

About this FAQ

This document is intended to provide planners in King County jurisdictions with additional clarity on topics related to new requirements for comprehensive plan housing elements and countywide work by the King County Affordable Housing Committee to establish jurisdictional housing needs. It has been authored by King County staff, based on the County’s interpretation of state law and its role in evaluating performance in meeting countywide housing need and growth policy goals. The questions and responses below are focused on differentiating between housing growth targets and housing needs and how to plan for both in the 2024 periodic update of comprehensive plans. Guidance from the Washington State Department of Commerce referenced in responses below will provide additional clarity in the future.

1. What is this FAQ about?

In 2021, the Legislature made changes to the Growth Management Act (GMA) that amended planning requirements for the housing elements of comprehensive plans.¹ The Department of Commerce was tasked with preparing 20-year projections of housing need, which include detail on housing need by income, and on emergency housing and permanent supportive housing needs. Jurisdictions must plan for and accommodate this housing need in their housing elements.

The Growth Management Act stipulates cities’ and counties’ duty to plan for allocated growth.² Cities and King County are required to plan for the number of housing units needed to manage projected growth, as expressed as growth targets in the 2021 King County Countywide Planning Policies.³ Because King County jurisdictions already plan for housing growth targets, there has been confusion and discussion about how the housing targets and projected need intersect with one another. Additionally, the new comprehensive plan housing element requirements have created uncertainty about what it means to “plan for and accommodate” projected housing needs.

This FAQ is focused on clarifying confusion about this change to the GMA—detailed in the Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 36.70A.070(2)(a) through (d)—and its effect on the planning process in King County.

2. What do recent changes to GMA mean for comprehensive planning?

The relevant subsections of RCW 36.70A.070 are used to organize this answer. Amendments to the GMA enacted by the Legislature in 2021 are shown in *italicized underlined text*. Note that this is not a comprehensive list of amendments to the GMA enacted by the Legislature in 2021.⁴

RCW 36.70A.070(2)(a)

2. A housing element ensuring the vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods that:

(a) Includes an inventory and analysis of existing and projected housing needs that identifies the number of housing units necessary to manage projected growth, as provided by the department of commerce, including:

¹ ESSHB 1220 [\[LINK\]](#)

² RCW 43.62.035 [\[LINK\]](#) and RCW 36.70A.115 [\[LINK\]](#)

³ VISION 2050 calls for growth targets expressed in housing units, MPP-RGS-2 [\[LINK\]](#)

⁴ ESSHB 1220 [\[LINK\]](#)

Frequently Asked Questions on Growth Targets, Housing Need, and Comprehensive Plans
December 6, 2022

- (i) Units for moderate, low, very low, and extremely low-income households; and
- (ii) Emergency housing, emergency shelters, and permanent supportive housing;

Interpretation: The housing element must include an inventory and analysis of housing needs by income level and for emergency and permanent supportive housing.⁵ Commerce is providing 2044 projections at the county level and offering guidance to counties and cities on how to allocate these needs to local jurisdictions. The King County Affordable Housing Committee of the Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) administered a process this year to develop a recommended approach to allocating need consistent with Commerce’s guidance and intends to transmit its recommendation to the GMPC by the end of 2022. Commerce combines housing units needed by income level and permanent supportive housing into a “permanent housing need” category and units/beds needed for emergency housing and emergency shelters into an “emergency housing need” category.⁶

RCW 36.70A.070(2)(b)

~~(b) ((includes))~~ Includes a statement of goals, policies, objectives, and mandatory provisions for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing, including single-family residences, and within an urban growth area boundary, moderate density housing options including but not limited to, duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes;

Interpretation: The housing element has always needed to include goals, policies, objectives, and mandatory provisions for all forms of housing that can exist in a jurisdiction. Per this amendment, housing elements for cities and urban unincorporated King County must include policies and mandatory provisions for “moderate density” housing forms like multi-unit buildings with two to six units and townhomes.

RCW 36.70A.070(2)(c)

~~(c) ((identifies))~~ Identifies sufficient capacity of land for housing~~((,))~~ including, but not limited to, government-assisted housing, housing for ~~((low income families))~~ moderate, low, very low, and extremely low-income households, manufactured housing, multifamily housing, ~~((and))~~ group homes ~~((and))~~, foster care facilities, emergency housing, emergency shelters, permanent supportive housing, and within an urban growth area boundary, consideration of duplexes, triplexes, and townhomes; ((and))

Interpretation: The housing element must identify how future land capacity is sufficient to accommodate housing need by income levels, including permanent supportive housing, and adequate zoning for emergency housing. The Department of Commerce is developing guidance for cities and counties on how to satisfy this requirement.⁷ King County will update this FAQ upon release of this guidance.

⁵ Commerce has grouped the statute requirements of emergency housing and emergency housing into one bucket of needs called emergency housing and reports these units as net new housing needed as a reflection of the number of units/beds needed to manage projected growth. Commerce also projects baseline housing supply today and total housing need in the future as the sum of baseline supply plus net new housing needed. This document refers to the collective needs of both categories as emergency housing to be consistent. When this document refers to housing need, it is in reference to net new housing needed unless otherwise specified.

⁶ ‘Permanent housing need’ as used in this FAQ is the 20-year projection of housing need, not all future housing that will ever be needed.

⁷ This guidance is still under development. More information will be released on Commerce’s website. [\[LINK\]](#)

Generally, jurisdictions will determine the typical housing types that are built in each zone and relate those housing types to the income levels the housing typically serves. Then, jurisdictions will perform a land capacity analysis to project housing capacity for each zone. Jurisdictions will then compare the capacity to housing need at each income level. Gaps in capacity for need at any income level will indicate where capacity should be expanded.

For emergency housing capacity, if a jurisdiction allows emergency housing and emergency shelters in any zone that allows hotels, or alternatively in a majority of zones within a one-mile proximity to transit, it does not need to quantitatively demonstrate capacity. However, if the jurisdiction has any relevant restraints on emergency housing and emergency shelter (e.g., occupancy, spacing, or intensity requirements for siting emergency housing, or no zones that allow hotels), then they must perform a land capacity analysis to show capacity for emergency housing consistent with Section 3 of ESSHB 1220.⁸ Guidance will be provided about how to do this emergency housing capacity analysis, including by taking into consideration emergency housing/beds currently available in the jurisdiction and by identifying sites where these forms of temporary housing could be constructed.

RCW 36.70A.070(2)(d)

(d) (~~makes~~) Makes adequate provisions for existing and projected needs of all economic segments of the community, including: (i) Incorporating consideration for low, very low, extremely low, and moderate-income households; (ii) Documenting programs and actions needed to achieve housing availability including gaps in local funding, barriers such as development regulations, and other limitations; (iii) Consideration of housing locations in relation to employment location; and (iv) Consideration of the role of accessory dwelling units in meeting housing needs;

Interpretation: This amendment offers further detail on what it means to make adequate provisions for existing and projected housing needs for economic segments within a housing element. The Department of Commerce is developing guidance for jurisdictions on complying with the specific “adequate provision” requirements of the GMA (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(d)(i-iv)). Generally, jurisdictions will need to identify if they are not meeting their specific housing needs (both by housing type and affordability level), identify the barriers that exist to that development, and identify and document appropriate programs and actions to overcome each barrier identified.

3. How does housing need relate to the growth targets adopted in 2022?

In King County jurisdictions, growth targets express the amount of housing and jobs a jurisdiction should plan to accommodate over the 20-year planning period of the comprehensive plan. Targets were adopted in the 2021 King County Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs). Growth targets are the basis for the land use assumptions used across a jurisdiction’s comprehensive plan (e.g., for transportation and capital facility planning).

Housing need provides additional detail on the distribution of additional units needed to house current and future residents more equitably by reducing cost burden and overcoming housing undersupply. It is comprised of *permanent* housing need, which includes housing need by income level and permanent supportive housing, and emergency housing need. Jurisdictions should use the housing need projections to create or adjust the zoning,

⁸ ESSHB 1220 [\[LINK\]](#)

strategies, tools, and incentives in their plans and development regulations to accommodate projected housing need and the strategies to promote its development.

The permanent housing need has been calibrated to equal the housing growth expressed in the growth targets countywide and for individual jurisdictions. The target and need numbers should be used in the different, but complementary ways described above.

The Department of Commerce is developing guidance for jurisdictions on demonstrating sufficient capacity of land for permanent housing and emergency housing types (RCW 36.70A.070(2)(c)). King County will update this FAQ upon release of this guidance.

4. Can I plan for more housing than in my target?

Jurisdictions can plan for more capacity than the target, but the comprehensive plan should be based on the adopted housing growth target. As stated in CPP-DP-14a, the housing growth targets establish the number of housing units a jurisdiction is planning for over the 20-year comprehensive plan.⁹ Using land use assumptions that express significantly more (or less) growth than the growth targets raises the risk of inconsistencies with the CPPs, as well as the plan not being certified by the Puget Sound Regional Council.¹⁰ VISION 2050 states that land use assumptions need to be “substantially consistent” with adopted growth targets.¹¹

Jurisdictions may, however, plan for land capacity that exceeds targets. This can help make space for the types of housing needed to meet housing need through strategies that leverage market rate development to build affordable units (e.g., incentive zoning, bonus densities, multifamily tax exemption), and housing forms with a potential lower per-unit construction cost. Be mindful that VISION 2050 MPP-RGS-12 states that jurisdictions should avoid increasing capacity in a pattern inconsistent with the Regional Growth Strategy.¹² Creating additional capacity near frequent or high-capacity transit would support accommodating housing need, and the Regional Growth Strategy, for example. Question 8 below elaborates further on planning for housing need.

5. Should planning for infrastructure and services reflect the growth targets or housing needs?

The growth assumptions used across all elements of the comprehensive plan, including the transportation and capital facilities elements, need to be identical and substantially consistent with adopted growth targets. The infrastructure needs, like those expressed in a capital improvement plan, should be informed by the types of development expected over the next twenty years, and this might be affected by the housing need allocation. For example, if accommodating housing need means adding significant capacity for multifamily housing in a jurisdiction where currently none exists, the plan should reflect the infrastructure needs of a future with a more diverse housing mix, with potential infrastructure improvements like, for example, wider circumference water mains or additional stormwater infrastructure.

⁹ 2021 King County Countywide Planning Policies [\[LINK\]](#)

¹⁰ Puget Sound Regional Council Plan Review Checklist [\[LINK\]](#)

¹¹ VISION 2050, p. 42. [\[LINK\]](#)

¹² Ibid.

6. Does projected housing need include all housing, or just housing for households making less than area median income (AMI)?

The total permanent housing need includes housing affordable to all income levels, including market rate units and permanent supportive housing needs.

7. Is need for emergency housing included in the growth targets?

While permanent housing need was calibrated to equal housing targets, it does not include the need expressed for emergency housing. Emergency housing is considered to be temporary or non-permanent housing such as group living situations or non-permanent residences, so they do not count as housing units or towards growth targets.

8. What if all of my jurisdiction's need is at or below 80% AMI? We need market rate housing to incentivize the income-restricted housing. Don't we need a higher target to factor in the market rate housing?

Because the amount of projected countywide growth is not changing, growth targets are not being reconsidered.¹³ The housing need projections do not affect the total amount of growth jurisdictions have agreed to accommodate by 2044. The housing need projections describe the types of housing jurisdictions need to plan for to ensure sufficient and attainable housing for all households by 2044, recognizing that the housing produced may be greater or less than the housing target and in a different distribution than the permanent housing need. Jurisdictions can use their growth targets as land use assumptions while still planning for the need expressed by the housing need projections through creating sufficient zoning and land capacity for the types of housing included in the need projections, developing and adjusting incentives and planning tools for affordable housing, and by financing its development or preservation. Sufficiently documenting these strategies in the comprehensive plan will ensure that jurisdictions are planning for their growth targets and housing need per state, regional, and countywide policy.

Because of the timing of when growth targets were adopted, the GMA amendments on planning for permanent housing need, and the statutory timelines for comprehensive plan updates, growth targets are not being reconsidered. Additionally, the region is working to reverse over a century of discriminatory housing policy and over a decade of underproduction. This challenge and its solution are embedded in the housing need projections, which solve for these issues within a 20-year planning period. It is likely that it will take more than one 20-year planning period to resolve the structural issues the housing need projections express. Also, in about ten years, King County jurisdictions will develop new growth targets that can adjust for the shortcomings of this planning cycle.

¹³ Counties and cities are required to plan collectively for the growth projected in the Office of Financial Management's most recent county growth projection (RCW 36.70A.115). OFM will release an updated projection in 2022, which is anticipated to be consistent with previous projections.

9. What if we don't have funding for the 0-30% AMI, but that is most of our jurisdiction's permanent need?

Per the statute, jurisdictions need to plan for and accommodate projected permanent and emergency housing need. For housing affordable to the lowest income households that requires significant subsidy, it would be appropriate to demonstrate that a jurisdiction has capacity for the types of housing and describe the funding contributions and regional collaboration, along with additional strategies used to stimulate and prioritize development or preservation at the given affordability level.

10. Will my jurisdiction be penalized for growth that exceeds the target or within an income band?

No. Accountability for permanent housing need is focused on sufficient land capacity for and the incentives and strategies jurisdictions used to stimulate affordable housing production. King County will monitor and report on affordable housing supply or production in the Regional Affordable Housing Dashboard. Accountability for housing production (total housing) is focused on achieving growth targets and is conducted via the Urban Growth Capacity Report (buildable lands process).

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