

Introduction – Bainbridge Island Comprehensive Plan

I. Bainbridge Island 2015 The Island Today

New Socioeconomic Profile To Be Written

Historic Preservation Commission Rewriting Island History Section



The Island's once rural landscape began yielding to residential pressures as events such as the 1962 Seattle World's Fair led to the Island's continued "discovery." In some areas, summer cabins became year-round residences and berry farms became golf courses surrounded by cul-de-sacs. The Island has three privately owned courses. Two courses are the region's oldest -- Country Club and Wing Point.

An Island-wide park district was formed in 1965, transforming former military lands and preserving other lands for recreational purposes, including a swimming pool. The State Parks acquired the Fay property near Port Monroe and waterfront portions of Fort Ward. Today, the fort is a National Historic District, one of at least ten historic areas and part of the 200 properties on the State's Island historic resource inventory. Archaeological sites also remain and are protected by state law.

Today, the skyline is lower -- forests have been logged two or even three times. Islanders voted in _____ to purchase Grand Forest from the state. Few salmon return to spawn in local streams and paralytic, shellfish-poisoning toxins are now recorded periodically within the Sound. Since 1970, commercial divers have harvested geoducks from newly discovered deep water beds. The largest industry is aquaculture. Disease resistant Atlantic salmon are raised by Norwegian specialists in floating pens off Fort Ward.

Environmental concerns led to the closure of the Island's oldest industry, the creosote wood preservative plant. New, land-based industrial efforts produce such items as commercial fish net systems, sport fishing poles, office furniture, and housing. Farm pursuits focus mainly on wine grapes, berries, produce, and livestock. A seasonal, weekly Farmers' Market offers home-grown produce. The school district is the largest employer, but many Islanders commute to King, and Kitsap County urban centers. Far from being isolated, Islanders play an active role in the regional and world community and value cultural diversity.

Population growth pressures, environmental concerns, and county representation were among the issues that caused residents to study ways of gaining more access to government and more local control. In 1991, Islanders elected to annex all other areas to Winslow and to change the name of their new city to Bainbridge Island.

The forces of change, including this Plan, will continue to shape the Island.

II. What is the Comprehensive Plan and how is it used?

The authority and requirements for the City of Bainbridge Island to adopt and update its Comprehensive Plan (the **Plan**) is contained in the [Growth Management Act \(GMA\) \(RCW 36.70A\)](#). The [GMA](#) requires that the plan be reviewed and updated at least every eight years, which means that the periodic update cycle for Bainbridge Island is 2016, 2024, 2032, and following.

The [GMA](#) requires that the Plan have sufficient land capacity and urban services adequate to accommodate at least the next twenty years of growth, although the City may choose to adopt policies and strategies with an even longer time frame. For example, sustainability goals, policies or strategies may have a multi-decade or even multi-generational perspective.

A. What a Comprehensive Plan is and isn't, as defined by the [GMA](#)

The [GMA](#) definition of a Plan is:

"Comprehensive land use plan," "comprehensive plan," or "plan" means a generalized coordinated land use policy statement of the governing body of a county or city that is adopted pursuant to this chapter."¹

Thus, the Bainbridge Island Comprehensive Plan is a "policy statement" that provides important direction to a variety of city actions, including, but not limited to, the adoption of its capital budget and its development regulations. However, the Plan is not a "land use control" which means that it is not designed or intended to be applied directly to development permits.

The [GMA](#) definition of development regulations is:

"Development regulations" or "regulation" means the controls placed on development or land use activities by a . . . city, including, but not limited to, zoning ordinances, critical areas ordinances, shoreline master programs, official controls, planned unit development ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and binding site plan ordinances together with any amendments thereto . . ."²

The [GMA](#) also states:

"Each county and city that is required or chooses to plan under RCW 36.70A.040 shall perform its activities and make capital budget decisions in conformity with its comprehensive plan."³

The "shall perform its activities" phrase suggests broader application of comprehensive plan policies than simply codes and capital budgets. On Bainbridge Island, the City maintains a number of functional plans, such as the City's utilities plans as well as programs it funds and administers through its budget. The City also coordinates with

other units of local government, e.g., the Bainbridge Island School, Fire, and Parks districts, each of which maintains its own programs and functional or operational plans.

B. How is the Comprehensive Plan used?

The Vision, Guiding Principles and Policies in this section of the Comprehensive Plan provide substantive direction to all of the Plan Elements as well as the City's budget and work program priorities. They also provide direction to the City's functional plans such as its parks, stormwater and utilities plans.

In addition, the Vision, Guiding Principles and Policies communicate the City's priorities to the other units of government responsible for providing services to the Island community. This includes the Bainbridge Island Fire, Park and School Districts, and the Washington State Department of Transportation, all of which prepare functional and operating plans to provide their respective services and facilities to Island residents.

C. Types and degrees of policy direction

The Elements in this Comprehensive Plan consist of Goals and Policies. Goals express the high-rank order values that are most important to the Island community. They are aspirational, frequently describing desired outcomes. The Policies listed under each Goal identify strategies or specific actions to be taken to move the community in the direction of fulfilling the Goal.

Depending on the issue and the Element, the Goals and Policies may provide direction to the City Council, the Planning Commission, the Hearing Examiner and City staff. Some of the actions will take the form of land use or other regulations; others will be capital projects or programs; and still others may take the form of outreach, education, coordination or partnership with citizens, organizations or other units of government.

The goal and policy statements sometimes use very directive verbs, such as "maintain" or "adopt". In other cases, less directive verbs are used, such as "consider" or "encourage." The more directive verbs convey a higher rank order of policy direction. Directive goal or policy language may call for the updating of development regulations, however, that does not convert them into controls or conditions that can be directly applied to a permit decision.⁴

A similar distinction can be made between the auxiliary verbs "should" and "shall." Both terms are used in the Comprehensive Plan and it is intended that both provide substantive direction. The difference in meaning between "should" and "shall" is one of degree rather than kind. As used in this Plan, the word "shall" imparts a higher order of substantive direction than the word "should." However, as with the active verbs, the use of "shall" remains substantive policy direction, not a land use control within the GMA meaning and definitions cited above.

D. How and when may the Comprehensive Plan be amended?

In addition to the eight-year cycle for the periodic review of the Comprehensive Plan, the GMA also includes requirements regarding potential plan amendments in the intervening years. Set forth at RCW 36.70A.130, these include:

- A comprehensive plan may be amended only once in any given calendar year.
- All proposed plan amendments, including those initiated by private parties or by the City, should be considered concurrently to determine the cumulative effect of the proposals.
- Procedures must be adopted for any interested person to suggest amendments to either the Comprehensive Plan or development regulations.
- A city must establish a means by which it will “docket” (i.e., compile and maintain a list) of all suggested plan or development regulation amendments and consider whether or not to adopt them during the amendment process.
- Public participation programs must be developed and followed for proposed amendments or revisions to the Comprehensive Plan or development regulations.
- Exceptions to the once-a-year limitation on plan amendments include: the initial adoption of a subarea plan; the adoption or amendment of a Shoreline Master Program; the amendment of the capital facilities element that occurs concurrently with the adoption of the city budget; when the city is under a remand order from either the Growth Hearings Board of a court; and when the City declares an emergency.

III. Vision, Guiding Principles and Policies

This section contains the Island’s Vision, an aspirational description of the community’s desired future. The values and priorities in the Vision are served and advanced through this Comprehensive Plan and its implementing actions. This section also contains seven guiding principles that connect the Vision to the elements of the Comprehensive Plan. These seven principles affirm, clarify and update the five principles in the 2004 version of the Comprehensive Plan.

The Guiding Principles are at the top of the Plan’s hierarchy of substantive and directive policy. Grouped below and serving each Principle are several Guiding Policies. These provide further specific direction to the Goals and Policies in the Plan’s Elements.

A. Vision

Bainbridge Island is notable for its beauty, its maritime climate, its location between Seattle and the Olympic Peninsula, and its support of the arts. The island consists of beaches and harbors, forests and fields, trails and two-lane country roads, homes and businesses surrounded by the waters of Puget Sound. We are defined as much by the water around us as by the ground beneath our feet.

Bainbridge has a rich natural and cultural history including a long presence of indigenous people, followed more recently by European and Asian immigrants who built timber, maritime and agricultural economies. Contemporary Bainbridge Island is home to a diverse mix of people including farmers, artists, students, business professionals, retirees, and is hospitable to visitors.

The people of Bainbridge aspire to accommodate inevitable growth while protecting the wildlife habitat, watersheds, shorelines, open space, and the air and water quality of the island. We welcome innovative ideas, industrious business people, new and traditional cultures, and people of all ages and backgrounds. We strive to provide quality housing, education, health care, and business, recreational, and cultural opportunities for all of our inhabitants. We embrace local food sources, renewable energy, and paths for biking and walking.

Global warming and the impacts of climate change are major issues for our generation, and will be for the foreseeable future. We recognize that it will be challenging to adapt to the environmental and economic changes that we will face in the decades ahead. The good will, imagination, and pragmatism of our citizens will foster a compassionate environment in which we listen to, learn from, and engage with all the people who live here. There is no word for exclusion in the Lushootseed language of Puget Sound.

The people of Bainbridge Island understand that it will take an active approach to not only maintain, but restore and enhance the condition of the island if we expect to continue enjoying its bounty. Island residents balance personal interests with concern for the community and the environment. As the island's population increases, we will manage our lands and waters thoughtfully, with innovative planning policies.

Bainbridge citizens embrace the challenges of our future. That future calls on residents and visitors alike to actively participate in shaping a joyful, stable, and sustainable community, where its present and future generations are stewards of the land and keepers of its culture.

B. FIVE OVERRIDING PRINCIPLES THAT GUIDE THE PLAN

Principle #1 - Preserve the special character of the Island, which includes the small town atmosphere of downtown Winslow, forested areas, meadows, farms, marine views, scenic and winding roads that support all forms of transportation.

Guiding Policy 1.1

Adopt an island-wide conservation plan⁵ to identify and apply effective strategies to preserve the natural and scenic qualities that make the Island a special place.

Guiding Policy 1.2

Accommodate new growth in central places that meet the Island's identified needs for housing, services and jobs while respecting conservation and environmental protection priorities.

Guiding Policy 1.3

Identify appropriate land use patterns and building form alternatives to achieve the Island's priorities for both conservation and development.

Principle # 2 - Protect the water resources of the Island.

Guiding Policy 2.1

Manage water resources for Bainbridge Island for present and projected land uses, recognizing that Island's aquifers and other water resources are the sole source of our water supply.⁶

Guiding Policy 2.2

Preserve and protect the functions and values of the Island's aquatic resources, including, but not limited to, its aquifers.⁷

Guiding Policy 2.3

Monitor the impacts of water drawdowns on individual aquifers and the effects on the large number of private wells and adjacent aquifers.

Guiding Policy 2.4

Anticipate and prepare for the consequences of sea level rise.⁸

Guiding Policy 2.5

Maintain the Island's comprehensive program of water resource data gathering and analysis.⁹

Principle # 3 - Foster diversity and meet the human needs of the residents of the Island, its most precious resource.

Guiding Policy 3.1

Ensure a variety of housing choices to meet the needs of present and future residents in all economic segments and promote by promoting plans, projects and proposals to create a significant amount of affordable housing.¹⁰

Guiding Policy 3.2

Maintain the well being of all members of the Island community, where all Islanders feel connected to the community and where each individual has opportunities to contribute to the community.¹¹

Guiding Policy 3.3

Support, protect, and enhance the value of the arts and humanities as essential to education, quality of life, economic vitality, broadening of mind and spirit, and as treasure in trust for our descendants.¹²

Principle # 4 - Consider the costs and benefits to Island residents and property owners should be considered in making land use decisions.

Guiding Policy 4.1

Respect private property rights protected by the State and U.S. Constitutions.

Guiding Policy 4.2

Recognize that private property rights are not absolute, but must be balanced with necessary and reasonable regulation to protect the public health, safety and welfare.

Principle # 5 – ~~Development should be based on the principle that the~~
Recognize that the Island’s environmental resources are finite and must be maintained at a sustainable level. the Island’s finite environmental resources.

Guiding Policy 5.1

Preserve and enhance the Island’s natural systems, natural beauty and environmental quality.¹³

Guiding Policy 5.2

Protect and enhance wildlife, fish resources and natural ecosystems on and around Bainbridge Island.¹⁴

Guiding Policy 5.3

Identify strategies and actions to mitigate and adapt to the effects of climate change.

Principle #6 Meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.¹⁵

Guiding Policy 6.1

Look beyond the state’s mandated 20-year plan horizon in order to recognize the longer term life cycles of natural systems, green building practices, and public infrastructure investments.

Guiding Policy 6.2

Advance social equity on the Island by addressing basic human needs, including affordable housing, personal health and safety, mobility, and access to human services.

Guiding Policy 6.3

Seek appropriate ways to provide economic opportunities for all community residents within a diversified Island economy.

Principle #7 - Support the Island’s Guiding Principles and Policies through the City’s organizational and operating budget decisions.

Guiding Policy 7.1

Promote *good governance*¹⁶ and an Island culture of citizenship, stewardship and civic engagement.¹⁷

Guiding Policy 7.2

Update each City department’s work program annually, allocate sufficient time and resources and provide needed policy direction to achieve consistency with and implement the Comprehensive Plan.¹⁸

Guiding Policy 7.3

Grow a diversified¹⁹ *vibrant economy*.²⁰

Guiding Policy 7.4

Nurture a *healthy and attractive community*.²¹

Guiding Policy 7.5

Build *reliable infrastructure and connected mobility*.²²

Guiding Policy 7.6

Grow a *green, well-planned community*.²³

Guiding Policy 7.7

Maintain a *safe city*.²⁴

¹ RCW 36.70A.030(4).

² RCW 36.70A.030(7).

³ RCW 36.70A.120.

⁴ The Growth Management Hearings Board held in an early case: “While there is an important directive linkage between them, policies (i.e., plans) and regulations are distinct GMA creatures. The Act’s consistency requirements give plans directive effect over regulations, however this does not convert policy documents into land use controls.” *Tulalip v. Snohomish County*, Growth Management

Hearings Board Case No. 99-3-0013, 1/28/00, Final Decision and Order, at p. 4.

⁵ Final Report, City of Bainbridge Island Mayor's 2025 Growth Advisory Committee.

⁶ Plan, Water Resources Element, Goal 1.

⁷ Plan, Environmental Element Aquatic Resources Goal 1, which is also the mandate under the GMA to designate and protect the "functions and values" of ecosystems. RCW 36.70A.060 and .170.

⁸ Plan, Environment Element, Frequently flooded areas, Goal 1.

⁹ Plan, Water Resources Element.

¹⁰ Final Report, City of Bainbridge Island Mayor's 2025 Growth Advisory Committee.

¹¹ Plan, Human Services Element, Framework Statement.

¹² Plan, Cultural Element, Goal submitted for Inclusion.

¹³ Plan, Environment Element, Environment Goal 1.

¹⁴ Plan, Environment Element, Fish and Wildlife Goal 1.

¹⁵ This is the definition of sustainability most frequently used by American cities in plans, strategies, programs and budgets. It was published first in 1987 in a United Nations report titled "Our Common Future." It is often referred to as the Bruntland Commission Report, after its Chair Gro Harlem Bruntland.

¹⁶ *Good Governance* is one of the six desired results of the City's Council's adopted budget priorities adopted in 2014.

¹⁷ *A culture of stewardship, citizenship and civic engagement* was one of the key issues to address listed in the City Council's adopted scope for the Plan Update.

¹⁸ This proposed Guiding Policy expresses the City's commitment to continually take actions to be included in its planning work program and the work programs of all city departments, to meet its statutory duties under the GMA to be consistent with and implement the comprehensive plan. RCW 36.70A.040(3) provides in part that "each city located within the county shall adopt a comprehensive plan under this chapter and development regulations that are consistent with and implement the comprehensive plan" RCW 36.70A.120 also states: "Each county and city that is required or chooses to plan under RCW 36.70A.040 shall perform its activities and make capital budget decisions in conformity with its comprehensive plan."

¹⁹ Plan, Economic Element, Goal 1, uses the important term "diversify". Adding that word to this Guiding Policy makes clear that the value of economic development does not mean any large or single solution.

²⁰ *Vibrant Economy* is one of the six desired results of the City Council's adopted budgeting priorities.

²¹ *Healthy and Attractive Community* is one of the six desired results of the City Council's adopted budget priorities..

²² *Reliable Infrastructure and connected mobility* is one of the six desired results of the City Council's adopted budget priorities.

²³ *A Green, well-planned community* is one of the six desired results of the City's adopted PBB.

²⁴ *Safe City* is one of the six desired results of the City's adopted PBB.