

## Coupeville 2045 Comprehensive Plan – Frequently Asked Questions – October 3, 2022

### **What are the requirements for growth planning and why is it important?**

The 1990 Growth Management Act (GMA) provides the planning framework for counties, cities, and towns in the state. Island County and all the cities and towns within it are required to "fully plan" for expected population growth. Coupeville must update its comprehensive plan every 10 years.

In addition to planning within the community, most towns and cities planning under the GMA are required to map an "urban growth area" outside of the incorporated boundary in anticipation of future land annexations, population growth, and infrastructure expansion for the next 20 years. Under RCW 36.70A.110 (2), communities within a national historical reserve are exempt from this mandate. Coupeville is the only such town in Washington State and so it does not have an urban growth area outside of the town.

This does not mean Coupeville is exempt from planning well within the town boundary. Growth and change is inevitable and good planning uses policies and tools to help Coupeville shape growth to best meet its community objectives. The comprehensive plan is also a statement of the community's vision, values, and priorities. It guides decision-making, regulations, and investments towards meeting community goals over the coming 20 years. This involves thinking about how people move around the community, how Coupeville attracts and retains thriving businesses, where and how people want to live, how to protect valued features and resources, and how to continue providing opportunities for recreation.

### **What are the consequences to the Town for not complying with GMA?**

The Governor has the authority, under [RCW 36.70A.345](#), to impose sanctions against cities and counties that do not comply with GMA, as determined by the Growth Management Hearings Board. Sanctions may include withholding or temporarily rescinding the authority to collect portions of motor vehicle tax, sales tax, and various other revenue sources.

### **What is Coupeville's projected population by 2045?**

Coupeville's projected 2045 population is between 2,160 – 2,252 depending on the projection method used, an increase of 210-302 people over the 2021 population of 1,950. The Town has selected a projected population of 2,175, consistent with Island County's 2016 Buildable Lands Analysis and recent population trends. **This is 225 more people than the current population** and they will need approximately **111 new housing units**, assuming an average of 2.04 persons per household.

### **How many new people can move to Coupeville?**

The land and private property in Coupeville has remaining capacity to accommodate approximately 244 housing units or 495 new residents within town limits under current zoning, assuming all utility services are available. If sewer service is not

extended where it is currently lacking, housing capacity is reduced to 173 units or 351 new residents. These numbers are based on the availability of vacant land the likelihood of existing homes being redeveloped.

### **Why increase the housing capacity if Coupeville already has more than enough for the projected population?**

There is a very small buffer between the current capacity and projected population increase (as little as 62 units) which represents a very tight real estate market and will likely not resolve the ongoing increase in home prices. This also provides very little room for error in the analysis' assumptions about land value, environmental conditions, and property owner interest and ability to develop housing.

Creating modest additional capacity is proposed to provide more room for uncertainty about the future, more property rights and options for Coupeville's landowners, and provide a greater chance of stabilizing home prices. As a tradeoff for this, the draft Comprehensive Plan proposes a number of policy updates to encourage and require that new buildings have high-quality design, that adequate infrastructure be in place to support growth, and that Coupeville's historic features continue to be preserved and protected.

### **When will the anticipated growth occur?**

Coupeville's projected growth is anticipated to be spread out over the next twenty years, averaging approximately 11 to 12 new residents per year.

### **What is this project proposing and what geographic area does it cover?**

The Coupeville 2045 Comprehensive Plan is a new document but generally preserves the same direction as the last plan adopted in 2012. The plan has a new vision statement for the future of the town in 2045, goals and policies are proposed to be revised and expanded, and the future land use map is proposed to be updated with alternatives for increasing housing capacity while retaining Coupeville's historic features and small town qualities.

The Plan covers the municipal boundaries of the Town of Coupeville only. The Island County Planning Department anticipates updating the County's Comprehensive Plan by 2025, which will encompass all of the unincorporated areas outside of Coupeville, Langley and Oak Harbor, along with Camano Island.

### **Is low-income housing part of the Comprehensive Plan update?**

The Town of Coupeville does not propose or manage housing developments. There is not a specific "low-income" housing project proposed by the Town.

An aspiration of the draft Comprehensive Plan is for housing prices to be stabilized or even lowered so that people of moderate incomes can afford to live in Coupeville – especially the workers who support the Town's economy like teachers, nurses, restaurant workers, and retail staff. According to stakeholder interviews and survey feedback (along with formal information like Census data), many service workers and young people cannot afford to live in Coupeville because of soaring housing prices outpacing incomes and a lack of homes to move into locally, forcing them

into long commutes from across the island or beyond. Long-term, this threatens the resilience and stability of Coupeville’s economy, social community, and historical integrity.

The primary method known to stabilize housing prices is to increase supply so there is more competition among property owners and a variety of options for buyers and renters to choose from. To that end, draft housing goal H-1 is: “Provide for a sufficient supply, diversity, and affordability of housing to meet community needs”, and several map and policy changes are proposed to promote modest increases in zoned capacity for property owners to develop private housing. Acknowledging that even smaller housing units can be out of reach for many people in today’s market, the Plan recommends exploring approaches and strategies for ensuring future housing units intended to for individuals and families of moderate to low income, stay affordable over a long period of time.

### **Does new housing development affect adjacent property values?**

The quick answer to this question is: it depends. Research shows that market value of properties near new housing development generally changes in at least a neutral or a slightly positive direction in the long-term, but property tax bills may decrease because new housing adds shared value to an entire community.

Senior citizens and people with disabilities on limited incomes are eligible for an exemption from paying some property taxes, depending on their income levels. More information is available from the Island County Assessor’s Department: <https://www.islandcountywa.gov/assessors/Pages/Senior-Disabled-Exemption.aspx>

### **What will the environmental review involve?**

The Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requires cities and counties to consider environmental impacts associated with governmental decisions, including issuing permits for private projects, constructing public facilities, or adopting regulations, policies, and plans. The SEPA tool needed for a basic update to a Comprehensive Plan like this project is a checklist. In the checklist the Town and its consultant team will describe the effects of the updated Comprehensive Plan on things like air and water quality, historic and cultural resources, and public services.

The draft checklist will be issued in January or February 2023 and it will have a minimum 30-day public comment and a public hearing before the Planning Commission. More information is available from the Washington Department of Ecology: <https://ecology.wa.gov/Regulations-Permits/SEPA/Environmental-review/SEPA-guidance/SEPA-checklist-guidance>

### **Is there adequate water and sewer infrastructure to support projected growth?**

By the end of 2022 the Town will have completed an update to Coupeville’s Water System Plan, currently under review by the State. The Draft Plan includes projected water demands through 2042. Looking at historic trends, the Plan provides three scenarios for annual demand growth projections, ranging from 1.0%

annual growth to 2.5% annual demand growth. Assuming continued efforts at water conservation by users, and continued maintenance of the water distribution system, the Plan concludes there is adequate potable water to serve anticipated growth.

According to the Town's Sewer Comprehensive Plan, the waste water treatment plant has enough capacity to accommodate future projected growth, including areas where connections to sewer lines are currently not available. In 2023 the Town is scheduled to update the Sewer Plan which will inform the next update to the Comprehensive Plan.

**What are the projected costs of new development to the Town of Coupeville, and where will the funds come from?**

The Town does not subsidize private development. All new (non-public) project proposals, ranging from single family residences to commercial projects are required to install facilities to serve themselves, including roads and utility lines. Additionally, multifamily and commercial projects are required to comply with the Town's concurrency management program and undergo a "concurrency test" to ensure that public facilities and services for which a level of service (LOS) has been established keep pace with new development. If a proposal does not pass the concurrency test, the project proponent will be required to invest in new infrastructure or modify the project to reduce the need for facilities and services.

**What is the anticipated effect on crime rates?**

Despite an increase in population of 593 residents between 1990–2020, and the addition of 379 new housing units during the same time period (ranging from apartments, cottages, duplexes, condominiums and townhomes to single family residences), crime rates in Coupeville have remained steady over the last two decades and are less than half the national average. Based on historic trends, the addition of 111 new units distributed throughout the Town over a 20 year period is not anticipated to have a dramatic effect on the Town's low crime rate.

**Do the Coupeville Schools have the ability to accommodate the anticipated additional students?**

The Coupeville School District serves all of central Whidbey Island, from San de Fuca to the north to Honeymoon Bay to the south. According to information provided by the School District Office, it is anticipated that Coupeville Schools will have capacity for increased student enrollment.