

# HOUSING ELEMENT

## GOALS, OBJECTIVES & POLICIES

The City has created Goals, Objectives & Policies specific to the Housing Element. These Goals, Objectives & Policies guide the City’s decision making process related to housing issues and are organized into broad categories including:

- Housing Availability
- Enhance Existing Neighborhoods
- Jobs to Housing Balance & Mixed Use Development
- Affordable and Subsidized Housing
- Housing for Vulnerable Populations

### HOUSING AVAILABILITY

**HOUSING GOAL 1:** ENHANCE MOUNT VERNON’S CULTURAL AND ECONOMIC VITALITY BY ENCOURAGING THE DEVELOPMENT OF HOUSING SOLUTIONS OF ALL TYPES THAT PROVIDE FOR VARIED DENSITIES, SIZES, COSTS AND LOCATIONS THAT ARE SAFE, DECENT, ACCESSIBLE, ATTRACTIVE, APPEALING AND AFFORDABLE TO A DIVERSITY OF AGES, INCOMES, AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS.

**OBJECTIVE 1.1:** In City plans and zoning regulations, accommodate a variety of housing types that are attractive and compatible in design, and available to all economic segments of the community.

- Policy 1.1.1: The Comprehensive Plan shall provide housing capacity for all market segments to meet the growth targets identified for the City of Mount Vernon in the Skagit County Population and Employment Allocation adopted by County-Wide Planning Policies.
- Policy 1.1.2: In recognition of community needs, the City shall maintain a variety of future land use classifications and implement zoning to accommodate a range of housing types with varying densities and sizes.
- Policy 1.1.3: Continue the use of opportunities and incentives through the Planned Unit Development (PUD) process for a variety of housing types and site planning techniques that can achieve the maximum housing potential of the site while being designed in consideration of surrounding properties and the natural environment.
- Policy 1.1.4: Continue to promote plans and policies that encourage in-fill residential projects in close proximity to neighborhood centers, shopping and retail facilities, parks, transit routes and other service uses.
- Policy 1.1.5: Continue to promote plans and regulations that allow incentives such as bonus densities and flexible design standards that support and promote the construction of new innovative or affordable housing styles, compatible with the planned uses of surrounding sites. Ground related housing types such as cottages, townhouses, zero lot line developments and other types are examples of housing choices that promote individuality and ownership opportunities. Consider adopting new development regulations that would offer new ways to encourage these types of housing choices.

- Policy 1.1.6: Continue to implement zoning requirements for manufactured homes on single family lots and ensure they provide for appropriate location and design criteria and meet state requirements.
- Policy 1.1.7: Continue to promote high density development and re-development in the Central Business District (C-1 zone). Analyze ways to allow housing that steps-down, or transitions, in density immediately surrounding the Central Business District. Consider completing a sub-area plan to include areas surrounding the existing C-1 zone to evaluate whether or not this zone should be expanded to these abutting areas.

## ENHANCE EXISTING NEIGHBORHOODS

### HOUSING GOAL 2: PROMOTE THE PRESERVATION, MAINTENANCE AND ENHANCEMENT OF EXISTING HOUSING AND RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS THROUGHOUT THE CITY.

**OBJECTIVE 2.1:** Promote infill housing that is compatible with abutting housing styles and with the character of the existing neighborhood.

- Policy 2.1.1: Encourage infill housing on vacant or underutilized parcels having adequate services, and ensure that the infill development is compatible with surrounding neighborhoods.
- Policy 2.1.2 : Adopt development regulations that enhance existing single family neighborhoods by requiring significant changes in density be transitioned near these existing neighborhoods. Ways to transition from higher-density to existing single-family neighborhoods include (but are not limited to) the following: reducing densities and building heights closest to existing neighborhoods; and require landscaping treatments and fencing surrounding higher density developments.
- Policy 2.1.3: Consider adopting regulations such as flexible lot sizes that encourage infill development on small lots consistent with the neighborhood’s character.
- Policy 2.1.4: Encourage the construction of attached and detached accessory dwelling units in single-family districts subject to specific development, design and owner occupancy provisions.

**OBJECTIVE 2.2** Enhance the value, character and health of the City’s existing housing stock by improving and extending the life of such housing.

- Policy 2.2.1: In cooperation with the County and public or private housing agencies, the City should periodically assess housing conditions to identify areas of the city needing rehabilitation and to monitor previous rehabilitation efforts, contingent upon funding availability.
- Policy 2.2.2: Encourage private reinvestment in residential neighborhoods and private rehabilitation of existing housing by providing information, technical assistance, and referrals to appropriate agencies and organizations.

- Policy 2.2.3: Consider additional funding to strengthen the City’s existing code enforcement efforts with the goal of reducing the amount of substandard housing, renovation of homes in need of repair, and to preserve the health, safety and affordability of the City’s existing housing stock.
- Policy 2.2.4: In cooperation with Skagit County, the City should encourage the preservation of existing housing. Private investment should be encouraged in older residential neighborhoods, manufactured home parks, and multifamily complexes to ensure the health, safety and affordability of existing housing. Programs supporting weatherization, home repair and rehabilitation, and infrastructure maintenance should be supported.

## JOBS-HOUSING BALANCE & MIXED-USE REGULATIONS

**HOUSING GOAL 3:** ENCOURAGE LIVING-WAGE JOB RETENTION AND CREATION IN THE CITY SO THAT RESIDENTS ARE NOT FORCED TO COMMUTE OUT OF MOUNT VERNON TO WORK.

**OBJECTIVE 3.1:** Promote policies to increase the ratio of living wage jobs to housing within the City.

- Policy 3.1.1: Encourage the creation of mixed-use areas throughout the City characterized by living wage jobs, mixed income housing, and ample public open spaces all within a walkable urban context.

## AFFORDABLE AND SUBSIDIZED HOUSING

**HOUSING GOAL 4:** ENCOURAGE SAFE, DECENT, ACCESSIBLE, ATTRACTIVE AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING DEVELOPMENT THAT MEETS COMMUNITY NEEDS AND IS INTEGRATED INTO, AND THROUGHOUT, THE COMMUNITY INCLUDING AREAS OF HIGHER LAND COST WHERE GREATER SUBSIDIES MAY BE NEEDED.

**OBJECTIVE 4.1:** Encourage the creation of ownership and rental housing that is affordable for all households within the City, with a particular emphasis on low, very-low, and extremely-low income households as defined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

- Policy 4.1.1: Evaluate the adoption of zoning regulations targeted at otherwise market-rate developments that require *or* incentivize a minimum percentage of new dwelling units and/or lots that are created (whether multi-family or single-family) be income restricted.
- Policy 4.1.2: Evaluate the adoption of zoning regulations that would allow multi-family residential developments that are income-restricted to those at or below 60 percent of the area median income for at least fifty years to be located in zoning districts other than multi-family residential.
- Policy 4.1.3: Evaluate the adoption of zoning regulations that provide bonuses in density for developments that create income restricted units aimed at those earning less than 80% of the area median income (AMI) with greater bonuses provided to housing reserved for those earning 60% of the AMI and below.

- Policy 4.1.4: Encourage affordable housing to be dispersed throughout the City, within each Census tract, rather than overly concentrated in a few locations.
- Policy 4.1.5: Where affordable housing is proposed together with market rate housing, affordable housing units should be comparable in design, integrated into the whole development, and should match the tenure of the whole development.
- Policy 4.1.6: Maintain and explore enhancing regulatory incentives to encourage the production and preservation of affordable ownership and rental housing such as through density bonuses, impact fee reductions, permit fast-tracking, or other methods.
- Policy 4.1.7: Ensure during development review processes that all affordable housing created in the city with public funds or by regulatory incentives remains affordable for the longest possible term; at a minimum 50 years.
- Policy 4.1.8: Identify and catalogue real property owned by the City that is no longer required for its purposes and is suitable for the development of affordable housing for very-low to moderate income households. The inventory should be provided to the State Office of Community Development in accordance with state law.

**OBJECTIVE 4.2:** Prioritize the preservation of the affordability, health, safety and quality of the City’s existing housing stock.

- Policy 4.2.1: In conjunction with public and private housing providers, the City should identify and encourage preservation of affordable units in publicly assisted (subsidized) housing developments that are at risk of converting to market-rate housing.
- Policy 4.2.2: Encourage relocation assistance and replacement housing to be developed, where feasible, to help low-income households when displacement is unavoidable.

**OBJECTIVE 4.3:** Work collaboratively with other jurisdictions, agencies and stakeholders to promote the preservation and creation of local and regional affordable housing strategies.

- Policy 4.3.1: Be an active participant in the multi-jurisdictional affordable housing program and cooperative efforts that will be guided by the Skagit County of Governments in 2016/2017 that will identify strategies to promote an adequate and diversified supply of countywide housing for all residents.
- Policy 4.3.2: Encourage, assist, and partner with organizations that can construct, manage, and provide affordable housing to those earning 80% or less of the AMI during all stages of siting and project planning and when applying for county, state and federal funding.
- Policy 4.3.3: Work regionally and with other jurisdictions to jointly fund affordable housing.
- Policy 4.3.4: Support state and federal funding and policies that promote affordable housing.
- Policy 4.3.5: Explore with the County, other local jurisdictions, and private lending institutions the availability and enhancement of educational programs for first time homebuyers.

- Policy 4.3.6: Coordinate with private lending institutions to encourage the creation and availability of financing mechanisms such as reverse mortgage programs, housing trust funds, and loan pools for local financing of affordable housing.
- Policy 4.3.7: Encourage interjurisdictional cooperative efforts and public-private partnerships to advance the creation of affordable and special needs housing.
- Policy 4.3.8: Continue to promote home ownership for low-income households earning up to 80% of the median income through support of the Home Trust of Skagit and other similar organizations that could be created in the future.

**OBJECTIVE 4.4:** Create an evidence based system for collecting and analyzing data and plan adaptive strategies that will assist the City in proactively encouraging the preservation and creation of affordable housing in the City.

- Policy 4.4.1: Consider adopting a schedule to have the Community & Economic Development Department (CEDD) report to Council on the number of renters and owners that are paying 30% or more of their income on housing in the Mount Vernon Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) as reported through the Comprehensive Housing Affordability Strategy (CHAS) Data Query Tool from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Providing an annual report should be considered the goal for such reporting; however, the timing of such a report should be following the release of previously unreported data from HUD. Should other data that complies with industry accepted methods that use sound estimating and statistical methodologies become available, in addition to the referenced HUD data, Council could consider requesting CEDD staff to report on this data as well. This report could provide Council with an opportunity to reassess and adjust policies and development regulations to meet low income housing needs.

## HOUSING FOR VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

**HOUSING GOAL 5:** PROMOTE THE DEVELOPMENT, AND COLLABORATE WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS, TO DEVELOP A VARIETY OF HOUSING SOLUTIONS FOR THOSE WITH SPECIAL NEEDS INCLUDING, BUT NOT LIMITED TO:

- VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE;
- PERSONS AFFLICTED WITH ALCOHOL/DRUG ADDICTION;
- PERSONS AFFLICTED WITH BEHAVIOR HEALTH ISSUES;
- PERSONS COMING FROM CORRECTIONS AND PSYCHIATRIC INSTITUTIONS, NURSING HOMES AND FOSTER CARE; AND,
- PERSONS THAT ARE HOMELESS.

**OBJECTIVE 5.1:** Work closely with appropriate agencies in the region to develop and implement policies and programs addressing special housing needs for vulnerable populations.

- Policy 5.1.1: Encourage opportunities for assisted housing for people with special needs by:
- a. Adopting land use policies and regulations that treat government-assisted housing and other low-income housing the same as housing of a similar size and density;
  - b. Permitting group living situations, including those where residents receive such supportive services as counseling, foster care or medical supervision in accordance with State and Federal Laws; and,
  - c. Encouraging developers and owners of assisted housing units to undertake activities to establish and maintain positive relationships with neighbors.
- Policy 5.1.2: Encourage coordination among providers of social, health, counseling, and other services to families, children, and persons with special needs including seniors, persons with physical or mental disabilities, persons with terminal illness, or other special needs.
- Policy 5.1.3: The City should collaborate and support social service agencies that support the development and implementation of a comprehensive approach to the prevention, transition, and stabilization of the homeless. Programs and services that decrease potential homelessness, stop recurring homelessness, and to promote long-term self-sufficiency (such as the Housing First model) should be encouraged.
- Policy 5.1.4: Support the development of facilities and services for chronically homeless, homeless, and those who are at-risk of becoming homeless by:
- a. Adopting land use regulations that streamline the siting of facilities such as the creation of an overlay zone, or a demonstration zoning ordinance. Consider adopting regulations within an overlay zone, demonstration zoning ordinance, or other mechanism that allows these facilities to be developed based on occupancy characteristics versus density allowed in different zoning designations.
- Policy 5.1.5: Consider incentives to encourage the establishment of fully accessible housing for people with disabilities, which exceed the minimum requirements for accessible units otherwise mandated by federal and state law, including providing density bonuses for additional units that incorporate universal design or other similar design principles.
- Policy 5.1.6: Ensure that facilities and services to meet the health care, treatment, social service, and transit needs of households with special needs are part of housing development plans.
- Policy 5.1.7: Through the City's plans and regulations, location of housing for disabled persons and/or seniors should be promoted near or within sites where neighborhood centers, shopping centers, public transportation and/or parks or open space to facilitate their maximum participation in the community.