

1 Introduction

Gig Harbor is the name of both the *bay* and the *city* in Pierce County. The Puyallup Tribe, who have lived on and cared for these lands have a vital history in the area since time immemorial.

By the 1860s, its sheltered waters and abundant supply of natural resources attracted immigrants from Croatia who launched the commercial fishing and boatbuilding industries. Scandinavians established farms and developed the town's infrastructure. Italians, Germans and others cleared roads, opened schools and local businesses.

Gig Harbor's broad origins have forged a unique heritage that "*the Maritime City*" will work to preserve as it faces the challenges of growth that lie ahead.

1.1 Overview

The Gig Harbor Comprehensive Plan provides a clear and comprehensive framework for managing the city's growth through 2044. Aligned with Washington State's Growth Management Act (GMA), this plan establishes a vision for the city's future while ensuring that Gig Harbor retains its distinct small-town character and natural beauty. As the city continues to evolve, this plan addresses the challenges of growth while embracing opportunities that enhance the quality of life for its residents.

The development of the Comprehensive Plan has been a collaborative effort, with extensive input from residents, local businesses, and stakeholders. Through surveys, workshops, and public hearings, the City of Gig Harbor ensured that the Plan is rooted in the aspirations of the community. The feedback gathered through these engagement efforts shaped the goals, policies, and strategies that guide the city's growth. Public participation remains a cornerstone of this Plan, reflecting a shared vision for the future of Gig Harbor.

1.2 Vision and Purpose

Central to the Comprehensive Plan is a vision for a vibrant, livable city that balances sustainable growth with environmental stewardship and community values. The Plan lays out a strategy to manage population increases, housing demands, and economic development, while protecting the local environment and maintaining the unique qualities that make Gig Harbor a desirable place to live and work. It reflects the community's commitment to preserving its maritime heritage and scenic waterfront while planning for future generations.

The recent 2023–2024 Strategic Plan for the city defined this with the following vision statement:

The City of Gig Harbor leads the way in livability, environmental stewardship, economic vitality, and municipal services.

The Plan is also designed to meet the requirements of the Growth Management Act (GMA), which mandates coordinated planning between cities and counties to address key issues such as land use, transportation, housing, and environmental protection. It also aligns with the Puget Sound Regional Council's VISION 2050 and the Pierce County Countywide Planning Policies, ensuring that Gig Harbor contributes to broader regional objectives, including sustainable development, reduced greenhouse gas emissions, and equitable growth. By aligning local and regional planning efforts, Gig Harbor ensures a cohesive approach to managing urban growth.

1.3 Implementation and Interpretation

Implementation of the Gig Harbor Comprehensive Plan relies on a range of regulatory tools, including the capital facilities plan, zoning codes, design review guidelines, and environmental protection policies. These tools guide land use, infrastructure investments, and development standards to ensure that growth is sustainable and consistent with the city's vision. By coordinating these efforts, Gig Harbor can manage new development while preserving its unique character and meeting the needs of residents.

In addition to providing a framework for guiding future action, the Plan highlights the importance of public engagement and intergovernmental coordination. Ongoing input from the community, local businesses, and regional agencies is crucial to refining the plan as conditions evolve. City staff and officials play key roles in interpreting and applying the plan's goals to individual projects, balancing immediate development impacts with long-term community benefits to ensure Gig Harbor's growth remains aligned with broader regional objectives.

1.4 Guide to the Document

The Comprehensive Plan is divided into key elements, each addressing a specific topic area for long-term planning in the city over the next 20 years. This includes the following elements:

- **Land Use (LU)** guides the city's future development, balancing urban growth with environmental stewardship, housing needs, and economic goals. It outlines land use categories, growth targets, and policies to ensure that development is sustainable, efficient, and aligned with regional plans while maintaining the city's character and quality of life.
- **The Harbor (HB)** focuses on preserving the historical, cultural, and maritime heritage of the downtown waterfront while promoting a vibrant, mixed-use center. Its policies support economic development through tourism, recreation, and marine industries, and maintain public access, protection of scenic views, and sustainable growth of local businesses and housing.
- **Community Design (CD)** provides policies that support vibrant, pedestrian-friendly spaces that reflect the city's small-town charm, natural beauty, and maritime heritage. It promotes well-designed public and private developments that preserve historical structures, enhance connectivity, and support sustainable growth while maintaining the community's unique character.

- **Environment (EN)** includes policies about protecting natural resources, conserving habitats, and promoting sustainable development practices to ensure long-term ecological health. It emphasizes climate resilience, water quality, and low-impact development to balance urban growth with environmental preservation.
- **Housing (HO)** gives policy direction on meeting future housing needs while preserving the city's small-town character. It emphasizes diverse housing options, affordable housing development, and strategies to prevent displacement, ensuring that residents across all income levels have access to adequate and affordable housing.
- **Economic Development (ED)** describes the city's approach to increasing local employment and entrepreneurial opportunities by supporting business attraction, retention, and expansion, as well as fostering workforce development. It emphasizes sustainable employment growth through the reuse of older buildings, promotion of small businesses, and coordination of sufficient infrastructure to accommodate commercial and industrial development, all to build a stronger local economy.
- **Essential Public Facilities (EPF)** outlines the City's processes for identifying and siting facilities that provide critical public services, as required by GMA. This element includes policies for managing these difficult-to-site facilities, ensuring that both publicly and privately operated facilities are appropriately located to serve the community while minimizing negative impacts on local land use, environment, and neighborhoods.
- **Utilities (UT)** provides policies to ensure the provision of essential services such as water, wastewater, electricity, natural gas, telecommunications, and solid waste. It emphasizes coordination with regional providers to support sustainable growth, maintain infrastructure, and ensure reliable service delivery as the city expands.
- **Shoreline Management (SM)** focuses on balancing ecological preservation with sustainable development along the city's waterfront. It aims to protect shoreline habitats, promote water-oriented uses, and ensure public access to the waterfront while supporting the city's historical, recreational, and commercial activities.
- **Parks, Recreation, and Open Space (PR)** provides the city's vision for a diverse and accessible park system that meets the recreational needs of all residents. It emphasizes the development of parks, trails, and open spaces that balance active and passive uses, preserve natural habitats, and promote connectivity, while supporting sustainability and enhancing the community's quality of life.
- **Transportation (TR)** presents policies to strive towards a safe, efficient, and multimodal transportation system that supports the city's growth. It emphasizes enhancing connectivity for walking, biking, and driving, while encouraging the development of infrastructure to meet the needs of a growing community.
- **Capital Facilities (CF)** ensures that essential infrastructure such as water, sewer, stormwater, and emergency services supports current development and future growth. This element outlines policies for managing and financing improvements aligning with the city's land use goals and GMA requirements.
- **Arts + Culture (AC)** emphasizes the importance of arts and cultural activities in enhancing the city's economic vitality, education, and community design. It promotes investment in the arts to foster creativity, preserve local history and traditions, and support a vibrant, inclusive community. The element outlines goals to integrate public art, support creative businesses, provide cultural spaces, and ensure

that arts initiatives are accessible to all residents, reinforcing the unique character and identity of Gig Harbor.

Additionally, there is an **Implementation** element that outlines how the Plan will be put into action over time, including administrative aspects of engagement, amendments, and coordination with Tribal Nations. There is also a **Glossary** of terms included within the Comprehensive Plan for reference.

Each of these elements includes **goals** and **policies**:

- A **goal** is a broad statement about a longer-term aspiration that the city intends to achieve. Goals typically articulate the desired end state or the general policy direction over time, but do not dictate how to achieve the outcomes.
- A **policy** is a specific guideline to direct decision-making to achieve the goals outlined in the Plan. Policies provide the framework for actions and decisions that the city needs to implement and are typically actionable and more precise.