

## Purpose

Public participation is a hallmark of the Growth Management Act (GMA) and is an integral part of Pierce County's planning process. The focal point of County long-range planning is the County's Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan is a land use policy document that guides County decisions related to growth and development of unincorporated Pierce County. The policies of the Comprehensive Plan articulate a vision of Pierce County and establish a blueprint for future population and employment growth, economic development, transportation, capital facilities, and protection of natural resources. The GMA (RCW 36.70A.140) calls for "early and continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations implementing such plans." The purpose of the public participation program is to inform residents, property and business owners, and other stakeholders on how to learn about or initiate proposed land use changes, and how to provide feedback to County decision makers. The goal of the program is to encourage public input and to foster diverse viewpoints for the County to consider before taking final action on amendments and revisions to the Comprehensive Plan and implementing developing regulations.

## GMA Long-Range Planning Activities

Pierce County's GMA long-range planning activities include amendments and revisions to the Comprehensive Plan, community plans, and development regulations that implement the plans. The process for these activities is a "bottom up" effort, involving early and continuous public participation throughout the planning process. During the process, the Planning Commission and County Council consider public input via public testimony and written comments. Below are descriptions of each of the County's GMA long-range planning activities for which the public has opportunity to participate. Land Use Advisory Committees (LUACs) may also assist Planning and Public Works in projects and studies related to refinement, improvement, or augmentation of the Comprehensive Plan and implementing regulations.

## Comprehensive Plan and Community Plan Periodic Update

Pierce County's Comprehensive Plan is the starting point for any planning process and the centerpiece of local planning. This long-range planning document contains goals and policies, which are intended to guide concerning future land use, community services and facilities, parks and recreation, environmentally sensitive areas and rural lands, and economic development for the County. The GMA requires the County to periodically review and, if needed, revise its comprehensive plan and development regulations every eight years to respond to changes in state law and to new information about land use, community needs, and population growth. As Pierce County continues to grow and change, the County's comprehensive plan is intended to change and reflect the needs and vision of the County.

Community Plans are subarea plans within defined geographic areas and are part of the Pierce County Comprehensive Plan. They are intended to be a supplement to and refinement of the Comprehensive Plan policies. Community planning boards serve as a sounding board for a community in the development of a new community plan. The Planning Commission reviews and makes formal recommendations to the County Council on proposed community plans and their associated development regulations. Community Plans represent the unique characteristics of each community planning area. Community Plans may, if necessary, be updated through the periodic update process. LUACs oversee and make recommendations to the Planning Commission for Community Plan updates.

Consistent with the GMA, the County will provide notice of periodic update amendments and revisions to the Comprehensive Plan, community plans, and implementing development regulations. The public will have opportunities for involvement and is encouraged to participate in the periodic update process. Public participation opportunities may be expanded and tailored to the proposed updates depending on the nature and scope of the updates.

## Comprehensive Plan Amendments

Amendments to the Pierce County's Comprehensive Plan are considered every two years and any concurrent change to development regulations must be consistent with and implement the Comprehensive Plan. The County may consider amendments more frequently under the following circumstances:

1. The initial adoption or subsequent update of a subarea plan (community plan).
2. Adoption or amendment of a shoreline master program.
3. The amendment of the capital facilities element.
4. Whenever an emergency exists.
5. To resolve an appeal of the comprehensive plan.
6. Certain amendments regarding Agricultural Resource Lands and redesignation of Rural 10 to Rural Farm.

## Development Regulations

The Pierce County Comprehensive Plan sets the policy framework for accommodating and directing growth and development in unincorporated portions of the County and, in turn, serves as the basis for development regulations such as zoning and permit requirements. Development regulations are the controls placed on development or land use activities by the County, including, but not limited to, zoning, subdivisions, critical areas, landscaping, planned unit developments, signs, etc. These regulations implement the Comprehensive Plan and must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan.

Development regulations may be initiated by County Council or Planning Commission requests. Citizen advisory boards including LUACs, and property owner(s) may petition the Planning Commission to initiate an amendment to development regulations. The County will hold at least one public hearing to receive public comment before the Planning Commission and County Council, and each public meeting will be noticed and held in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act and the GMA. Public notices for development regulation amendments will reference the specific community plan areas that will be affected.

## How to Get Involved

Pierce County employs a two-year planning cycle for Comprehensive Plan amendments. Each cycle begins in an even numbered year and ends in an odd numbered year. Any interested person may, at any time, propose amendments and revisions to the Comprehensive Plan, community plans, or any of the plan's implementing development regulations. Such requests will only be processed concurrently in the same planning cycle and no more frequently than once every two years consistent with Pierce County Code Chapter 19C.10 Procedures for Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan. Proposed amendments to development regulations not made concurrently with Comprehensive Plan Amendments may be initiated at any time and will be subject to the application requirements and procedures prescribed in Pierce County Code Chapter 2.03.

## Pierce County Code Public Participation Requirements

To ensure meeting the GMA public participation requirements, Pierce County's provides methods to encourage public participation in the development and amendment of the Comprehensive Plan and implementing development regulations. The methods are located in various locations of the Pierce County Code. The following County statutes provide the processing timeframes, notice requirements, and general procedures for amending the comprehensive plan and development regulations as well as the guidelines for administration of development regulations. These requirements may differ for amendments and revisions to the Comprehensive Plan and implementing development regulations. In some circumstances, additional methods of encouraging public participation may be tailored to specific projects depending on their nature and scope.

- [Chapter 1.28 Rules of Procedure – Pierce County Council](#)
- [Chapter 2.03 Amendment to Development Regulations](#)
- [Chapter 2.45 Land Use Advisory Commissions](#)
- [Chapter 2.78 Planning Commission](#)
- [Chapter 19C.10 Procedures for Amendments to the Comprehensive Plan](#)
- [Chapter 19C.20 Procedures for Developing New Community Plans and Community Plan Updates](#)

This program is intended to supplement, and not limit or replace, existing County authority and procedures for the adoption of legislation, including, but not limited to, the adoption of amendments and revisions to the Comprehensive Plan and implementing development regulations. Errors in exact compliance with this public participation program shall not render invalid any Comprehensive Plan Amendment, implementing development regulation, or other legislation adopted in accordance with this program as long as the spirit of the program is observed, unless otherwise provided by applicable state or federal law.

## Get Involved

Public participation is a two-way process. Citizens provide information that is needed to develop and implement the Comprehensive plan and development regulations, and at the same time, receive information about planning and land use. An informed community and informed leaders create a better framework in planning.

**Stay informed** – Receive email notifications by signing up to receive automatic emails about upcoming meetings and information related to the County's GMA long-range planning activities.

**Attend public meetings and provide comments** – Meetings, such as Planning Commission and County Council hearings, provide opportunities for public comment and participation. Your attendance can directly impact the decision-making process. Meetings will be advertised, posted locally, and will be posted on the County's website.

## Public Comment in the Decision-Making Process

The Pierce County Planning and Public Works Department oversees the public involvement in the local GMA planning process, but, ultimately, it is the Pierce County Council that decides on the direction and content of policy documents or regulations that they determine to be in the community's best interest, as shown in the following graphic. This decision-making process also includes the Planning Commission and, at times, the advisory committees.

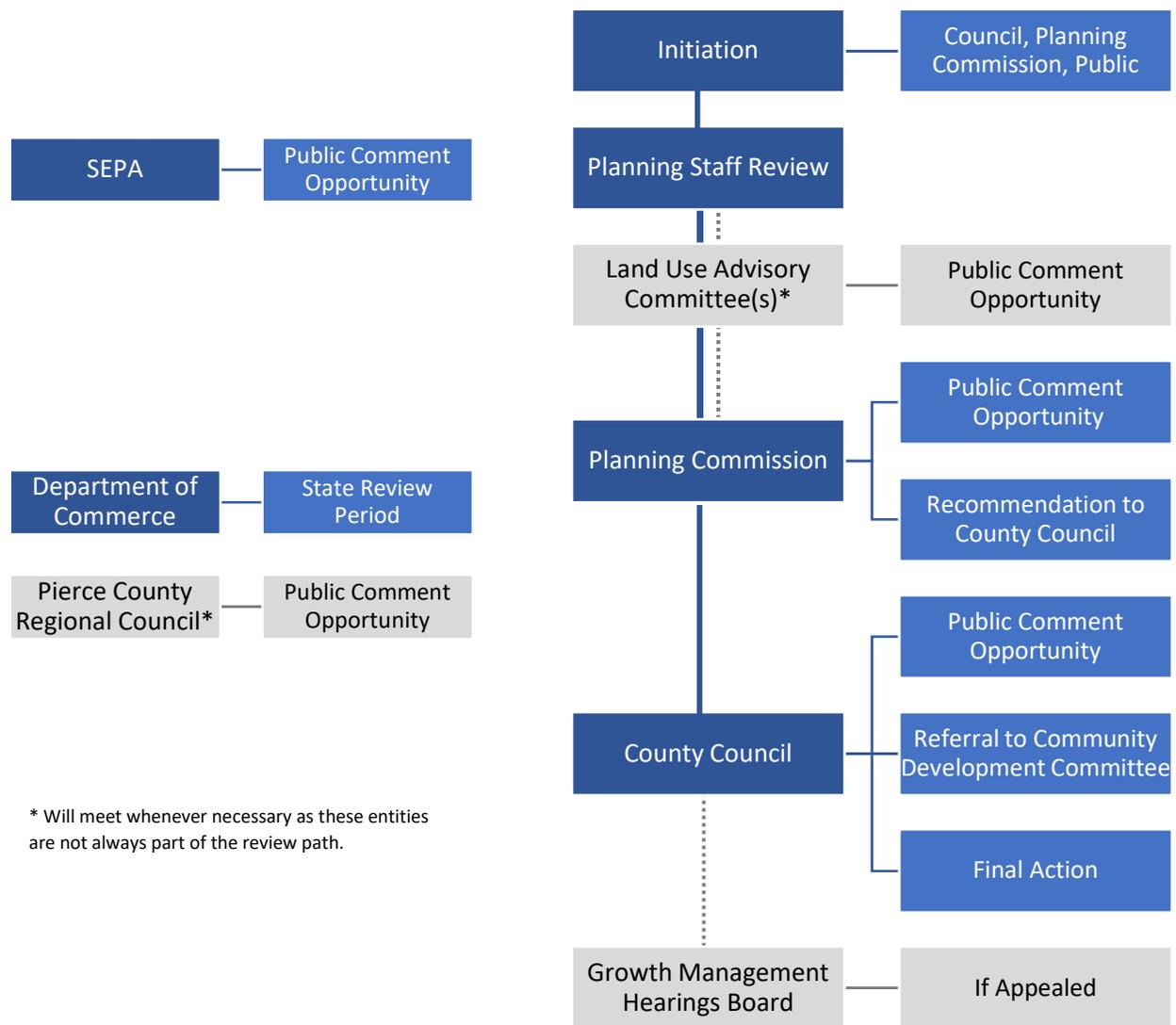
The land use advisory committees (LUACs) may be called upon to review and consider policy-related land use matters and provide recommendations to the Planning Commission such as the Comprehensive Plan and community plans. Regulatory changes are not required to be reviewed by LUACs; although there may be instances where a LUAC may be asked to assist in reviewing regulatory changes consistent with County Code Chapter 2.45.110. The LUACs' review is documented and available for public review.

The Planning Commission reviews and make recommendations to the County Council on the amendments and revisions to the Comprehensive Plan and implementing development regulations. In their review and consideration of policy-related matters, the Planning Commission gives due consideration to the recommendations of the LUACs. The Planning Commission, however, is not bound to these recommendations and is free to provide their own recommendations to the County Council. After review and public meeting, the Planning Commission provides its recommendations to the County Council for final action. The Planning Commission’s review is documented and available for public review.

Each of these meetings during the adoption process are subject to the Open Public Meetings Act, and there is opportunity for the public to participate and provide comment.

The Pierce County Regional Council provides review and recommendation on urban growth area amendments through the comprehensive plan amendment process. There is an opportunity for public testimony and comment at these meetings.

**Comprehensive Planning/Regulatory Amendment(s) Public Participation Process**



\* Will meet whenever necessary as these entities are not always part of the review path.

For further information, please contact the Pierce County Planning and Public Works Department Long Range Planning, (253) 798-3736 or visit [www.piercecountywa.gov/6854/Public-Participation-Program](http://www.piercecountywa.gov/6854/Public-Participation-Program).