

Land Use Element

Introduction

The Land Use Element is central to all other elements. It provides for the distribution of land use meeting Coupeville's needs for residential, commercial, recreational, public facilities, and other land uses. This element also describes development patterns that support Coupeville's vision for the future. The Land Use Element includes policies that promote compatible pedestrian-oriented development, resource protection and sustainable design, economic vitality, historic preservation, and the development of inviting and distinctive public spaces.

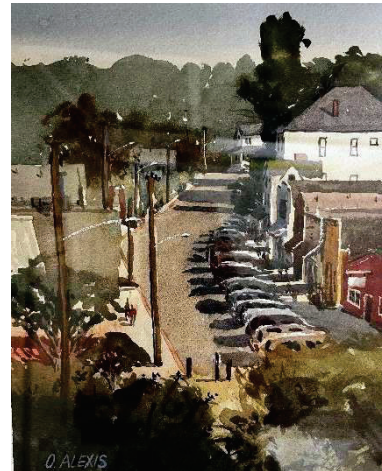
The Growth Management Act requires cities and towns to show how they will be able to accommodate 20 years of growth through sufficient buildable land that is zoned appropriately.

Appendix A - Land Use contains the Land Use Element background information with data and analysis that provides the foundation for the Land Use Element goals and policies, including the Land Capacity Analysis required under the GMA and outlined in the Island County Countywide Planning Policies.

Existing Conditions Summary

Within Coupeville's Town limits, there is a total land area of 721 acres. Land uses within the Town include a mixture of residential, commercial, and public uses, with a significant amount of undeveloped land.

The oldest and most densely developed area is the original Town plat, which includes much of the area extending south from the shoreline between Main Street and Gould Street. Coupeville's boundaries encompass nearly the entire claim of Thomas and Maria Coupe (filed November 20, 1852) and most of the John Alexander claim



Painting of Front Street in Coupeville



Cliff house (photo credit: Dave Wechner).

(August 1, 1852), each totaling approximately 320 acres. (Source: How Coupeville Grew, A Short History of Town Development, 1998).

Commercial development is focused on the Town's primary streets, including N Main Street, S Main Street, NW Front Street, and NW Coveland Street. Retail businesses are mixed with government and professional offices. As the County seat, Coupeville is also home to WhidbeyHealth Medical Center, which offers a variety of medical services, and the Coupeville School District.

Housing is distributed throughout the Town of Coupeville. Early residential development occurred on small lots in the central portion of Town. More recent development has been suburban in nature, with large lots in outlying parts of town. While most of the existing housing is the traditional “detached, single-family” housing type, the Town also has three mobile home parks, as well as a steadily increasing number of multifamily dwellings.

Future Growth and Land Capacity

Consistent with RCW 36.70A.070(1) and WAC 365-196-405(2)(i), this section describes Coupeville’s future land use designations, corresponding zoning districts, anticipated development intensities, and estimated residential densities. It also evaluates whether sufficient land capacity exists within the Town and Urban Growth Area (UGA) to accommodate projected population and housing growth over the 20-year planning period.

Future Land Use Designations

The Future Land Use Map (Map LU-1) organizes land within Coupeville into three primary designations: Residential, Commercial, Civic and Parks/Open Space. Each designation corresponds to one or more zoning districts and establishes the general pattern, intensity, and character of future development. Development standards, including residential density, floor area ratio (FAR), and building height, are regulated through the Town’s development code.

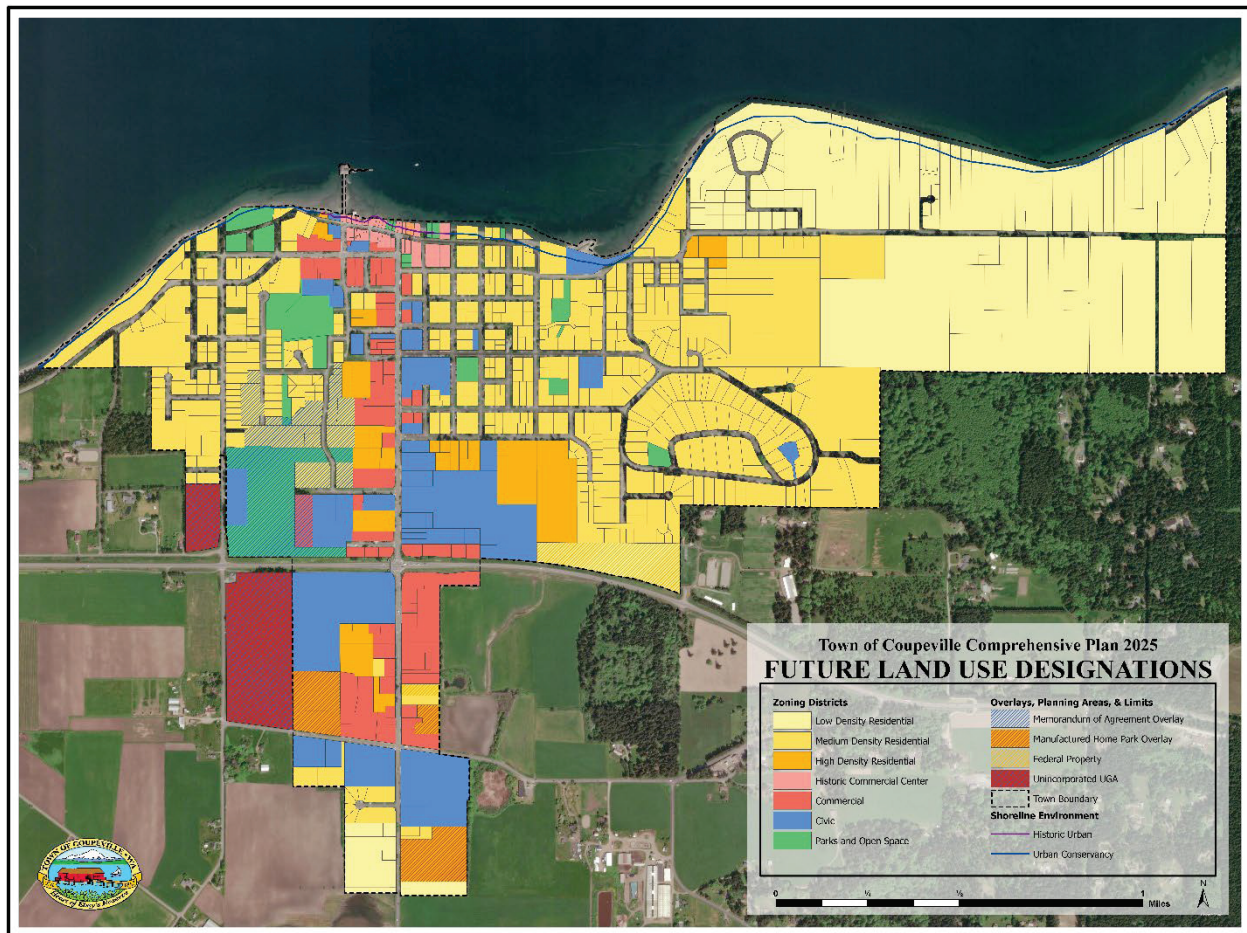
Residential

The Residential designation supports a range of housing types at low to moderate densities and includes the Low-, Medium-, and High-Density residential zoning districts. Historically, the Low- and Medium-Density zones primarily accommodated single-family homes and accessory dwelling units, with densities generally ranging from approximately 2 to 4.5 dwelling units per acre depending on lot size. The High-Density zone has traditionally supported multifamily housing at densities up to 11 dwelling units per acre. In response to state middle housing requirements under RCW 36.70A.681, the Town increased allowable residential densities to up to 6 dwelling units per acre in the Low-Density zone, 13.5 dwelling units per acre in the Medium-Density zone, and 22 dwelling units per acre in the High-Density zone to expand housing capacity and support a greater range of housing choices.

To expand housing choice and affordability, the Town adopted middle housing regulations applicable to all residential zones. These regulations allow a broader range of housing types,

including duplexes, triplexes, cottage housing, and small apartment buildings, in areas previously limited to detached single-family development.

Map LU-1. Future land use designations



Commercial

The Commercial designation includes the Historic Commercial Center and Commercial zoning districts. These areas function as centers for retail, services, employment, and housing. Development is generally more compact and may include mixed-use buildings with commercial uses at street level and residential or office uses above.

Civic and Parks/Open Space

The Civic and Parks/Open Space designations apply to lands used for public, institutional, educational, recreational, and open space purposes. While these areas have not traditionally accommodated residential uses, recent code amendments have expanded opportunities to support community needs.

For example, supportive housing is permitted within the Civic zone, allowing for STEP housing and similar uses on publicly owned or institutionally zoned properties. This approach provides

additional housing opportunities while preserving land designated for residential and commercial development.

Table LU-1. Land use designations.

Future Land Use Designations	Description	Implementing Zones
Low-Density Residential (LDR)	This designation is intended for areas where more intensive urban development is constrained by environmental conditions, topography, the cost of extending urban services, or the need to maintain an appropriate transition between the Town and adjacent rural lands. The lands within this designation are intended to minimize impervious surfaces, protect natural features, and/or protect the cultural and physical integrity of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve. Land use and density: Single-household dwellings are the predominant land use, with other compatible housing forms (cottages and accessory dwelling units) permitted in certain circumstances. Areas with minimal or no public sewer service or areas that are difficult to develop owing to topography or other factors should be zoned RR. Areas with public sewer service should be zoned LDR. - Residential density should be a maximum of 3 units per acre with 1 principal unit and up to 2 middle housing units. - Those areas currently without public sewer are limited to a 2-acre minimum lot size (Rural Reserve).	Rural Reserve Low-Density Residential
Medium-Density Residential (MDR)	Purpose: Allows for medium-density residential use in areas that provide a suitable environment for residential development, have good access to the Town's transportation system, and feature (or plan to feature) adequate public services to serve residential development. Land use and density: Single-household dwellings are the predominant land use. Appropriately scaled and designed middle housing types, including accessory dwelling units, cottages, and duplexes, are allowed depending on the site's size and context, and the size and design of the dwellings. Residential densities depend on the current context:	Medium-Density Residential Memorandum of Agreement (MOA Area)

Future Land Use Designations	Description	Implementing Zones
	- Those areas currently without public sewer service are limited to 2-acre minimum lot sizes (Rural Reserve). - Residential density in all other areas should be a maximum of 13.5 units per acre with 1 principal unit and up to 2 ADUs per lot, or up to 3 middle housing units per lot.	
High-Density Residential (HDR)	Purpose: Allows for high-density residential use in areas that are near commercial areas, parks, trails, and transit routes, and are located to permit efficient provision of public services. Land use and density: This designation allows for a mixture of multifamily housing types, including townhouse and apartment dwellings. Small-scale and pedestrian-oriented commercial services are also allowed on corner lots. Residential densities depend on the current context: - Those areas currently without public sewer service are limited to 2-acre minimum lot sizes (Rural Reserve). - All other areas are allowed up to 22 units per acre. - Minimum densities for new subdivisions and other multi-unit developments are important to maintain and enhance housing capacity and diversity.	High-Density Residential Memorandum of Agreement (MOA Area)
Commercial	Purpose: Allows for commercial and multifamily development that is appropriate in size and scale to the Town. This designation should be applied in areas with multimodal transportation access and near concentrations of residential development. Land use and density: Commercially designated areas have land uses that serve the entire Town. The TC zone is appropriate for commercial areas centered on Main Street and provides a variety of neighborhood services. The GC zone is appropriate in areas that prioritize automobile-oriented access and are characterized by existing light industrial development and larger-scale retail and service uses. Residential uses are allowed in the TC zone with no maximum density, subject to other zoning requirements. Residential uses	Town Commercial General Commercial

Future Land Use Designations	Description	Implementing Zones
	are allowed in the GC zone up to a maximum of 15 units per acre.	
Historic Commercial Center	Purpose: Provides for a range of commercial, residential, and water-oriented development that is appropriate in scale and character within historic downtown Coupeville. This area balances services and amenities for both Coupeville residents and tourists. Land use and density: A variety of commercial retail, office, and service uses are permitted. Residential uses are limited, largely consisting of historic single-household homes, short-term rentals, and apartment units generally not at street level.	Historic Commercial Center
Civic	Purpose: Includes areas used for schools, religious institutions, government buildings, public parking lots, hospitals, public cultural centers, parks, public recreation centers, affordable housing, supportive housing, and other similar uses. Land use and density: A variety of public, quasi-public, civic, governmental, and institutional uses are allowed. Some principal commercial uses that support the functions and operations of the Civic designation are permitted. Residential uses are allowed in some circumstances, such as when surplus publicly-owned land is available or when they are integrated with existing or planned civic uses.	Civic High-Density Residential Medium Density Residential Town Commercial Memorandum of Agreement
Parks and Open Space	Purpose: Intended to identify existing public parks, recreation, and open spaces within Town limits. Land use and density: Parks, recreation, and open space only, including lands managed by the National Park Service, which may not be open to the public.	Parks and Open Space Memorandum of Agreement
Manufactured Home Park Zoning Overlay	Purpose: Intended to protect existing affordable housing stock and provide for affordable homeownership and rental housing. Land use and density: Areas suitable for development or placement and occupancy of mobile homes, manufactured homes, or modular homes for residential purposes or rented or leased sites in mobile home parks. These areas are intended to encourage multifamily density in residential areas.	High-Density Residential

See *Appendix A - Land Use* for details of Coupeville's land use, and see the Housing Element for additional housing information.

Goals and Policies

Goal LU-1: Land Use Pattern and Growth Management. Establish and manage a pattern of development consistent with the community's vision and provide for a variety of land uses that further the policies of this Plan.

LU-1.1 Promote opportunities for a well-balanced mix of land uses, including residential, commercial, public services, recreational, and cultural uses through the Future Land Use Map adopted with the Comprehensive Plan.

This policy provides the Town with a tool to evaluate proposals to annex land or expand the Coupeville town boundary. The Department of Commerce advises that annexations should have a net benefit to the Town and the Reserve.

LU-1.2 Acknowledge and maintain the current Town boundary as a reasonable and logical corporate boundary and service area. Minor and strategic annexations may occur when property owners propose or demonstrate a significant benefit to the Town, including protection of historic resources, environmental protection, an increase in housing supply and variety, an increase in park space, and a net positive fiscal impact. Allow only for minor strategic annexations where the subject land is:

- A. Not viable for agricultural uses.
- B. Located for viable service connections.
- C. Viable and appropriate for housing development, community facilities and services, or park, recreation, and open space purposes.
- D. Supportive of other goals and policies of the Comprehensive Plan and Island County Countywide Planning Policies.

LU-1.3 Provide a reasonable supply of development capacity through the Future Land Use Map and zoning standards to provide a variety of opportunities for residential development, redevelopment, and infill, housing choices, and housing affordability.

LU-1.4 Direct growth to the neighborhoods with the most opportunities to accommodate new development due

- to available land, infrastructure capacity, and proximity to services.
- LU-1.5 Growth should be carried out thoughtfully, putting historic properties and the cultural landscape of Coupeville and Central Whidbey at the forefront for protection.
- Accommodate growth and development in a manner that protects the physical, cultural, and historic integrity of Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve.
- LU-1.6 Respect the historic pattern of development in the Town by striving to maintain the Donation Land Claim and Town Plat system and avoid suburban design trends, including cul-de-sacs.
- LU-1.7 Engage with partner agencies and groups to ensure that protecting Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve continues to serve as a guiding principle for the future of the greater Coupeville community.
- LU-1.8 Establish future land use designations as shown in Table LU-1.
- LU-1.9 Manage and maintain the Town's Official Zoning Map to ensure continued consistency with the Future Land Use Designation Map.
- LU-1.10 Lands under the most intensive noise zone of Outlying Landing Field Coupeville (85 dB DNL) should not be designated greater than Low Density Residential.
- LU-1.11 Evaluate options for where building height limits may be modified to increase the height limit from 28 feet to 34 feet to potentially allow three-story buildings in a few select High Density Residential and Commercial areas.
- Increased height limits could be contingent upon certain criteria, such as ensuring the increased heights will not impact viewsheds and compliance with the Ebey's Landing Design Guidelines

See Appendix A - Land Use for the Navy's 2021 Air Installations Compatible Use Zones (AICUZ) Footprint Map for Outlying Landing Field (OLF) Coupeville.

- LU-1.12 Review and amend the Shoreline Master Program as necessary to govern the development of all designated Shorelines of the State within Coupeville.
- LU-1.13 For properties zoned Rural Reserve, rezones to Low Density Residential shall be prohibited until appropriate infrastructure, particularly sewer, is available to serve the property.

Goal LU-2: Residential Uses. Enhance the quantity and diversity of Coupeville's housing options while reinforcing and enhancing the quality, character, and function of Coupeville's residential neighborhoods.

- LU-2.1 Provide for a wide variety of housing types within the Town to meet the full range of housing needs for Coupeville's evolving population.

See Housing Element Policy H-1.7 for related ideas to explore in a housing action plan.

A. Accessory dwelling units (ADUs).

Encourage attached and detached ADUs in all residential districts, provided size, design, and other provisions are included to promote compatibility with surrounding uses. Streamline ADU permitting and fees to encourage their construction throughout Coupeville.



Accessory Dwelling Unit.

- B. Cottages.** Encourage the development of cottage housing (a cluster of small homes around a common open space) in residential zones as an increasingly popular housing type, provided special design provisions are included to ensure a pedestrian-oriented design, inclusion of common open space, and strict cottage size limitations.



Cottage housing in Coupeville.

C. **Small homes.** Encourage and incentivize the integration of small detached single-household homes. Such homes, provided they are no more than 1,400 square feet and emphasize a pedestrian-oriented design, would fit well into Coupeville's context and serve a wide demographic of the population.

D. **Duplexes / Triplexes.** Allow for and encourage duplexes and triplexes in more residential areas, provided the zoning and design provisions promote pedestrian-oriented designs compatible with existing neighborhoods. Review options, if expanded opportunities are appropriate in the zoning code, such as changing the buffer requirements.



Example of a duplex.

E. **Townhouses.** Allow for and encourage the development of townhouses in the Medium and High Density Residential zones as an efficient and popular form of housing for a large demographic of Coupeville's population. Design standards emphasizing pedestrian-oriented design, facade articulation, and usable open space are particularly important. Define and encourage townhouses consistent with other residential land uses.



Example of Townhouses in Coupeville.

F. **Multifamily housing.** Review development regulations to evaluate barriers to development of multifamily housing located within walking distance of transit and commercial services, including zoning and availability of land, height and density limits, and other standards.



Example of multifamily housing (photo credit: Opticos Design)

G. **Assisted living.** Review development regulations to evaluate barriers to the development of assisted living, nursing homes, and similar supportive facilities.

H. Tiny homes. Evaluate options to permit compatible, well-designed tiny homes on parcels designated for high-density residential and civic uses.



Example of tiny homes.

- LU-2.2 To protect the limited housing stock availability in Coupeville, continue prohibiting short-term rentals in residential zones.
- LU-2.3 Building codes. Study an amendment to the Town's building codes to streamline the design and review of small, multi-unit housing structures (four units or less) by allowing them to be built under the International Residential Code instead of the International Building Code. Coordinate with the development community, the fire district, and other stakeholders as appropriate to develop the amendment.
- LU-2.4 Encourage development and redevelopment of a wider variety of housing types.
- LU-2.5 Minimize the amount of housing displacement created by development

Goal LU-3: Commercial Uses. Enhance the character and economic vitality of Coupeville's commercial districts and overall business environment.

- LU-3.1 Support efforts to protect and maintain historic structures, particularly those north of Front Street that are at risk of sea level rise, storm surge, and bluff erosion.
- LU-3.2 Encourage new commercial development to be mixed-use with residential components.

Provide greater flexibility for residential uses to be developed in commercial zones, but continue to preserve street frontages for commercial use.
- LU-3.3 Review the amount and type of parking required for commercial uses and make code adjustments if there are barriers to development and local entrepreneurship.
- LU-3.4 Recognize that industrial uses are generally not compatible with the existing development pattern in

Mixed use refers to two or more types of land uses being present in a building, on a parcel of land, or in a neighborhood. A common example is residential and commercial land uses being placed close together. Mixed-use development and communities have the benefit of placing homes closer to where people want to work and shop, benefiting both the economy and the environment.

- the Town. This, however, does not preclude consideration of potential proposals for small-scale light industrial development such as artisan manufacturing, microbreweries, roasteries, furniture and craft shops, and art production studios.
- LU-3.5 Prohibit any further single-purpose commercial development adjacent to SR 20, except for professional offices. Residential development is appropriate, provided all zoning criteria are met.
 - LU-3.6 Develop regulations to ensure new construction adjacent to State Route (SR) 20 is adequately and appropriately screened with native landscaping from SR 20 views.



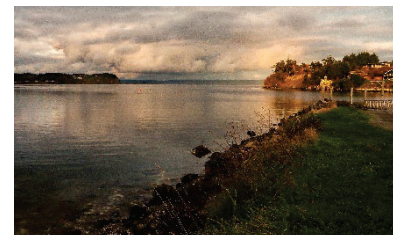
Kapaw's Iskreme (photo credit: Dave Wechner).

Goal LU-4: Resource Protection, Sustainability, and Climate Change.
Establish and promote strategies to ensure Coupeville is a sustainable and resilient community through resource conservation and climate change preparedness.

- LU-4.1 Promote a compact, mixed-use development pattern that minimizes and reduces greenhouse gas emissions and encourages physical activity and a healthy community. This is achieved, for example, by locating a mix of housing, retail, service, schools, medical care, and recreation uses in close walking/bicycling distance from each other to reduce the need for driving, and by encouraging multi-unit housing types that have reduced energy needs for heating and cooling.
- LU-4.2 Encourage home gardens for food production and composting.
- LU-4.3 Ensure that pedestrian and other non-motorized accessibility measures are incorporated in development proposals, where appropriate.
- LU-4.4 Ensure compatibility of land uses with natural features and systems, such as topography, geology, soil suitability, surface water, ground water, frequently flooded areas, wetlands, climate, scenic and cultural resources, and vegetation and wildlife.



ADU (photo credit: Dave Wechner).



Coupeville shoreline (photo credit: Dave Wechner).

LU-4.5 Seek to retain open space such as wetlands, forests, shorelines, and other areas that provide essential habitat for native wildlife species. This is achieved, for example, by clustering residential lots and maintaining native forests and undergrowth.

LU-4.6 Prohibit unnecessary disturbance of natural vegetation in new development and encourage retention of trees and other vegetation.

LU-4.7 To protect wildlife habitat areas and minimize adverse stormwater impacts, minimize grading of landforms, and the extent of soil and vegetation disturbance in new development.

LU-4.8 Facilitate clean energy production at the site, neighborhood, and community scale. This could include proactively identifying suitable locations for clean energy production and streamlining regulations for permitting rooftop solar and wind energy systems, for example. The scale and design of energy production systems should be compatible with the historic areas of Coupeville and comply with the Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve Design Guidelines.

LU-4.9 Reduce the pollution impacts of fossil-fuel infrastructure, such as by prohibiting the development of new fossil-fuel gas stations. Facilitate the development of Level 3 electric vehicle charging stations and hydrogen fuel stations in Town and throughout the Reserve. The scale, design, and appearance of vehicle fueling/charging stations should be compatible with the character of Ebey's Landing National Historic Reserve.

LU-4.10 Encourage water conservation measures in the zoning standards, including requirements for drought-tolerant landscaping, native vegetation, and rainwater catchment for non-potable household use.



Orca (photo credit: Dave Wechner).



Solar panels in the midday sun on a house roof (photo credit: Watt A Lot via Unsplash).



Overflow drain in rain garden swale (photo credit: Brett VA).

Goal LU-5: Public Spaces and Facilities. Protect and enhance Coupeville's cherished community hubs and open spaces, including the Recreation Hall, Town Park, Community Green, shorelines, neighborhood parks and trails, and public institutions.

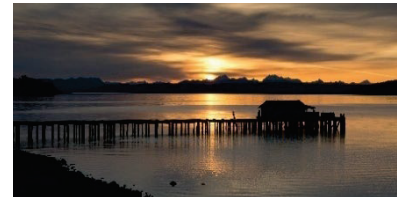
LU-5.1 Work collaboratively with Island County, Coupeville School District #204, WhidbeyHealth Medical Center, and other major institutions on joint land use planning. Encourage institutions to develop master plans for their future development to ensure that future growth is planned and coordinated between all affected parties. Master plans may allow institutions to develop more intensively to reduce the amount of property necessary for their future growth.



The Coupeville Wharf.

LU-5.2 Encourage Island County to maximize existing property holdings through infill development.

LU-5.3 Protect and enhance the Community Green as a community gathering space for a variety of events.



Sunrise on Penn Cover (photo credit: Dave Wechner).

LU-5.4 Support efforts to preserve and promote the Coupeville Wharf.

LU-5.5 Encourage public participation in the design of public spaces and facilities.

LU-5.6 Periodically review the inventory of undeveloped public land managed by all levels of government. Undeveloped or surplus public land should be designated appropriately on the Future Land Use Map.



Coupeville Recreation Hall (photo credit: Dave Wechner).

Goal LU-6: Land Use Processes. Assure that development review and permit processes operate in a fair, timely, and predictable manner. Update processes from time to time to incorporate best practices, changes in law, and to align with community priorities and values.

LU-6.1 Establish and maintain planning processes that allow regular public discussion and examination of community goals and values.

LU-6.2 Consider the regional impact of local land use decisions and coordinate planning and development decisions with those governmental agencies having jurisdiction or other direct interests in land use matters, particularly Island County and Ebey's Landing National Historical Reserve.

- LU-6.3 Work cooperatively with Island County to discourage urban uses outside of Coupeville's boundary that intrude upon prime farmland, forest, and natural resource areas integral to the Reserve. Re-establish joint planning areas if needed.
- LU-6.4 Update processes and procedures throughout the Coupeville Town Code to be consistent with the Hearing Examiner system established on February 8, 2018.
- LU-6.5 As soon as possible after adopting amendments to the Coupeville Comprehensive Plan, update the Zoning Map and Development Regulations to ensure consistency with the Plan.
- LU-6.6 Periodically review the concurrency ordinance (at least during every periodic Comprehensive Plan update) for its effectiveness to mitigate the growth impacts of major development proposals.