

Town of Coupeville

COMPREHENSIVE PLAN 2025-2045

VOLUME 1



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Plan at a Glance

Vision & Plan Introduction

This chapter introduces Coupeville's vision statement and provides brief background information on the Town of Coupeville's history and physical form, the planning framework under which this plan was created, and how the plan is implemented.

Land Use Element

The Land Use Element is central to all other elements and describes development patterns that support Coupeville's vision for the future. It includes the Future Land Use Designation Map. Goals and policies address growth management, residential and commercial uses, and resource protection.

Historic Preservation & Community Design Element

The Historic Preservation and Community Design Element combines historic preservation and community design as a singular, integrated element to protect Coupeville's historic and cultural resources and guide future development.

Housing Element

The Housing Element addresses the preservation, improvement, and development of housing; identifies land to accommodate different housing types; and makes provisions for the existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the community, including planning for housing by income band and providing for supportive housing.

Economic Stability Element

The Economic Stability Element provides guidance on the types of businesses that are compatible and complementary in Coupeville. It also addresses tourism and promotes employment opportunities.

Parks, Recreation & Open Space Element

The Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Element guides the expansion and maintenance of Coupeville's park system and helps ensure a healthy recreational and open space environment.

Natural Systems Element

The Natural Systems Element aims to protect Coupeville's natural systems, such as air and water quality, and protect people and property from natural hazards.

Climate Element

The Climate Element provides guidance on mitigating the effects of a changing climate, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and preparing for climate impact scenarios, including fostering resilience to climate impacts and natural hazards; protecting and enhancing environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advancing environmental justice.

Transportation Element

The Transportation Element guides the development of the Town's transportation system, including non-motorized transportation, to accommodate existing and future growth.

Capital Facilities Element

The Capital Facilities Element guides the maintenance, preservation, and expansion of the Town-owned or operated facilities and services, including public buildings, streets, parks, water, stormwater, and sewer.

Utilities Element

The Utilities Element establishes an overall strategy for providing adequate utility service to accommodate projected growth.

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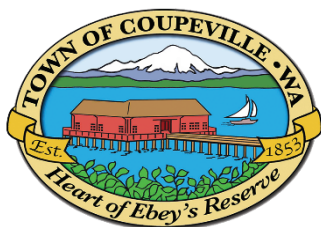
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FACET



Introduction: Vision and Plan

Vision Statement

Coupeville is a vibrant, friendly, and historic waterfront town with a rich Indigenous, agricultural, maritime, and architectural heritage in the heart of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. Our community cherishes and enhances natural habitats, walkable neighborhoods connected to great parks, trails, and beaches, a diversity of housing choices, and homegrown economic opportunities while implementing responsible climate change actions.

The vision statement was crafted in collaboration between the Planning Commission, Town Council, Town staff, the consultant team, and community members.

The Comprehensive Plan

This Comprehensive Plan guides the future growth, character, and development of the Town of Coupeville for the planning period 2025-2045. The purpose of a comprehensive plan is to bring together everything that a community needs to chart its course for the future.

It addresses the entire community and all its values, activities, and functions and contains information about the community's preferences related to physical growth and preservation. It records important facts and context about contemporary and future challenges, and it provides tools and action steps to achieve the plan's goals.

This 2025-2045 Comprehensive Plan fulfills the periodic review requirements of the Washington State Growth Management Act and replaces the 2023 Coupeville Comprehensive Plan. This plan only applies within the municipal boundaries of the Town of Coupeville. Island County has planning authority over all the unincorporated areas outside of Coupeville, within the County.



Central Coupeville and waterfront.



Parade in Coupeville (photo credit: Sue Hamilton).



Price Sculpture Forest (photo credit: Bondi Budde).

Introduction to Coupeville

Coupeville is a small, historic, waterfront town, centrally located on Whidbey Island in Island County, Washington. It is the county seat of Island County. Today, it is primarily a residential community and serves as the commercial center for central Whidbey.

The Town of Coupeville was established in 1853 and was formally incorporated in 1910. The Town encompasses a little more than one square mile of land area and approximately two miles of shoreline. Major geographic features include three major hills and the Penn Cove shoreline, which forms the Town's northern boundary. State Route 20 divides the Town's built environment into two distinct areas – the historic commercial area and the bulk of the residential areas north of the highway, and schools and a newer commercial area south of the highway.

The entirety of Coupeville lies within the boundaries of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve, created in 1978 with the signing of Public Law 95-625 by President Carter. This followed the establishment of the Central Whidbey Island Historic District, the largest National Historic District in the country, in 1973. The 17,572-acre reserve is intended to preserve historical, agricultural, architectural, and cultural traditions while still being sustainable and welcoming to the next generation. The majority (85 percent) of land in the Reserve is privately owned, with protections secured through conservation easements, land purchases, local land use regulation, and the cooperation of landowners. Major features of the Reserve enjoyed and valued by residents and visitors include numerous trails, state parks, working farms, historic buildings, and Coupeville's historic commercial center.

Land Acknowledgement

The Town of Coupeville is located on the homelands of the Lower Skagit People. For thousands of years, Coast Salish tribes have stewarded the lands, waterways, plants, and animals in our region. We pay respect to the elders and their families, past, present, and emerging, for they hold the memories, traditions, and culture of their people. The Town of Coupeville is committed to respecting this long history as we honor and acknowledge the continued presence and rights of all Indigenous people. We will advocate for and partner with our Indigenous neighbors as we continue to work together as an even more inclusive community.



Tsimshian Haayuuk Dancers, Penn Cove Festival, Embrace Whidbey and Camano Islands.

Brief Town History

According to Ana Ramirez, the Education Curator at the Hibulb Cultural Center and Nature Preserve, “Prior to European contact, the lands along Penn Cove were home to several Coast Salish Tribes, including the Kikialus, Snohomish, and Lower Skagit, as well as other tribes and bands signatory to the 1855 Treaty of Point Elliot. Since time immemorial, the ancestors of these tribes have hunted, gathered, and fished throughout their various traditional territories. The Lower Skagit lived in the northern portion of Whidbey Island, including Coupeville, Penn Cove, and Maylor Point. Chinook, coho, pink, chum, and sockeye salmon provided an abundant source of food. In the island’s prairies, bracken fern grew seven feet tall. Dried bracken roots were ground into flour that would be baked for bread. Fresh camas could be boiled and eaten like potatoes, or bulbs could be dried and preserved.” (Source: <https://whidbeycamanoislands.com/an-immemorial-indigenous-presence/> Written by Ana Ramirez, Education Curator. Hibulb Cultural Center and Nature Preserve).

European expeditions began in the 1700s. The Donation Land Claim Act of 1850 brought an influx of White colonials, which led to the displacement of Coast Salish peoples from their ancestral lands and forced most of them onto reservations. Colonel Isaac Ebey, the first local claimant, gave his name to the settlement of Ebey’s Landing on the shores of Admiralty Inlet, south of Coupeville. Captain Thomas Coupe founded Coupeville in 1853. By 1855, Ebey’s Landing and Penn Cove had been divided into a patchwork of land claims. Newcomers were drawn to large open prairies that were easily converted to farmland, woodlands that provided an abundance of timber resources, and the insulated cove.

After it began growing in the 1860s, Coupeville became the center of the area’s development. Logging and agriculture formed the original economic base. The Town became the seat of county government in 1881. The original Town plat, recorded in 1883, includes most of the central part of Coupeville east of North Main Street. Whidbey Island’s location was leveraged by the U.S. Army in the early 1900s with the construction of Fort Casey, and then



Susie Kettle (maiden name Slapoose, Lushootseed name Teloleta). Susie was Lower Skagit and was born about 1861 and died in 1938. (photo credit: Island County Historical Museum).



Penn Cove Water Festival Canoe Race, Embrace Whidbey and Camano Islands.



Barley field (photo credit: Dave Wechner).

again in the 1940s with the construction of Fort Ebey. Both forts were part of a coastal defense plan to protect Admiralty Inlet and the greater Puget Sound region.

Since World War II, and particularly since 1970, Coupeville has experienced considerable growth and change. Retirees have been drawn to the town's friendly community, mild climate, and beautiful setting. The completion of State Route 20 in 1967 improved access across Whidbey Island and connected communities to ferry terminals. As the county seat, Coupeville has seen the effects of growth throughout Island County with expanded county offices, schools, and medical services.

As these changes led to the demolition of old buildings and the construction of new ones, Coupeville residents became acutely aware of their unique landscape and historic structures. They also came to realize the importance of tourism to the local economy. The Central Whidbey Island Historic District (established in 1973) and Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve (1978) have provided a framework to preserve the Town's unique character while allowing it to adapt to meet future needs.

Town Engagement Activities

While the major comprehensive plan update completed in 2023 featured a range of COVID-19 pandemic-era engagement activities centered on a plan that was updated top to bottom, the 2025 update included a range of engagement activities and strategies focused on essential aspects of the update, including but not limited to housing and climate. Key activities were:

- Proactive interviews with key community stakeholders and leaders
- A communitywide planning priorities survey answered by 255 people
- A visioning workshop held online jointly with the Planning Commission and Town Council, plus a follow-up meeting
- Two community workshops to discuss plan ideas and concepts
- Responding to public comments on the plan's direction and content
- At least eight Planning Commission meetings to discuss strategies, goals, policies, and the draft version of the plan

**Coupeville Comprehensive Plan Update
Community Vision Survey**

Coupeville is updating our Comprehensive Plan, which is the roadmap to where we want to go as a community over the next 20 years. We need your help to confirm our collective vision, community values, and resources provided. This survey is the start of a planning process expected to last through 2025. We appreciate your feedback!

Survey takers may optionally enter into a raffle for a \$50 gift certificate from Safeway.

Prefer to fill out the survey online? Visit the link or scan the QR code with a smartphone.
www.safeway.com/dl/500000

Please return completed survey by Friday, December 31, 2021 to:
Donna Kaser, Planning Director
Coupeville Town Hall
402 Stewart Street, PO Box 720

1) What do you love about Coupeville? Write a 1, 2, and 3 only next to your top three choices.

☐ The quality of life is enjoyable here ☐ The amenities/recreational opportunities ☐ Variety of activities, historic downtown, and scenic views ☐ The atmosphere, environment, historic, scenic, and culture ☐ Living within a scenic landscape, historical, natural, and diverse ☐ The sense of community and engaged citizens ☐ The well-maintained and historic buildings	☐ Variety of scenic views, scenic, and historic ☐ The recreational opportunities, scenic, and historic ☐ The well-maintained and historic buildings ☐ Great views ☐ Living within a scenic landscape, historical, natural, and diverse ☐ The sense of community and engaged citizens ☐ Other
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2) What are you most concerned about for Coupeville? Write a 1, 2, and 3 only next to your top three choices. I am most concerned about...

☐ The local economy and/or living expenses ☐ The overall cost of living ☐ The loss of affordable housing (especially for the younger generation) ☐ The potential loss of quality of life due to increased traffic and noise ☐ The loss of historic buildings and/or historic character ☐ The potential loss of historic buildings and/or historic character	☐ Housing issues, including rental prices, and availability ☐ Accessibility for the elderly and disabled ☐ The potential loss of quality of life due to increased traffic and noise ☐ The loss of historic buildings and/or historic character ☐ The potential loss of historic buildings and/or historic character ☐ Other
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A survey was mailed to Town residents and property owners in November 2021



Town Workshop #2 in October 2022.

- Several Town Council adoption meetings
- Creation and maintenance of a website for the planning process
- Regular updates in the Coupeville newsletter
- Regular notifications via email to interested parties

This plan addresses many of Coupeville's ongoing and emerging challenges identified by community members, including:

- Lack of affordable housing supply and housing options, especially for community members with low to moderate incomes
- Limited resources to preserve historic structures, landscapes, and cultures
- Climate change and sea level rise
- An aging population
- Limited transportation options for those who cannot or choose not to drive

The Coupeville community is also optimistic about its future, thanks to its many positive attributes, including:

- A strong identity centered around historic, agricultural, Indigenous, and maritime heritage
- Community commitment toward preservation of the Town's historic resources
- Small town, rural feel
- Integrity of residential neighborhoods
- Location within Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve
- Robust tourism economy
- Natural splendor, water views, and landscape vistas
- Presence of major institutions and employers, including the Island County government campus, WhidbeyHealth Medical Center, and the Coupeville School District.

Washington State Planning Framework

This Comprehensive Plan meets the goals and requirements of the 1990 Growth Management Act (GMA), which 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" under the GMA. Fully planning means adopting the required elements listed in the table below and regulating critical areas (sensitive environmental areas).

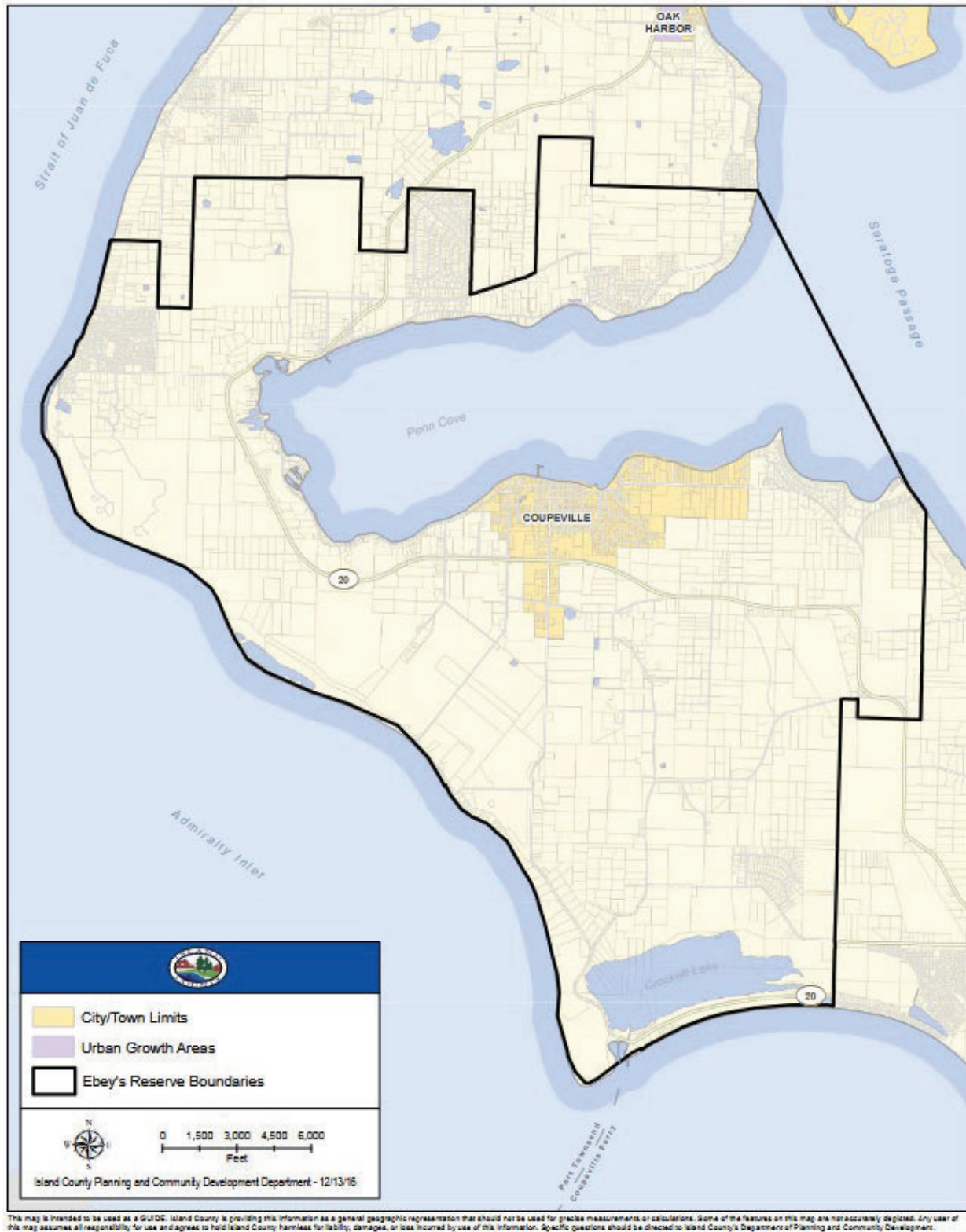
The Comprehensive Plan is the primary document that is supported by other Town plans and development regulations. This plan is designed to assess existing conditions and present a vision of growth and development for the next 20 years.

Per RCW 36.70A.130, local jurisdictions are required to periodically update their comprehensive plans to ensure that they are consistent with GMA requirements and can accommodate projected population and employment growth over the next twenty years. Although Coupeville updated its Comprehensive Plan in 2023, additional updates are required to meet more recent changes to State requirements, particularly regarding housing and adapting to climate change under HB 1337, HB 1220, and HB 1181.

The Town's integration with Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve gives it special status for planning purposes. Typically, 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 over the next 20 years. Under RCW 36.70A.110(2), communities within a national historical reserve are exempted from this mandate. Coupeville is the only exempted town in Washington State. Further, the town "... may restrict densities, intensities, and forms of urban growth as determined to be necessary and appropriate to protect the physical, cultural, or historic integrity of the Reserve."

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

The Governor has the authority, under RCW 36.70A.345, to impose sanctions against jurisdictions 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 taxes and other revenue sources.



Source: Island County Comprehensive Plan 2016, Map 5A, with Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve boundary.

Table 1. Comprehensive Planning Elements.

Required elements
<i>The GMA requires Coupeville to address topic areas called "elements." These are:</i>
Land Use
Housing
Capital Facilities
Utilities
Transportation
Climate Element

Optional elements
<i>Coupeville has also chosen to include the following extra elements in its Comprehensive Plan because of their value to the community and their importance to the town's orderly planning and development:</i>
Economic Development (locally renamed as Economic Stability)
Park and Recreation (locally renamed as Parks, Recreation & Open Space)
Natural Systems
Historic Preservation and Community Design

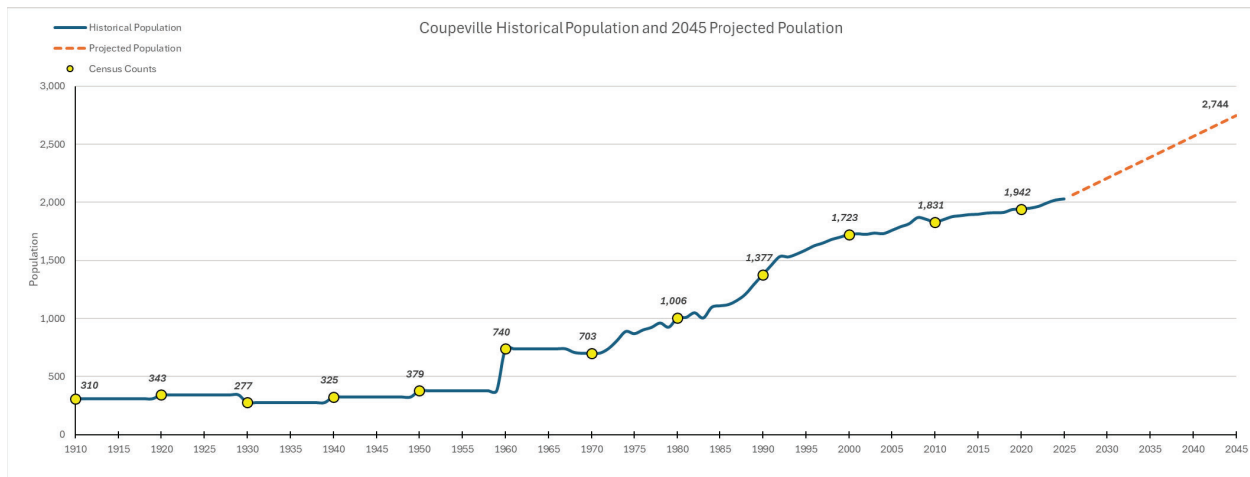
Population Forecast, Housing Capacity, and Land Capacity

More information about the **Land Capacity Analysis** methodology and key findings is available in Appendix A.5.

As of 2025, Coupeville has an estimated population of 2,030 people. In 2021, the Washington State Legislature dramatically changed the way communities are required to plan for housing. House Bill 1220 (HB 1220) amended the Growth Management Act (GMA) to instruct local governments to “plan and accommodate” for housing affordable to all income levels.

According to the 2024 OFM Postcensal estimates, Coupeville has an estimated 1,048 housing units, representing an increase of 115 units since 2010. Using the projection method selected by the Island County Countywide Planning Group, Coupeville's projected housing needs are 350 by 2045, corresponding to a population projection of approximately 2,744.

Figure 9 - Coupeville Population, Historical (1910 - 2025) and Projected (2026-2045)



Note: Historical estimates in census years are a count, while intercensal years are estimates. No intercensal population estimates exist prior to 1960. Sources: OFM Historical April 1 Intercensal Estimates of Population, 1890 – 2020 decennial census - updated June 2024; 1960 - 2025 postcensal estimates updated June 2025; 1990-2000 prepared March 2002; 2000-2010 last revised June 23, 2016; 2021 last revised November 30, 2021; OFM GMA Population Projections for Counties 2020 - 2050, December 2022; Island County 2025 Periodic Update Appendix B: Housing Allocation Methodology, 2016; BERK, 2022; Facet, 2024.

A 2024 land capacity analysis and housing needs assessment found that Coupeville has sufficient capacity in the Low Density Residential (LDR) and Medium Density Residential (MDR) zones to accommodate households earning 120% or more of the area median income (AMI). However, the analysis identified insufficient capacity to meet the housing needs of households earning below 120% AMI, particularly those earning 80% AMI or less, over the 20-year planning period. In response, the Town intends to rezone select parcels to increase opportunities for housing affordable to households earning 80% AMI and below.

That said, the land capacity analysis also determined that Coupeville has adequate land to accommodate its forecasted growth. The analysis considered the current zoning regulations, density limits, infrastructure capacity, and trends in the real estate market. Using this information, the analysis shows that Coupeville has an estimated capacity for 179 additional

housing units based on current conditions. This capacity increases to 250 housing units if sewer service is expanded to all areas of town. A separate analysis of housing unit capacity by income bracket has been completed for the Housing Element and outlines adequate provisions and modifications to development regulations, incentives, and policies to meet the projected need of 351.

For more details on the methodology for these forecasts, please see Appendix A - Land Use and Appendix C - Housing.

Implementation

As a policy document, the Coupeville Comprehensive Plan works as a source of reference and guidance for future regulatory and administrative actions. The Plan itself, however, does not directly regulate property rights, land uses, or other activities. Implementation of the Plan's goals and policies happens through the Town's development regulations, budgeting and investments, and regular updates to the plan.

How This Plan Works

The goals and policies are the heart of the plan and provide direction for Coupeville's future. A **goal** is intended to be a direction-setter. It is an ideal future end, condition, or statement related to the public health, safety, or general welfare towards which planning and implementation measures are directed. A goal is a general expression of community values and, therefore, is typically more abstract in nature.

A **policy** is a specific statement that guides decision-making. It indicates a clear commitment from the local legislative body. A policy is based upon a comprehensive plan's goals and the analysis of the data. A policy is put into effect through implementation measures such as the zoning code, staff hiring, or project funding commitments.

There are several tools used to implement the Comprehensive Plan. The main methods are through development regulations, such as zoning and critical areas ordinances, and through capital improvement plans, such as sewer, water, parks, and transportation. These tools constantly weigh the Town's financial ability to support development against its minimum population obligations and environmental protection. It is the Comprehensive Plan goals and policies that the development regulations and capital improvement plans are based upon.

Budgeting and Investing

Coupeville's budgets and investments convert the Comprehensive Plan policies into reality. The development of capital facilities, operation of public services, and the use of public funds and land should be consistent with the goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan. Goals and policies are implemented through the Capital Facilities Element and the associated Capital Facilities Plan and capital budget, which are updated annually to plan for the modification and expansion of infrastructure like roads, utilities, and parks.

The operating budget also impacts staff resources needed to support all elements. Many policies of this Comprehensive Plan support specific research or programs that require sufficient staff capacity, support for writing grant applications, or funding for outside professional services. For example, implement the Land Use and Historic Preservation elements by updating development regulations; implement the Transportation Element through writing grant applications and designing updated streets; and implement the Economic Stability element with tourism research and management programs.

The Town strives to ensure the public receives the maximum possible benefit from the expenditure of public funds. This is achievable with a budget planning process that facilitates public review and comment during the long-range budgeting process and balances priorities according to infrastructure needs, projected growth, community priorities, state and federal laws, and fiscal restraint. Budgeting should support the highest feasible levels of service to promote the security, health, safety, and general welfare of Coupeville's residents, businesses, and visitors.

Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan are necessary from time to time to comply with changing regulations and to respond to changing conditions and needs of the community. The Growth Management Act requires that amendments to a comprehensive plan be considered no more frequently than once per year, except in certain special circumstances. Proposed amendments to the Comprehensive Plan must be considered concurrently so that the cumulative effect of various proposals can be determined. Proposed amendments will be evaluated for intent and consistency with the Comprehensive Plan, and whether there has been a change in conditions or circumstances from initial adoption, or if new information is present that was not available at the time of initial adoption. Town staff and the Planning Commission review proposed amendments to the Plan, take public input, and forward recommendations to the Town Council.

Comprehensive Plan Periodic Updates

The Growth Management Act requires that comprehensive plans be reviewed and updated as necessary, at least every ten years, outside of the optional annual review process (RCW 36.70A.130). The next major periodic update will occur in 2035 and at least every ten years thereafter. The Town must also complete an implementation progress report on the Plan five years after adoption (in the case of this update, in 2030) (RCW 36.70A.130(9)).

Goals and Policies

The goals and policies set forth throughout the Comprehensive Plan are the result of the “visioning” process facilitated by the Town of Coupeville in the early stages of the development of the Comprehensive Plan.

It is envisioned that the adoption of some of these goals and policies will require several years to enact. The Town will actively work to implement these goals and policies within the next ten years until the next required major update of the Comprehensive Plan. These goals and policies will be incorporated into the Town's codes as necessary and annually as amendments to the Comprehensive Plan.