURES

Reasonable measures are those actions necessary to reduce the differences between actual development patterns and growth and development assumptions and targets (RCW [36.70A.215](#)). Based on the draft buildable lands analysis results, it appears that the city will need to address a shortfall in estimated capacity for housing/population through reasonable measures.

Reasonable measures work will be folded into the upcoming comprehensive plan periodic update process, which will begin later this year and continue through adoption of an updated comprehensive plan and development regulations in early 2024. The reasonable measures work would begin with a more detailed evaluation of the apparent discrepancy, would then confirm whether measures are, in fact, necessary (it is possible that external factors could explain the apparent shortfall in capacity). If the city determines that reasonable measures are necessary, then we will need to identify possible actions to be taken to reduce the difference between achieved and planned growth, document methodology, and establish a monitoring program to determine whether the measures have been effective.

Draft reasonable measures for jurisdictions in Snohomish County are included in the latest [draft countywide planning policies](#) (see pages 74-82 of the pdf). These are based on previously-adopted measures in the countywide planning policies, [Buildable Lands Guidelines](#) from the Department of Commerce (see pages 48-51 and 68-76 of the pdf), a 2003 [Reasonable Measures Report](#) for Snohomish County and its cities and a 2020 [Reasonable Measures Program Technical Supplement](#).

Next Steps

The buildable lands report will be reviewed by Snohomish County Tomorrow's Planning Advisory Committee (planning staff from around the county) and the Steering Committee (councilmembers and mayors from around the county), with a recommendation forwarded to the county council for consideration and approval this summer. If necessary, the city's work on reasonable measures would be folded into the comprehensive plan periodic update process to begin late 2021.

Snohomish County Tomorrow Planning Advisory Committee

- **May 13:** Final draft report recommendation

Snohomish County Tomorrow Steering Committee

- **April 28:** Briefing on draft report results
- **May 26:** Action on final draft report

Report forwarded to County Council (public hearing & adoption)

- **Summer 2021:** County council considers approval of methodology and final report
- **June 30:** deadline to complete report



Draft Buildable Lands Maps

NORTH

- [Land Status](#)
- [Zoning and Future Land Use Designations](#)
- [Critical Areas, Buffers and Major Easements](#)
- [Additional Housing Unit Capacity](#)
- [Additional Employment Unit Capacity](#)

MIDDLE

- [Land Status](#)
- [Zoning and Future Land Use Designations](#)
- [Critical Areas, Buffers and Major Easements](#)
- [Additional Housing Unit Capacity](#)
- [Additional Employment Unit Capacity](#)

SOUTH

- [Land Status](#)
- [Zoning and Future Land Use Designations](#)
- [Critical Areas, Buffers and Major Easements](#)
- [Additional Housing Unit Capacity](#)
- [Additional Employment Unit Capacity](#)

