

# 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The incorporation of Covington was approved by voters in November of 1996 and became effective August 31, 1997. With this incorporation came a need for a Comprehensive Plan. Covington's first ever Comprehensive Plan was based on the City's Vision Statement and is intended to provide guidance for public and private decision makers who will be responsible for Covington's future growth and development.

The Vision Statement, as adopted by the City Council, states:

The City of Covington is a place where community, businesses and civic leaders are partners in building a city that is family-oriented, safe and pedestrian-friendly. A community that proudly invests in enhancing our small town character and natural environment, and provides diverse recreational opportunities, as well as remaining financially responsible.

The following elements are necessary to achieve this Vision:

**DOWNTOWN** Covington will have a downtown that is well designed and pedestrian-friendly with a permanent combination of commercial and residential areas.

**RESIDENTIAL** will be safe, diverse, and accessible and will have well-maintained neighborhoods that instill a sense of community.

**CITIZEN** input is an integral part of the shaping of the community.

**FAMILIES & YOUTH** Covington will help instill a sense of responsibility and provide opportunities for a variety of cultural and recreational activities for all ages.

**HUMAN SERVICES** will address local needs by encouraging a partnership between private and public organizations.

**CITY GOVERNMENT** will remain efficient, accessible, responsive, accountable, and financially responsible to the community.

**BUSINESSES** will be in partnership with the community and have a long-term commitment to Covington.

**ENVIRONMENT** will be preserved with responsible limitations while enhancing the areas natural beauty.

**DESIGN STANDARDS** Covington will have high-quality design and construction standards that give buildings and structures a sense of permanence and provide for an aesthetically pleasing skyline in our community.

**PARKS AND OPEN SPACE** are an important part of our community's future and quality of life.

Covington's Comprehensive Plan updated in 2003 is designed and written for a planning period of 20 years. The Comprehensive Plan translates community values and vision into the framework for decisions pertaining to the direction and quality of growth, intensity and diversity of land use, transportation modes and arterial network, public facilities and services, parks and recreation, and resource lands and critical areas. The Comprehensive Plan is the reflection of how Covington's citizens want the city to look and function in the future, and provides the basis for achieving that vision.

The Growth Management Act of 1990 (GMA) mandates the concentration of population within urban areas. The Covington Comprehensive Plan Study Area includes sufficient developable land to accommodate 20 years of planned population and employment growth. To maintain a satisfactory quality of life, the City will need to make difficult decisions relating to the development and redevelopment of Covington. This plan is intended to provide analysis and development policies to assist in making land use decisions.

The Covington Comprehensive Plan builds on the factual information contained in the King County Community Plans for Soos Creek and Tahoma-Raven Heights. However, the land use strategies and development policies have been developed to reflect the Vision Statement and Vision Plan articulated by Covington residents in 2001. The Planning Commission was responsible for the overall planning process. The staff of the Planning & Public Works Department and consultants were responsible for the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan document.

The public participation process was conducted in accord with Ordinance #32-00, Ordinance 41-02, and applicable code Sections 20.18 and 20.20. There were additional public meetings in the year 2003 at which numerous aspects of the plan were discussed, in addition to the minimum required number of hearings.

## 1.1 The Growth Management Act

Key ingredients of the GMA are: cities and counties must designate Urban Growth Areas (UGA). These areas will, at a minimum, include all cities as well as the areas needed to accommodate a 20 year projected population increase. Urban growth shall be encouraged within the UGA, and outside of it growth can occur only if it is not urban in nature. The UGA shall also include greenbelt and open space areas.

Amendments to GMA have been passed by the Washington State Legislature since its adoption. Local jurisdictions planning under GMA are required to adopt county-wide planning policies to form the basis of their comprehensive plans, and state agencies must conform with local comprehensive plans. The Central Puget Sound Growth Management Hearings Board is one of three Growth Planning Hearing Boards created to resolve disputes concerning comprehensive plans and development regulations adopted under GMA. To enforce GMA, the Governor may impose sanctions on cities, counties, and state agencies who do not comply with GMA goals and requirements.

## 1.2 Consistency with State Goals

The GMA sets out thirteen statutory goals. For a community's plan to be valid it must be consistent with the requirements of GMA. Consistency, in this context, means that a plan must not conflict with the state statutory goals, countywide policies, or plans of adjacent jurisdictions.

### 1.2.1 State Planning Goals

The following GMA planning goals are used to guide the development and adoption of Covington's Comprehensive Plan and development regulations:

1. **Urban Growth.** Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.
2. **Reduce Sprawl.** Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.
3. **Transportation.** Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.
4. **Housing.** Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing

types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock.

5. **Economic Development.** Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.
6. **Property Rights.** Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.
7. **Permits.** Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.
8. **Natural Resource Industries.** Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.
9. **Open Space and Recreation.** Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks.
10. **Environment.** Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.
11. **Citizen Participation and Coordination.** Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.
12. **Public Facilities and Services.** Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.

13. **Historic Preservation.** Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical or archaeological significance.

### 1.3 Endangered Species Act

Listing of Chinook salmon by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) as “threatened” under the authority of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) will impact many aspects of the planning process for the City of Covington. NMFS requirements to preserve and enhance salmonid habitat potentially affects all activities that impact water quality and quantity, and maintenance activities associated with road, sewer and water systems. Land use review processes and resulting decisions are also affected. Protection of habitat values regulated by ESA was incorporated into Covington’s planning efforts, as is reflected throughout this Comprehensive Plan, especially in Chapter 7, the Environmental Element.

### 1.4 Countywide Planning Policies

GMA requires counties to establish and adopt countywide planning policies. The intent of these policies is to establish a countywide framework for the development of consistent county and city comprehensive plans. Specifically, the countywide planning policies must implement urban growth areas; promote contiguous and orderly development and provision of urban services to such development; site public capital facilities of a countywide or statewide nature; address countywide transportation facilities and strategies; consider the need for affordable housing; coordinate joint county and city planning within urban growth areas; address countywide economic development and employment; and analyze fiscal impact.

The King County Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) was formed in October, 1991 to implement this requirement for countywide planning and coordination. The GMPC periodically reviews these policies and amends and updates them as necessary, the most recent occurring in August, 2003.

The countywide planning policies in their entirety are incorporated by reference in this plan, and they are available for review at the Covington Planning Department. Specific countywide planning policies are referenced throughout this Comprehensive Plan, as they relate directly to many issues and policies discussed in the plan.

### 1.5 Comprehensive Plan — What is it and How is it Used

The Comprehensive Plan provides a legally recognized framework for making decisions about land use, transportation, public facilities, parks and open space in the City. The GMA defines a comprehensive plan as a generalized coordinated land use policy statement of the governing body of a county or city. The GMA requires that the comprehensive plan consist of maps and descriptive text covering objectives, principles, and standards used to develop the comprehensive plan. The plan must be an internally consistent document and all elements must be consistent with the future land use map. Furthermore, a comprehensive plan must include a land use, housing, capital facilities, utilities transportation element, and may also include other elements relating to the physical development within its jurisdiction, such as parks and recreation or natural hazards mitigation.

This Comprehensive Plan is intended to aid a broad range of public and private users including city and county officials, community groups, service providers, developers, other government agencies and citizens. Here are some of the ways the plan may be used:

First, the Comprehensive Plan is the framework or guide for plans and regulations that govern the location and intensity of land uses. The Comprehensive Plan provides the basis for evaluating proposed changes in land development and redevelopment. It provides city officials with direction in developing specific plans and reviewing private development proposals. It indicates to the public how likely the city would be to approve zoning or subdivision and other changes that apply to a specific parcel.

Second, the Comprehensive Plan provides the framework for decisions about public facilities and services (i.e., what type and where should these facilities be located to support projected growth). It is intended that special districts, private utilities, and state and federal agencies use the Comprehensive Plan in preparing their functional plans.

Third, it is intended as a guide for city and county coordination and as a guide for city annexation of King County territory within the UGA.

Fourth, it is the basis for preparing development ordinances and Capital Improvement Programs.

## **1.6 Comprehensive Plan Study Area**

The Covington Comprehensive Plan Study Area is situated within the South King County Urban Area as defined in the King County Comprehensive Plan. Covington's Comprehensive Plan Study Area encompasses 3,558.5 incorporated acres delineated by the City of Covington's municipal boundary, and 275.5 acres of

unincorporated land that has been identified by King County to fall within the designated UGA. Covington's Comprehensive Plan Study Area lies to the east of the City of Kent and to the west of the City of Maple Valley. (See Figure 1.1)

## 1.7 Comprehensive Plan Components

The Covington Comprehensive Plan is organized into eleven elements that are titled and described as:

1. **Introduction.** The overview of the Plan, its purpose and use together with enabling legislation.
2. **Land Use.** This element outlines the overall concept that guides the proposed general distribution and location of various uses of land within the City's Urban Growth Area as required by RCW 36.70A.070. This element includes a summary of Covington's history, planning context, population and employment trends, intergovernmental relationships, a preferred future land use map, discussion of future and potential future annexation areas.
3. **Housing.** As required by RCW 36.70A.070, this element defines affordable housing in Covington, discusses the factors affecting housing availability and affordability, and provides a methodology for meeting the City's current and future affordable housing needs.
4. **Downtown.** This optional element provides detailed analysis and recommendations for approximately 20% of the City land designated as a downtown area that combines business and residential uses, and provides for an active and pedestrian friendly environment.
5. **Transportation.** This element meets RCW 36.70A.070 and provides the City with a guide for improving its transportation system to meet existing and future travel needs, and includes an inventory of existing transportation facilities and services, travel forecasting based on transportation improvement programs, and financing programs and implementation strategies.
6. **Parks and Community Services.** This optional element provides goals and policies to guide the acquisition and development of parks, open space, trails, recreation, culture and art, and human services facilities and programs aimed at meeting the City's recreational, social, and cultural needs. It also provides an inventory of park and recreation

facilities and programs, outlines accepted standards for parks, open space, and recreation facilities; set standards for such services; and presents a strategy for providing additional facilities and programs.

7. **Environment.** This optional element meets other state requirements to identify, designate and protect the quality of the natural environments to improve the quality of life for its residents.
8. **Surface Water Resources.** This optional element identifies existing environmental and water quality problems potentially associated with current and future predicted surface water runoff, addresses improvements to water quality and runoff control, identifies potential regional stormwater quality detention and infiltration facilities and presents capital improvement projects, maintenance and policy considerations
9. **Utilities.** This mandatory element under RCW 36.70A.070 examines the existing conditions and future need for water, sewer, solid waste, surface water management, electricity, natural gas, cable television, and telecommunications.





10. **Capital Facilities.** This required element meets 36.70A.070 by planning for the financing of streets, water, sewer, storm drainage, city facilities, parks and open space, and schools.
11. **Natural Hazard Mitigation.** This optional element provides a set of strategies to reduce risk from natural hazards through education and outreach programs, the development of partnerships, and implementation of preventative activities, such as code enforcement, land use or watershed programs.

### 1.7.1 Goals and Policies

Each element of the Comprehensive Plan contains goals and policies that will direct growth and development in the City over the next 20 years. A goal is a statement of what the City would like to achieve in the future. Goals must be realistic and flexible enough to allow a discussion of how it is to be reached. Goals are long range and usually remain unchanged throughout the practical life of the Plan. Policies are working and measurable statements which identify specific steps needed to achieve the stated goal. Often one goal will have a number of policies. Policies show how the City will reach its goals.

### 1.7.2 Documents Referenced in the Plan

The Comprehensive Plan references several documents. It is the intent of the City to reference the most current edition of the referenced document at the date of adoption of this Plan.

## 1.8 Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Covington's Comprehensive Plan will need to be periodically reviewed and revised as better information becomes available, and public attitudes, developmental technologies, economic forces and legislative policy change over time. The GMA requires that the Comprehensive Plan be amended no more than once per calendar year, except for certain exemptions and emergency actions. Amendment procedures governed by state law are addressed in Chapter 20.18 of the Covington Development Code.

## 1.9 Urban Growth Area Review

In conjunction with King County review of the county's Urban Growth Area and detailed population and employment projections, the City shall review its Comprehensive Plan UGA and growth projections. The City shall evaluate its UGA at least every 5 years to determine whether or not it is capable of meeting the County's

20-year growth projections. This UGA review shall occur concurrently with an annual Comprehensive Plan amendment review as described above.

### **1.10 Criteria for Annexing Unincorporated Areas**

Annexation of property within the UGA should benefit the City, its residents, and property owners. The City benefits by its increased ability to control new development with City standards, to extend its boundary in a logical manner, to expand its economic and tax base, to provide opportunities for new residential and commercial development that meet the needs of underserved populations, and to gain revenues from areas that enjoy City amenities but do not currently pay fees or taxes to the City. Property owners and new residents gain the ability to participate in local government, which directly impacts their lives and property. They also gain access to local services including police protection, code enforcement, building and land use controls.

The basic criteria for annexations are established by King County. King County policy establishes the framework for ongoing and consistent responses to annexing properties located within the UGA. Policies to guide the annexation process have been adopted in Land Use, Environmental and Economic Development Elements of this Comprehensive Plan. In addition, Appendix T-3 contains specific criteria to direct the annexation process. Covington recognizes that the fiscal impact is only one of many criterion to be evaluated, and it must be balanced with other annexation policies such as protection of natural resources and environmentally sensitive areas, provisions of public services and infrastructure, and helping the City meet its household and employment growth targets.