



Washington Association of REALTORS®

Government Affairs Program

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Ensuring Economic Vitality

Recommendation 1: Review the Comprehensive Plan to ensure community needs and vision are appropriately addressed, goals set, quality growth planned for, and actions taken to meet the needs of a growing community.

Strategy 1.1: Economic Development Element: Economic development is necessary to provide job opportunities, expand economic opportunities, increase public revenues and enhance the quality of life. Through an economic strategy based on market analyses and feasibility studies that identify current inventory, resources and needs, a community can set the stage for sustainable economic growth by planning and implementing proper zoning and development regulations, and providing the incentives, infrastructure and amenities necessary to attract economic development. Economic growth drives both the demand for workers and the corresponding demand for housing. Without an economic development element, the city may fail to take into account a critical piece of planning for future growth, as well as an inability to plan for and attract increased economic opportunities for the community.

Strategy 1.2: Housing Element: Every job created in a community needs a place to go home at night. Planning for, and accommodating a balance of jobs and housing is a critical component of economic vitality. Increased population growth is necessary to support greater business investment, increased employment needs, and create the demand for business services. As prescribed by the Growth Management Act, the Housing Element must provide an inventory and analysis of existing and projected housing needs; housing targets to achieve needs; a statement of goals, policies, objectives and provisions for the preservation, improvement and development of housing to meet the needs of the community, and the demand brought on by growth and employment opportunities. Importantly, each community must plan for the availability of affordable housing choices, and the number of residential units necessary to accommodate projected growth.

Strategy 1.3: Land Use Element: Land use decisions should consider the vision of the economy, housing needs for the future, infrastructure necessary to accommodate growth, and plans for preserving the environment, while protecting property rights. Communities must plan for the land necessary for commercial development, and the number of residential units necessary to accommodate projected employment growth, as there must be a balance between jobs and housing necessary to meet the demands of a growing workforce. Without available and suitably located housing, it becomes difficult for companies to attract a qualified workforce. Therefore, policies must ensure a sufficient amount of buildable land capacity be available for development in a competitive market.

Strategy 1.4: Performance Measures: Comprehensive plans should include specified, definable goals. Benchmark indicators and performance measures should be established to gauge how each jurisdiction is achieving its goals and accommodating planned growth. Performance measures will provide a process to ensure accountability in planning through baseline indicators that track the achievement of desired goals. Review programs should annually collect information to determine the quantity of buildable land available for residential and commercial activities, and regular evaluation programs should determine what adjustments are necessary to accommodate projected growth.

Recommendation 2: Complete a detailed review of the zoning code, development regulations and permitting process to ensure regulations implement the goals of the comprehensive plan.

Strategy 2.1: Revise Zoning Codes to Increase Flexibility: Adopting more flexible or less restrictive standards, such as: allowing planned unit developments, cluster developments, and mixed uses; permitting greater height and bulk developments (often combined with design standards); increasing allowable lot coverage; and, reducing lot sizes, setbacks, and street and parking standards can stimulate development while producing attractive, livable neighborhoods.

Strategy 2.2: Adopt Performance Standards Which Emphasize Outcomes: Specific setbacks, height limitations and similar standards do not take into account conditions which vary from site to site. Performance zoning/standards focus on directly controlling the impacts of a development.

Strategy 2.3: Permit Adequate Densities to Ensure that Development is Feasible: Increased density allowances can help off-set higher land costs and construction difficulties, making more attractive profits possible. Density bonuses and transfers can be used as incentives to encourage development in target growth areas.

Strategy 2.4: Consolidate and Coordinate Development Review Process: Measures to avoid unnecessary delay include: one-stop permitting process; simultaneous review of permits, administrative review and action on permits involving minor impacts; assigning a single staff contact to help an applicant throughout a project, or allow contracting out for review of applications; permitting more uses “by-right” (ensuring that a permit is issued, provided that specific, well-crafted standards are met, rather than rely on discretionary review by commissions); fast-track permit procedures applied within target development areas to increase the attractiveness of sites. Clearly stating what is and is not allowed will provide developers the certainty they need.

Recommendation 3: Prioritize Capital Facilities expenditures for strategic infrastructure investments that encourage quality economic development opportunities and choices.

Strategy 3.1: Adopt Infrastructure Strategies to Support Quality Development: Infrastructure provides the backbone for a community’s quality of life, and provides the framework for accommodating residential, commercial and industrial development. Local jurisdictions can set the stage for development by using a focused public investment strategy to direct growth to target areas by taking a more proactive role in providing infrastructure and shaping growth. Concurrency requirements, ensuring infrastructure is in place for development, should ensure adequate funding by prioritizing projects in the Capital Facilities Budget that would not meet the specified level-of-service.

Recommendation 4: Provide developers with site-readiness through pre-permitting for development.

Strategy 4.1: Conduct Detailed Environmental Analysis at the Outset: An environmental analysis through a programmatic environmental impact statement could examine the cumulative impacts of potential projects within a subarea, greatly speeding up the permit review for projects within the area.

Recommendation 5: Address the perception barriers that have discouraged development in the past.

Strategy 5.1: Implement a Public Relations Program: Each community needs a public relations effort to improve negative perceptions. While some focus should be directed at the media and surrounding communities, the target audience should be targeted businesses the community hopes to attract, as well as private planners, real estate professionals and developers marketing and purchasing properties for development.

Recommendation 6: Promote cooperation to implement vision and achieve community goals.

Strategy 6.1: Implement a Community Outreach Program: Each community should continue to work with public officials, representatives from neighborhood organizations, and citizens to implement the strategies recommended, to work with businesses to determine the needs of the business the community hopes to attract, and real estate and development professionals to develop a public relations campaign to encourage community revitalization, improvement, and economic development to occur.

Recommendation 7: Provide developer incentives to encourage development.

Strategy 7.1: Reduce Permit Fees and Development Costs: Local governments can enhance the relative attractiveness of development by adopting more appropriate level-of-service standards and lower development fees within designated areas.

Recommendation 8: Assess financing and public funding (grant and loan programs) opportunities to determine feasibility of obtaining funding from outside sources.

Strategy 8.1: Assist Developer with Obtaining Favorable Financing Terms: Local jurisdictions have access to some state and federal funds or some other types of funds that are not directly available to private developers. Cities may be able to channel these funds to developers or partner with developers to accomplish economic development projects

Recommendation 9: Consider land bank opportunities for strategic economic investments.

Strategy 9.1: Implement a Parcel Assembly Land Banking Program: Assembling small, individual parcels into larger blocks under common ownership can greatly enhance development potential. Most large developers are used to working with parcels of 10 acres or more, making the development of relatively small parcels less attractive for such developers.

Recommendation 10: Consolidate public facility sites to one location, and re-zone the available land for commercial use, and sell the property.

Strategy 10.1: Consolidate Public Facilities: Substantial amounts of land is used for public facilities. The city should review the current use of facilities, and determine which facilities should be consolidated. The newly surplus land should be re-zoned for commercial use, and the property should be sold for development.