



Planned Action EIS

A planned action environmental impact statement (EIS) simplifies and expedites the environmental review of future individual projects in a study area. Detailed and comprehensive environmental analysis occurs upfront during the planning stage for a study area, thereby streamlining the permit review process and reducing or eliminating the possibility of legal challenges to individual projects within the study area.

A planned action EIS can reduce the overall costs for project developers, which may translate into lower final housing costs. It can also help to attract growth to a priority planning area of a community. Except for specific exemptions (see below), the first step is preparation of an EIS on the planned action that evaluates the likely environmental impacts of anticipated future projects.

BACKGROUND

In accordance with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA, RCW 43.21c) and SEPA rules (WAC 197-11), an EIS is prepared for a site-specific project or a non-project legislative action, such as plans,

TOOL PROFILE

Objectives

- [Housing in Centers and Near Transit](#)
- [Housing Options in Expensive Markets](#)

Type of Tool

Incentives

Project Type

- Multifamily
- Ownership
- Rental

Affordability Level

Market-rate incentives and tools

ordinances or regulations, if the jurisdiction believes the proposal may have a significant environmental impact. The EIS identifies and describes:

- The proposed action and alternatives
- Existing conditions of the built and natural environment
- Impacts that may occur if the proposed action or an alternative action were implemented
- Mitigation measures to reduce or eliminate impacts
- Impacts found to be significant, unavoidable, and adverse (residual impacts despite mitigation measures)

A planned action EIS can help facilitate development, including housing, which may in turn reduce permitting costs and streamline efforts to achieve the community's housing goals.

The basic steps in designating planned action projects are to prepare an EIS, designate the planned action projects by ordinance, and review permit applications for projects. The intent is to provide more detailed environmental analysis during formulation of planning proposals, rather than at the project permit review stage.

A planned action designation means that further environmental review under SEPA, for each specific development proposal or phase, will not be necessary if it is determined that each proposal or phase is consistent with the planned action ordinance. Projects developed under a Planned Action EIS are not subject to SEPA appeal procedures. This means housing proposals within a designated planned action area can proceed through the permit review process with less time and cost, as well as without concern that the environmental analysis will be appealed.

SEPA allows some exceptions in preparing an EIS for a planned action:

- If an infill development area contains or will contain a major transit stop, an environmental impact statement may not be required for environmental analysis (RCW 43.21C.440). When a planned action in an area that contains or will contain a major transit stop (including commuter rail, fixed guideway or transitway, or the Link light rail network) is completed in conjunction with a comprehensive plan or other community plan, significant environmental impacts must be adequately addressed in a threshold determination or, where one is appropriate, in an environmental impact statement.
- [HB 1923](#) (2019) and [HB 2343](#) (2020) exempt certain housing and planning actions from SEPA appeals if they are completed in accordance with state requirements by April 1, 2023. For these exempted planning actions, a jurisdiction may complete a planned action EIS.

SEPA also allows some categorical exemptions for certain thresholds of development before SEPA must be applied. See the [SEPA Categorical Exemptions](#) tool for more detail.

