



MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** November 4, 2022

**TO:** Coupeville Town Council and Planning Commission Members

**FM:** Donna Keeler, Planning Director

**RE:** Draft 2045 Comprehensive Plan Update

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Attached please find a report summarizing the results of the survey from the public workshop held on October 18<sup>th</sup>, along with comments received to date on the Draft Comprehensive Plan. Based on the public input received to date on the Draft Plan and alternative map scenarios, staff would like to offer the following background information and suggestions for moving forward with the Draft Plan:

Background

To support the preparation of the Comprehensive Plan Update, BERK Consulting conducted a *Residential Lands Capacity Analysis* (attached) to assess the Town's supply of available land for residential development and ability to meet forecasted population growth. BERK relied on the most recent forecasts available issued in 2017 from OFM and the Island County 2016 Comprehensive Plan, along with past population trends.

The attached study finalized by BERK in September of 2022 describes the analysis and methodology used. Major findings and recommendations including the following:

- Coupeville's current population (2021) is estimated at 1,950.
- projected 2045 population is between 2,160 - 2,252 people depending on the projection method used. **BERK recommends planning for a projected population of 2,175.**
- Coupeville's overall percentage share of population in Island County from 1990 - 2021 is approximately 2.3%
- Based on an average household size of 2.04 people, the additional 225 people would require approximately **111 new housing units.**
- Coupeville has remaining capacity to accommodate approximately 244 housing units or 495 new residents within town limits under current zoning if sewer is made available everywhere in Town
- Without extending sewer, Coupeville's housing capacity is reduced to 173 units or 351 new residents under current zoning.

Although the study conducted by BERK determined the Town has enough vacant land and capacity to accommodate projected growth, the Draft Comprehensive Plan provides alternatives for consideration to increase housing capacity in different areas of Town to allow for more diverse housing types. As land and home prices increase, more essential workers such as teachers, emergency service providers and health care workers are being shut out of the market. If the Town wants to have a healthy, thriving diverse community, it is critical to provide homes for residents of all income levels.

Staff is in agreement that increasing zoned development capacity alone will not solve the housing crisis. Building “middle housing” such as duplexes, ADU’s and cottages may help, but we are already seeing these types of units as unreachable for many. For example, a 1,150 square foot cottage in Krueger Commons recently sold for \$543,000. Many communities across Whidbey Island and beyond are experiencing similar challenges, and their experience shows that a variety of housing policy, program, and financial solutions are needed to address the challenge. The adoption of an updated Comprehensive Plan will only be a first step towards promoting more affordable housing options.

### Staff Suggestions

1. Proceed with strategic, limited future land use map changes with the adoption of this comprehensive plan. Staff’s suggestion (attached) is a hybrid of Alternative 1 presented in the Draft Plan, including very modest changes. These would set in motion options to increase housing capacity in a manner and location consistent with the Town’s vision sooner rather than later.
2. Develop a Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan, potentially with a grant from the Department of Commerce. The Plan would provide the data necessary to determine what is needed for different income levels in Coupeville and include a variety of potential targeted strategies for ensuring middle housing and lower income housing remains affordable in the long run. This includes include an array of recommended approaches to help address Coupeville’s housing needs and may include:
  - a. Partnering with religious organizations, land trusts, and other non-profits to build affordable housing; private development incentives to provide affordable housing; and creating regulations to ensure rents within designated affordable housing units remain affordable.
  - b. Exploring inclusionary versus incentive-based affordable housing approaches in one or more residential zones. An inclusionary approach would require a certain amount of affordable housing set at specific affordability levels provided it is accompanied by a modest capacity increase.
  - c. Further analyze the option of offering strategic density discounts to small detached homes or duplexes (counting each dwelling unit as one-half dwelling unit for the purpose of density calculations if the home or unit is under a certain size threshold, such as 1,200 square feet).

- d. Consider other strategic capacity related land use and zoning changes that fit the Town's vision, goals, and policies. This could include adjustments to minimize lot sizes for one or more zones or other future land use map changes.

Such strategies above should be thoroughly vetted, with clear implications on the relative benefits and drawbacks of each option presented to community members and decision-makers. The Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan should be completed by early 2024, prior to the next required update to the Comprehensive Plan in 2025. With this information, along with updated projections from the State, the Town can consider and potentially incorporate further changes to the Future Land Use Designation Map and development regulations to meet the Town's housing goals and needs.

3. Maintain Rural Reserve Zoning on Parker Road for properties without sewer in order to limit proliferation of septic systems. Future rezones to Residential Low Density would only be allowed when the Town's sewer line is extended to serve those properties.
4. Add a countywide map to the introduction section showing the City of Oak Harbor and Langley and their urban growth areas. Include an explanation on why Coupeville is not required to have a UGA, and as a result, new growth in Coupeville can only happen in the existing town limits.
5. Land Use
  - a. Under Goal LU-1, consider adding a new policy addressing zoning within the most intense OLF noise zone. These areas should not be zoned higher than LDR. Plus, add the most up-to-date map of noise zones for the entire town for reference.
  - b. Under Goal LU-1, either add a new policy or amend policy LU 1-3 to acknowledge the forecasted population growth for the planning period. Emphasize that this was forecast done using the best methods and information available to be based on historic patterns.
  - c. Consider other updates in the Land Use and Utilities Elements to clarify the expected sequencing of events for sewer development and when rezoning is allowed from RR to LDR or MDR.
  - d. Add a policy supporting agricultural areas and farms outside of Town within Ebey's Reserve.
6. Housing
  - a. Re-emphasize the need for a Housing Needs Assessment and Action Plan. This would allow the Town to study the options for direct affordable housing support such as sales/property tax options under state law, surplus public land options, and other strategies mentioned above.
  - b. Should we add policies to encourage heat pumps and switching away from fossil fuel and wood heating as primary heating fuels? Perhaps add a new housing policy H-4.5 to mention renewable energy production like solar panels, which will bolster similar policies in Land Use and Utilities
  - c. Consider a policy addressing existing mobile home parks, which provide much needed affordable housing and which are at risk of displacement across the region
  - d. Consider adding policies supporting increased tenant protections for renters
7. Historic Preservation & Community Design

- a. Bolster the importance of this Element in the context of the Comprehensive Plan.
- b. Add a land acknowledgement and provide more reference to Indigenous culture and influence throughout the plan. Seek input from Indigenous community members.
- c. Continue coordinating with Ebey's Reserve Staff on this element. Strengthen or add policies to encourage preservation of key historic properties and contributing structures.

#### 8. Parks, Recreation and Open Space

- a. Consider adding a new policy about specific areas desired for future public Town parks or community spaces that should be studied such as the east end of Parker Road.
- b. Emphasize the need for a Parks and Recreation Plan.
- c. Comments were received regarding jet skis. Should a policy be considered?

#### 9. Natural Systems

- a. Numerous comments were received regarding the deer population. Would it be appropriate to add a policy addressing the deer population? A few residents suggested revising the Town's fence regulations along with deer management strategies.
- b. Consider incorporating polices and possibly a goal to establish Coupeville as a green community, also known as a biophilic community. A green community is generally one with abundant nature and natural systems that are visible and accessible. Not only does it encompass physical attributes and conditions such as parks, walkable environments and wildlife, but the spirit of a place and commitment and concern about nature. A growing body of evidence illustrates tremendous benefits of planning and designing communities with nature as a leading consideration. Benefits range from mental and physical health, to climate resiliency and public safety.

#### 10. Utilities

- a. Consider clarifying Utility policies on properties with septic and private wells hooking up to public sewer and water: i.e. when it is required, why it is required, and who pays for it.

#### 11. Transportation. Consider the following polices:

- a. Conduct a study in collaboration with WSDOT and Island County, the feasibility and benefits of safety improvements at SR 20, particularly at the intersection with NW Broadway.
- b. Add a policy about redesign options for Front Street.
- c. Add Town support for extending the Class 1 paved Kettles Trail in both directions to eventually have a connected trail system along the entire length of the island.
- d. Add specific policy language encouraging of active transportation (walking, cycling). Perhaps consider an active transportation plan, or at a minimum a list of projects.
- e. Continue Lobbying/advocating to the state for sustainable ferry service.