

Sound Choices Implementation Checklist

About this Checklist

The intent of this checklist is to help local jurisdictions make “Sound Choices”—updates to their comprehensive plans that align with the Puget Sound recovery community goals of improved habitat, stormwater management, and shellfish bed recovery.

Local jurisdictions make decisions that help protect and recover the Puget Sound. The [2022-2026 Puget Sound Action Agenda](#) calls for improving Growth Management Act¹ implementation, which includes comprehensive plan updates. Many Puget Sound Action Agenda strategies relate to required and optional elements in the Growth Management Act framework for comprehensive plans. Comprehensive plans set local land use policies under the Growth Management Act. Puget Sound basin counties and cities are due to update their plans in 2024 and 2025.

This checklist pulls from actions and strategies from the 2022-2026 Puget Sound Action Agenda and [Implementation Strategies](#).

How to Use This Checklist

Local jurisdictions can use this checklist as a self-assessment. You can use this checklist to understand whether your jurisdiction has the tools it needs to make Sound Choices. Every affirmative answer in this checklist builds the backbone of planning and regulations that helps protect Puget Sound. Recommendations are categorized by comprehensive plan elements and then voluntary topic areas. The checklist includes links to resources with additional information.

The term “the plan” used throughout this document refers to each jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan.

Note: The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is finalized an associated guidance document, [Guidance on Integrating Stormwater Solutions into Comprehensive Plans](#). This PSRC guidance provides examples, links to resources, and greater detail on how to integrate habitat protection and stormwater management into your comprehensive plan update.

Mandatory Elements ([RCW 36.70A.070](#))

¹ 2022-2026 Puget Sound Action Agenda Strategy 1 states: “Improve the education and incentives for public and decision-makers on opportunities to direct growth away from ecologically important areas” and “significantly improve the implementation of the GMA within local jurisdictions land use planning and decisions.”

Land Use Element

For more information and guidance on intersection between land use and transportation, see PSRC's [Guidance on Incorporating TOD Into Comprehensive Plans](#) and [Transit Supportive Planning Toolkit](#).

- Does the plan direct development away from and protect existing wetlands, floodplains, riparian areas, lakes, nearshore environments, and other environmentally sensitive areas and critical areas using tools like land use and zoning designations, and development clustering?
- Does the plan include policies that reduce barriers to channeling growth and development into preferred high-growth areas, such as Urban Growth Areas (UGAs) and cities? Those barriers might include transportation access, parking minimums, exclusionary zoning, availability and capacity of municipal water and sewer, association with high loads of toxic chemicals in the environment, development standards and regulations.
- Does the plan include policies that allow for or encourage transfer of development rights and easements to protect working lands and important habitats? Do those policies allow for transfer of development rights at a regional (instead of county) scale?
- Does the plan encourage transit-oriented development to accommodate denser development near public transit routes?
- If the UGA needs to be modified, does the plan analyze and encourage trading UGA in ecologically important areas for those that are not ecologically sensitive?
- Does the plan encourage creative infill development solutions and mixed uses?
- Does the plan support or identify opportunities for regional stormwater facilities or stormwater parks?
- Does the plan encourage developers to incorporate effective Low Impact Development (LID) approaches and go above and beyond existing stormwater permit requirements?
- Does the plan include policies that encourage LID and remove barriers to LID? (road widths, fire lanes, parking minimums).
- Does the plan incorporate watershed-level environmental information into land use designations or include an action to develop a watershed plan?

Housing Element

For more information and guidance on housing, see PSRC's [Housing Element Guide](#) and [Housing Opportunities by Place](#).

- Does the plan promote the development and preservation of long-term affordable housing options in walking distance to transit and green space (and outside of climate vulnerable areas) by implementing zoning, regulations, and incentives?
- Does the plan protect adequate housing in rural areas for agriculture and forestry-related operations?
- Does the plan ensure transparent, clear, and consistent implementation of regulations to provide consistency and streamlined development standards within preferred high-growth areas?
- Does the plan integrate options to promote objectives from the new middle housing and accessory dwelling unit state legislation for infill development in city limits and UGAs?
- Does the plan support public-private sector partnerships to provide affordable housing?

Capital Facilities Plan Element

- Does the Capital Facilities Plan include funding for stormwater retrofits and culvert upgrades, prioritizing projects that protect the Puget Sound?
- Does the Capital Facilities Plan consider Puget Sound protection and restoration, tribal treaty rights, and climate change adaptation in the prioritization process?
- If applicable: Does the Capital Facilities Plan reflect surface water management element outcomes?
- Does the Capital Facilities Plan incorporate a watershed approach to improving water quality and habitat function?
- Does the Capital Facilities Plan provide linkage to the plan's climate element to improve community resiliency and mitigate future greenhouse gas emissions?

Transportation Element

- Do transportation project designs consider multiple benefits and requirements like stormwater and bicycle and pedestrian improvements?
- Do transportation projects allow natural boundaries to determine routes?
- Does the plan encourage adequate or improved transportation infrastructure (including public transportation, sidewalks, and bicycle facilities) in city centers and high growth areas?
- Do the transportation policies limit sprawl?
- Does the transportation plan prioritize avoiding areas with high hydrological function and areas that provide high habitat or biodiversity value?
- Does the plan support stormwater treatment retrofits?
- Does the plan support fish barrier removal?
- Does the plan include policies that encourage or support reductions in vehicle miles traveled?

Utilities Element

- Does the plan support water quality improvements through stormwater management programs and projects?
- Are water reuse best management practices encouraged for commercial and residential development? This can help reduce stormwater quantity impacts.
- Do recommendations connect to the Capital Facilities Plan element? Either via policies or projects in Capital Facilities Plan.

Rural Element (only required for counties)

- Do land designations and zoning classifications align with the current use of the land in a way that prevents development and urban net densities on current working forests and agricultural lands?
- Does the plan use watershed scale planning to protect and restore water quality through more appropriate use of rural lands and minimize impacts of land use management and development practice?
- Does the plan support long-term sustainability of agriculture and forestry, including protecting resource lands from development impacts development, supporting infrastructure needs, and recognizing ecosystem services provided by rural lands?
- Does the plan support the establishment of best management practices that protect the long-term integrity of the natural environment, adjacent land uses, and long-term productivity of resource lands?

- Does the plan encourage consultation and partnerships with the local conservation districts?

Shoreline Element

Local [shoreline master programs \(SMP\)](#) play an integral part in marine and freshwater habitat protection. SMP goals policies are considered a Comprehensive Plan element.

- Does the plan either include SMP goals and policies or provide a reference to the local shoreline master program?
- Are land use designations in the comprehensive plan consistent with the local SMP shoreline environment designations?
- Do policies support vegetation conservation and no net loss of shoreline ecological functions?
- Does the SMP or the comprehensive plan support periodic (annually or other) tracking of armored shoreline?
- Are [land uses consistent with the local SMP](#) shoreline environment designations, applicable allowable uses, setbacks, buffers, building heights, and impervious surface limits? Shoreline Master Program policies may be included in this element, or as a stand-alone element.

Parks and Recreation Element

Some comprehensive plans combine the Parks and Recreation Element with an Open Space Element. Additional Open Space considerations are included under the Additional Topics section of this checklist.

- Do park facility designs protect water quality?
- Does the plan prioritize creation and restoration of green spaces resilient to floods and include trees to filter and reduce stormwater runoff?
- Does the plan encourage opportunities to add regional stormwater facilities to parks, or recreation to stormwater facilities, or support stormwater parks, which can provide recreation and stormwater treatment?
- Does your jurisdiction provide public education about protecting water quality and riparian, nearshore, and wetland habitats?
- Do policies in the plan encourage training for stormwater, LID, and green stormwater infrastructure?
- Are funds (such as parks impact fees or portions of property taxes) dedicated in the plan for acquiring, developing, and/or improving park facilities and natural areas/open spaces?
- Does the plan maintain, improve, or create green space amenities within walking distance of urban residents, such as tree canopy, parks, and trails?

Climate Change Mitigation and Resilience Element (mandatory plan element for 2025 jurisdictions as of July 1, 2023)

- See Department of Commerce guidance: [Climate Change - Washington State Department of Commerce](#) and PSRC's [Climate Change and Resilience](#).

Additional Topics

Stormwater

- Does the [Land Use Element](#) address local stormwater systems, integrate a standalone surface water element, or include policies addressing drainage, flooding, and stormwater infrastructure or water quality issues?

- Does the plan include support for incentives for rain gardens and LID best management practices?

Open Space

- Does the plan [identify open space corridors](#) within and between cities and UGAs, including lands for recreation, wildlife habitat, trails, and meaningful connection of critical areas?
- Does the plan follow the buildable lands program guidelines to [identify lands](#) for utility corridors, transportation corridors, stormwater management facilities, stormwater parks, recreation, schools, natural areas, and other public uses?
- Does the plan include goals and polices that address local open space conservation and access needs, prioritizing areas with higher racial and social inequities and rural and resource land facing development pressure?

Fish and Wildlife Conservation Areas

- Does the Land Use Element integrate information from local watershed planning processes, salmon recovery plans, climate change plans, ecosystem recovery plans, and relevant tribal plans to identify important habitats and species of local and tribal importance?
- Does the plan address local and regional priorities for restoration of important habitat and critical areas, such as those included in salmon recovery and ecosystem recovery plans?
- Does the plan adopt by reference the [WDFW Priority Habitat and Species](#) list?
- Does the plan include WDFW's Best Available Science for Riparian Management Zones using Site Potential Tree Height ([CAO checklist](#))?
- Does the plan include policies to protect natural resources that sequester and store carbon, such as forests, farmland, wetlands, estuaries, and urban tree canopy?

Natural or Environment Element

- Are urban forestry programs and tree retention regulations supported by key policies?
- Does the plan support stream and wetland habitat protection and restoration? Are applicable critical areas regulations supported by equivalent goals and policies?
- Does the plan include appropriate habitat stewardship policies that support native vegetation and science-based restoration? Including outreach to property owners and the community?
- Does the plan include, encourage, and provide linkage to local restoration programs, projects, and stewardship groups?
- Does the plan streamline required permits for restoration projects?
- Does the plan have an option for [Voluntary Stewardship Programs](#) to protect critical areas?

Surface Water Management

- Does the plan support the integration of information and strategies across plan elements? A surface water management element can provide this support.
- Does the plan include policies that provide linkage to municipal stormwater permitting (MS-4) requirements and the local surface water management plan?
- Does the plan provide linkage to the CIP to help prioritize stormwater and habitat improvement projects?
- Does the plan include policies that make LID the preferred and commonly used approach to site development?

- Does the plan support regional and watershed level coordination on surface water management?
- Does the plan promote tree retention as part of a green infrastructure approach to surface water management?

Other Questions:

- Does the plan support public-private sector partnerships to help advance your plan?

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