

## Chapter 5

# VISION, GOALS AND POLICIES

## Overview

There are three levels of visions, goals and policies to guide the development of comprehensive plans:

- Washington State Growth Management Act Goals
- Whatcom County Visions, Goals and Policies
- Birch Bay Community Visions, Goals and Policies

## Washington State Growth Management Act Goals

In 1990, the Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A) and the accompanying Chapter 365-190 WAC - Minimum Guidelines To Classify Agriculture, Forest, Mineral Lands And Critical Areas. The Growth Management Act (GMA) provides thirteen goals to guide the development and adoption of comprehensive plans and the development regulations of those counties and cities that are required or choose to plan under [RCW 36.70A.040](#). The goals are:

1. **Urban growth:** Encourage development in urban areas where adequate public facilities and services exist or can be provided in an efficient manner.
2. **Reduce sprawl:** Reduce the inappropriate conversion of undeveloped land into sprawling, low-density development.
3. **Transportation:** Encourage efficient multimodal transportation systems that are based on regional priorities and coordinated with county and city comprehensive plans.
4. **Housing:** Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population of this state, promote a variety of residential densities and housing types, and encourage preservation of existing housing stock.

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5. **Economic development:** Encourage economic development throughout the state that is consistent with adopted comprehensive plans, promote economic opportunity for all citizens of this state, especially for unemployed and for disadvantaged persons, and encourage growth in areas experiencing insufficient economic growth, all within the capacities of the state's natural resources, public services, and public facilities.
6. **Property rights:** Private property shall not be taken for public use without just compensation having been made. The property rights of landowners shall be protected from arbitrary and discriminatory actions.
7. **Permits:** Applications for both state and local government permits should be processed in a timely and fair manner to ensure predictability.
8. **Natural resource industries:** Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries, including productive timber, agricultural, and fisheries industries. Encourage the conservation of productive forest lands and productive agricultural lands, and discourage incompatible uses.
9. **Open space and recreation:** Encourage the retention of open space and development of recreational opportunities, conserve fish and wildlife habitat, increase access to natural resource lands and water, and develop parks.
10. **Environment:** Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.
11. **Citizen participation and coordination:** Encourage the involvement of citizens in the planning process and ensure coordination between communities and jurisdictions to reconcile conflicts.
12. **Public facilities and services:** Ensure that those public facilities and services necessary to support development shall be adequate to serve the development at the time the development is available for occupancy and use without decreasing current service levels below locally established minimum standards.

13. **Historic preservation:** Identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historical or archaeological significance.
14. **Shoreline Management.** Per RCW 36.70A.480 Shorelines of the State, the goals and policies of the Shoreline Management Act, as set forth in RCW 90.58.020, are added as one of the goals of the Growth Management Act.

### **Whatcom County Visions, Goals and Policies**

In April 1993, the Whatcom County Council adopted County-wide Planning Policies (Revised March 1997). These policies were formulated in conjunction with all of the incorporated cities of Whatcom County and are built into each element of the County's 1997 Comprehensive Plan.

Also, in April 1993, the County Executive appointed a cross-sectional citizen committee to a project called Whatcom County: The Next Generation. Their charge was to produce a graphic and written description of what the people of Whatcom County wanted the county to be in the year 2010. The committee used a variety of techniques to accomplish their mission including questionnaires at the County Fair, distribution of surveys through various organizations, and a statistically valid county-wide phone survey. The end result was a set of Visioning Community Value Statements.

### **Birch Bay Community Visions, Goals and Policies**

The Birch Bay Vision, Goals and Policies for this plan are derived from:

- Discussion at neighborhood and Steering Committee meetings held to date.
- Past Comprehensive Plans.
- The Birch Bay Community Vision Statement from the Birch Bay Economic Development Action Plan, September 2000.
- The Birch Bay Community Attitudes Survey by Hebert & Associates, June 2000.

- Washington State GMA Goals and Whatcom County Goals and Policies.

### Vision Statement

Birch Bay's Community Goals and Policies are based on the following Vision Statement.

**Preamble.** The Vision Statement is a verbal snapshot of Birch Bay Community in the year 2020. It summarizes the desired character and characteristics of our Community and provides the ultimate goal for all of our Community planning and development efforts. The vision statement is intended to be realistic, yet is more than a mere prediction. Rather than describing the features of Birch Bay Community as we think they are likely to be, it expresses what we would like our Community to become and believe we can achieve. It acknowledges past and current trends in Birch Bay Community's relationship to external factors, but also assumes an ability to shape the future in a positive way. The Vision Statement, therefore, is optimistic; affirming and enhancing the best of our past and existing attributes and aspiring for those we now lack but hope to have.

**We the People of Birch Bay.** We the people of Birch Bay hereby set forth a vision statement and pledge our commitment to achieve a common vision for the future of the Birch Bay Community. We the people of Birch Bay have identified a set of central values which we as a Community hold in common:

- We believe that the essence of a prosperous and vibrant Community is found not in its structures but in the collective spirit of those who live and work within the Community. We hold that the built aspects of a community - its transportation network, utility system, buildings and other facilities - should not be considered ends in themselves, but as means for enhancing the quality of life and enriching the human spirit.
- We respect the picturesque setting of Birch Bay and believe that any development along its shores must achieve harmony between this natural and man-made environment.
- We believe that certain controls on the choices of individual

action are appropriate to ensure that the community's best interests are realized.

- We believe that human activities should be considered as one component of a complex system of relationships among living things and their environment and that we have a responsibility to ourselves and to future generations to seek a mutually supportive balance within this system.

### Our Vision for Birch Bay

#### **1. Residential, Recreational, Resort Community.**

Birch Bay in 2020 is an attractive, vibrant, and inviting Community in which to live, work and vacation. The Community has maintained a balance between residential development and tourism related activities. Our neighborhoods are secure and stable, creating the foundation for our quality of life. They also have variety both in population and land use. People from all economic, age and ethnic groups live here. New businesses and high-tech industries have moved into our Community, providing shopping and employment opportunities for our residents. Serving the tourist population continues to be one of the primary economic activities of the Community. Tourism that was primarily a summer phenomenon is now occurring year round. Recreational vehicle parks continue to be popular, particularly during the summertime. The commercial area of the shoreline, has become a blend of successful gift shops, art galleries and restaurants, some of which combine first floor commerce with upper story residences and/or office spaces. In addition, the shoreline supports hotel and condominium housing which have been carefully located to protect views and provide on-site open spaces to soften the visual impact of building size.

The people in the Birch Bay Community, in search of self determination and maintenance of its vision come together as the Community of Birch Bay. The Community of Birch Bay has quickly gained prominence among communities in Whatcom County and is widely known as a place where scenic beauty is harmonized with urban development and job creating activities. Birch Bay, the natural saltwater inlet or bay is and remains to be the "soul" and the "heart" of the Community.

**2. Land Use and Development.** Land use and development patterns have changed significantly over the years. Tourist

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related developments such as hotels, motels, time-share condominiums, recreation vehicle parks, restaurants and other tourist related service facilities have been built along Birch Bay Drive, capturing the marine view of Birch Bay. The new tourist service related facilities have replaced some of the existing single-family residential uses along Birch Bay Drive. At the same time, much of Birch Bay Drive remains in single-family residential use. Commercial development, serving the resident population, is dispersed throughout the Community at specific nodes along the intersections of major roads and streets. Newly created employment centers, including high-tech industry, have chosen to locate adjacent to the numerous wetland areas creating idyllic campus-like setting. Residential development has retained its high-ground location, capturing the views of Birch Bay. Additional residential development has taken place in planned communities or subdivisions ranging in size of a few homes to hundreds.

**3. Public Spaces.** Public spaces, namely parks, open space, pedestrian and bicycle trails, and recreation sites have increased significantly during the past twenty years. The new pedestrian and bicycle trail, running from the Canadian border to Bellingham and south, has gained in popularity. Pedestrians and bicyclists along the trail stop at Birch Bay for restaurant and other services, contributing to the economy of the Community. Open space has been set aside and parks and recreation facilities have tended to locate near or adjacent to wetland sites. Appreciation and respect for Birch Bay historic and archeological cultural resources has been woven into community policies and planning.

**4. Transportation.** East-west traffic movement between Birch Bay and I-5, that has been a problem for years, has improved significantly. Birch Bay - Lynden Road and Grandview Road, have been widened by providing adequate shoulders and center left-turn lanes. Blaine Road also functions as a north-south collector/distributor road taking the traffic load off Birch Bay Drive, leaving it for local access traffic and for bicycles and pedestrians. A number of pay parking lots have appeared east of Birch Bay Drive, camouflaged and tucked away behind commercial facilities with their storefronts facing Birch Bay Drive. Bus service has improved considerably, enabling workers to travel to out-of-the-area job locations in Semiahmoo, Blaine, BP and Bellingham. Pedestrian and bicycle trails have become an integral part of all major road improvements. For example, along the trail, bicyclists can now travel, in their own right-of-way from the Canadian border to Bellingham and further south. Birch Bay Drive, which used to function as a north-south arterial road, now has

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resemblance to a beach-front promenade, integrating the people oriented development on the east side of the Drive with the water oriented activities on the west side.

**5. Utilities.** Endless supply of fresh water, that was taken for granted many years ago, no longer exists. The Birch Bay Water and Sewer District has been able to meet the growing fresh water demand by a combination of increasing its supply, curtailing its use by conservation measures and using treated wastewater to irrigate golf courses and supply industrial users. The wastewater collection system has been expanded and the treatment plant has been enlarged. All of the troubled septic systems along Drayton Harbor have been corrected, either by connecting them to the sewer system or by modernizing their operations through technological advances. Improved utility systems have significantly improved the water quality conditions in Drayton Harbor. Oyster growers are again bringing in abundant healthy crops.

**6. Education.** Birch Bay now has a school. The Blaine School District has built an elementary school in the area and has named it Birch Bay School. It is centrally located, adjacent to other civic buildings and recreational facilities. The school is a high-tech center, not only for elementary students but also for adults taking evening courses in arts and other humanities and improving their internet skills. The school is also equipped with a sizable auditorium and meeting rooms, functioning as an after-school community center. Fiber optic cable service that was a rarity a few years ago can now be found spread throughout the Community.

**7. Public Safety.** Crime that periodically raises its ugly head in all communities has subsided considerably in the Birch Bay Community as a result of crime prevention education and increased police presence. Further, the Community has matured; neighbors know their neighbors and neighborhood crime watch programs have caught on. Fire service has also improved. Fire and emergency medical response time has decreased considerably due to having constructed additional fire stations and staffing them with full-time fire and emergency medical service personnel. As a result of improved fire services, the fire insurance rates on residential structures has decreased significantly. Fire and police safety seminars are being conducted throughout the community on a regular basis.

**8. Economic Development.** The economy of Birch Bay Community has increased considerably over the years. Tourists demand for hotel and motel space has created additional jobs. Cherry Point continues

to be an important employment center providing jobs to many of the Community's residents. High-tech industry, particularly light manufacturing, has discovered Birch Bay. Small plants and operations have located in commercially zoned areas throughout the Birch Bay Community, providing year-round family wage jobs. The additional population, jobs in the hotel industry, high-tech, and light manufacturing, all have created additional jobs in the service industry, such as restaurants, convenience and specialty stores, personal services operations, and services to businesses and residences.

### **Birch Bay Community Goals and Policies:**

#### **A. Community and Civic Identity**

- Goal CC 1: To enact planning goals, policies and regulations that fulfill the Birch Bay sense of place established in the Community Vision Statement.
- Goal CC 2: To establish and maintain neighborhoods that protect and enhance visions shared by residents of each neighborhood.
- Goal CC 3: To establish gateway entries that initiate a sense of the community's appreciation of its natural setting and friendliness.
- Goal CC 4: To create a civic center(s) that provides public leadership by example for private development and that provides a vibrant sense of community by emphasizing open space, landscaping, views and the provision of quality community and cultural events.
- Goal CC 5: To assure that commercial and residential development along the shoreline reflects the community's commitment to stewardship of the beach environment.
- Goal CC 6: To integrate a high standard of pedestrian access in residential, commercial, public facility and road planning.

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Goal CC 7: To recognize the importance of having landscaping and street tree programs fully and cohesively integrated into public and private development.

### **B. Land Use**

Goal LU 1: To encourage development that fosters the community's long range vision of blending tourism related commercial use of land while maintaining a quality residential atmosphere.

Policy LU-1a: Provide sufficient and appropriately located residential and commercial lands. (WCCP)

Policy LU-1b: Provide a range of land uses which considers locational and market factors as well as required quantities of land. (WCCP)

Policy LU-1c: Assure that commercial development be contained within identified commercial nodes in order to avoid lineal commercial strips along arterials.

Policy LU-1d: Recognize the importance of tourism marketing that accentuates an appreciation of the aesthetics and natural features of the marine environment and its influence on various types of development.

Policy LU-1e: In accordance with community goals for a residential and passive tourism atmosphere, place requirements on development which provide an emphasis on pedestrian access, view protection and regulations regarding upkeep of RVs and second homes.

Policy LU-1f: Discourage non-resort commercial activity along the shoreline other than

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that needed to provide for tourism related services.

Policy LU-1g: To avoid sprawl, adopt minimum residential densities of 4 units per developable acre in single-family residential areas and 10 units per developable acre in multi-family areas.

Policy LU-1h: Require land owners who obtain increased density through UGA expansion to purchase or transfer development rights from TDR sending areas designated under the Whatcom County Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) Program.

Goal LU 2: To encourage development that complements each neighborhood's existing and/or desired character.

Policy LU-2a: Identify and protect cultural and physical assets of each neighborhood. These assets should be defined through periodic neighborhood surveys and workshops.

Policy LU-2b: Maintain neighborhood character by enacting flexible design standards and incentives that ensure compatibility as infill occurs.

Policy LU-2c: Provide Planned Unit Development, density bonuses and clustering regulations that encourage preservation and enhancement of neighborhood values and assets.

### **C. Housing**

Goal HO 1: To provide a mix of housing that reflects the residential and resort atmosphere of the community and that enhances individual neighborhood vitality.

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Policy HO-1a: Provide for a range of income levels. In addition, there should be diversity in design while maintaining a commitment to quality.

Policy HO-1b: To encourage and provide incentives for housing projects that preserve natural resources, view sheds and wildlife habitat.

Policy HO-1c: To encourage and provide incentives for housing projects that help to foster pedestrian and bicycle access to both neighborhood commercial centers and community facilities.

Policy HO-1d: To encourage and provide incentives that emphasize energy efficient homes, businesses and community facilities.

Goal HO 2: To recognize that a key component to achieving the community's vision is the manner in which affordable housing is provided and maintained.

Policy HO-2a: Provide incentives and subsidies to preserve, while enhancing, existing affordable housing.

Policy HO-2b: Encourage multifamily and/or smaller lot size housing that meets the needs of special populations and that are located near support services and community facilities.

Policy HO-2c: Explore all available federal, state, local and private options for financing affordable and special needs housing.

Policy HO-2d: Implement programs and regulations for education, encouragement and enforcement related to the upkeep of

permanent and seasonal single family houses and mobile homes.

**D. Shorelines**

Goal SL 1: To protect and enhance Birch Bay’s shorelines for the benefit of current and future generations.

Policy SL-1a: Recognize that Birch Bay, from Point Whitehorn to Birch Point, is the only Whatcom County marine shoreline designated by the Washington State Shoreline Management Program as a Shoreline of Statewide Significance and as such requires a heightened sense of stewardship.

Policy SL-1b: Emphasize the existing restrictions on man-made alterations on all near shore lands.

Policy SL-1c: Commercial activity should be discouraged along the shoreline other than that designated for the provision of resort commercial related services.

Policy SL-1d: When considering set backs and height restrictions, allow flexibility in order to protect views, provide open space and public access.

Policy SL-1e: Provide for strategies and funding to delineate in more detail shoreline associated wetlands, stormwater issues, hazardous areas and any other environmentally sensitive issues.

Goal SL 2: To enhance public access to the Birch Bay shoreline while maintaining a commitment to the rights of private property owners.

Policy SL-2a: Commit to increased awareness of and access to inventories and records that

provide information on tideland and nearshore ownerships and covenants.

Policy SL-2b: Do the same for public and quasi public rights-of-way for backshore trail corridors that link to tideland and nearshore public access.

Policy SL-2c: Commit to quantifying and addressing problems experienced by private shoreline property owners due to public access.

Policy SL-2d: Commit to the acquisition or preservation, through other means, of the undeveloped property on the spit at the mouth of Terrell Creek.

Policy SL-2e. Designate important shoreline areas in Birch Bay as “sending areas” for the transfer of development rights under the Whatcom County Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program.

### **E. Critical Areas**

Goal CA 1: To commit to conservation and enhancement of critical areas for long-range benefit to all concerned.

Policy CA-1a: Protect and enhance natural systems that support native fish and wildlife populations and habitat. (WCCP)

Policy CA-1b: Ensure the continued existence and enhancement of fish and wildlife populations by protecting and conserving valuable fish and wildlife habitat. (CAO)

Policy CA-1c: Encourage the preservation of natural river and stream functions that support fish and wildlife populations

and preserve marine shorelines.  
(CAO)

Policy CA-1d: Designate critical areas and buffers in Birch Bay as “sending areas” for the transfer of development rights under the Whatcom County Transfer of Development Rights program.

Policy CA-1e: Adopt an interim ordinance to require:

1. on-site mitigation for all wetland disturbance or fill within the Birch Bay Urban Growth Area until the County updates the Whatcom County Critical Area Ordinance, projected by the end of 2004; and
2. no net loss of area and function of wetlands, including the function of stormwater attenuation/runoff control at a level that existed on each project site in its pre-development condition.

Goal CA 2: To commit to careful management of hazardous areas and flood areas to avoid the high costs of correcting future problems as more development occurs.

**F. Parks, Recreation And Open Space**

Goal PR 1: To provide parks, trails and open spaces, which meet the needs of year round residents and are compatible with neighborhood needs and desires.

Policy PR-1a: Establish the means to assess and refine the recommendations in this plan in more detail.

Policy PR-1b: Assess community park and recreation desires in a systematic manner at least every five years.

Policy PR-1c: Encourage and facilitate individual neighborhood efforts to identify projects that help to create and

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maintain neighborhood character and cohesiveness.

Policy PR-1d Work cooperatively with the City of Blaine, Whatcom County Parks, the State of Washington, and any other governmental agencies and non-profit/private entities to provide and/or enhance recreation facilities and programs.

Policy PR-1e: Integrate park, trail and open space planning with that of transportation, commercial and housing planning.

Policy PR-1f: Assure that acquisitions of lands and easements assume a willing seller.

Goal PR 2: Recognizing that Birch Bay is one of Washington's Shorelines of Statewide Significance, to develop a long-range course of action that provides for high quality recreation use while protecting the resource itself and respecting the rights and ambiance of private property owners.

Policy PR-2a: Coordinate recreation use of the shoreline with the goals and policies of the Shorelines and Critical Areas element of this plan.

Policy PR-2b: Enhance public access and recreation usage in an environmentally sensitive manner.

Policy PR-2c: Devise methods to balance public/private ownership and recreation usage of the shoreline.

Goal PR 3: To recognize Birch Bay's historic and archaeological attributes and identify and encourage the preservation of lands, sites, and structures that have historic or archaeological significance.

Policy PR-3a: Prepare a comprehensive cultural resource inventory that incorporates existing archaeological and historic studies pertaining to the planning area.

Policy PR-3b: Work cooperatively, and in close communication, with agencies and organizations to assure consistency and compliance with local, state, and federal cultural resource policies and legislation. Work closely with local Native American archaeological efforts.

Policy PR-3c: Recognize the potential tourism related economic benefits and the educational value of cultural resource preservation and enhancement. Pursue funding sources to realize these benefits.

### **G. Transportation**

Goal TR 1: To reduce unnecessary vehicle traffic on Birch Bay Drive.

Goal TR 2: To provide safer, more appropriate collector routes to the Birch Bay – Lynden Road, Interstate 5 and the City of Blaine.

Goal TR 3: To coordinate local traffic planning with Blaine, Whatcom County, Washington State, the Whatcom County Transportation Authority and other agencies.

Goal TR 4: To become a community that achieves success in providing viable public and alternative transportation to reduce car traffic.

Policy TR-4a: Provide streets and arterials that maximize pedestrian/bicycle use.

Policy TR-4b: Whenever possible, separate vehicle and pedestrian/bicycle traffic.

Policy TR-4c: Commit to alternative transportation by working closely with WTA and others to establish park-and-ride lots and van pooling programs.

**H. Utilities**

Goal UT 1: To assure that proposed commercial and housing projects do not jeopardize existing utilities service levels.

Goal UT 2: To provide water and sewerage systems that are safe and that adequately provide for projected growth.

Goal UT 3: To coordinate utility planning with that of Blaine, Whatcom County and other agencies.

Goal UT 4: To implement conservation measures that complement the community's commitment to stewardship of resources and that result in long range economic benefit.

Goal UT 5: To assure that utility corridors are located, built and maintained in a manner that provides the least amount of impact possible on neighborhood and community landscapes.

Policy UT-5a: Explore possibilities to maximize joint utility corridors for both above and below ground lines.

Policy UT-5b: Protect viewsheds wherever and whenever possible.

**I. Stormwater Management**

Goal SW 1: To protect water resources and natural drainage systems by controlling the quality and quantity of stormwater runoff.

Goal SW 2: To implement stormwater management policies and

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strategies which recognize the value of wetland areas in solving stormwater problems.

Goal SW 3: To implement on-going monitoring of stormwater so that fresh and salt water quality problems can be identified early on.

### **J. Public Safety & Health**

Goal PS 1: To achieve and maintain a community feeling of living in a safe and secure environment.

Goal PS 2: To reduce fire and police response times

Goal PS 3: To promote and encourage citizen involvement in such things as neighborhood watch programs and emergency awareness.

Goal PS 4: To achieve and maintain high standards in providing normal and emergency medical treatment.

Goal PS 5: To work cooperatively with other agencies, especially the City of Blaine, the Blaine School District and Fire Districts 7 and 13 in providing facilities and programs relating to both community education and health.

### **K. Education**

Goal ED 1: To work with the Blaine School District to locate an elementary school in Birch Bay.

Goal ED 2: To foster educational opportunities for all ages and interests.

Goal ED 3: To work cooperatively with other agencies, especially the City of Blaine, the Blaine School District and Fire Districts 7 and 13 in providing facilities and programs relating to both community education and health.

**L. Economic Development**

- Goal EC 1: To continue the commitment to Birch Bay’s primary economic resource – recreation and tourism commerce – while maintaining a commitment to the residential character of the community.
- Goal EC 2: To coordinate economic development with environmental, resource, and other comprehensive land use and open space policies and measures to enhance the community’s overall quality of life.
- Goal EC 3: To be committed to providing family-wage jobs within the area and to effectively market Birch Bay as a place for businesses that complement the residential and recreational character of the community.
- Goal EC 4: To ensure adequate infrastructure to support existing and future business development and evolving technology.
- Goal EC 5: To support increased public/private partnering among all entities involved with economic development.