



Planning & Economic Development

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LAND USE AND ZONING

WHO REGULATES LAND USE IN WA STATE?

Local, state, federal, and tribal governments all have some authority to regulate land use in Washington. The Growth Management Act (GMA), RCW 36.70A, created by the Legislature in 1990, gives the primary responsibility for this process to state and local (city and county) governments. GMA lays out broad state goals for growth. These goals are implemented by local governments through comprehensive plans. These plans address issues such as the identification and protection of critical areas, zoning and land use areas, sprawl reduction and the provision of public infrastructure.

Zoning and environmental conditions influence land use permitting by determining what can be built where. Federal, state, and local governments all regulate environmentally sensitive areas such as streams, lakes, wetlands, wildlife habitat and aquifer recharge areas. Local and state governments also regulate development in certain critical areas, for example, steep slopes or areas vulnerable to erosion, floods, or landslides.

If your property contains environmentally sensitive areas, development permits will likely require you protect those areas by avoiding them. If avoiding the areas are not possible, you may be allowed to mitigate for any damages to the environment. If your property contains certain critical areas, local zoning regulations may prohibit or restrict development in them to protect the environment and public safety

LOCAL RESPONSIBILITY

Many city departments regulate development, but the planning department usually coordinates the process. Contacting the planning department is usually the best place to start when you are considering development. City oversight includes the following.

- **Critical Areas** are regulated by the [Critical Areas Ordinance](#) (CAO) found within the Poulsbo Municipal Code (PMC). Critical areas include: wetlands, critical aquifer recharge areas, fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas, frequently flooded areas, and geologically hazardous areas. The CAO specifies how the areas are determined, what types of activities or impacts are allowed, and what types of buffers and mitigation are required for unavoidable impacts. You will likely need to do a specific inventory of any critical areas on your property. See [Critical Areas](#) handout.
- **The Shoreline Management Act (SMA)** regulates activities along shorelines. Poulsbo administers the SMA through

the [Shoreline Master Program](#) (SMP). Under the PMC, shorelines of the city include Liberty Bay, Dogfish Creek, and their associated [shorelands](#) extending 200 feet landward, as measured on a horizontal plane from ordinary high water. The extent of shoreline jurisdiction on any individual lot, parcel or tract shall be determined by a field investigation and survey, and is the sole responsibility of the applicant. See [Shoreline](#) handout.

- **State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA)** review is required for projects that involve state or local agency permitting, licensing, funding, or adoption of a policy, plan or program. Information provided during the SEPA process helps agencies, applicants and the public understand how a project will affect the environment. You begin the process by submitting an [environmental checklist](#) to the agency which will be leading the SEPA process, usually the local planning department. See [SEPA](#) handout.
- **Zoning** may cover lot sizes, allowed uses, site plan requirements (e.g., building placement and height, parking, landscaping, signage) or other requirements such as tree retention and building design. The purpose of zoning is to protect health safety, and general welfare.

Other common local permits include land grading, mechanical (e.g., installation of sprinklers and heating systems), electrical, plumbing, and building construction.

LAND USE AND ZONING MAPS

The Comprehensive Plan [Land Use](#) Map depicts a long-term vision of how and where the city will grow and change over the next 20 years to accommodate expected population and job growth.

Decisions about land use designations directly guide subsequent decisions about zoning. The City's [Zoning Ordinance Map](#) tells us how land can be used and what can be built on any given property today. Zones are more specific than the land use designations and come with a set of rules (included in the City's [Zoning Ordinance](#)) that clarify what uses are allowed (e.g., residences, businesses, manufacturing), how buildings may be developed or changed (e.g., maximum heights, setbacks), and site development (parking, landscaping)

The [Land Use](#) Map and the [Zoning Ordinance Map](#) are like a leader and a follower. The land use map is the leading map and the zoning map is the following map. The zoning map can "catch up" to the plan map, but it can't go past it.

Disclaimer: this handout should not be used as a substitute for codes and regulations. The applicant/property owner is responsible for compliance with all code and rule requirements, whether or not described here. Please see the City of Poulsbo Municipal Code for complete text and requirements.

