



SPOKANE COUNTY

Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendment Process and Information Outline

What is the annual Comprehensive Plan process?

Annual Comprehensive Plan Amendments, involve a public process to review and amend the Comprehensive Plan and zoning map designations that are attached to specific properties. The review involves evaluating increases in population, services, capital facilities, land use, public hearings and other factors. **By state law, the County is limited to processing applications for such requests once a year.**

If a property owner desires to establish a land use that is not permitted within the existing zoning and Comprehensive Plan designations, they may decide to submit an application to consider amending the comprehensive land use and zoning designation on the property.

It is important to note that when a Comprehensive Plan change is applied for, a zone reclassification is needed to implement most map amendments and, if necessary, is accomplished concurrently through the same process. This application packet contains the necessary information for Comprehensive Plan amendments with concurrent zone reclassifications.

The Growth Management Act

The Washington State Legislature passed the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990 to reduce uncoordinated and unplanned growth that was threatening our environment, economic development and residents' high quality of life. The GMA required fast-growing counties like ours to develop a Comprehensive Growth Management Plan. After an extensive seven year public process, Spokane County adopted such a plan in November 2001. The plan describes how the County will manage its projected population growth over a 20-year period.

All property within Spokane County has been designated with a Comprehensive Plan land use category. These categories are divided into two general areas, urban and rural. A boundary line called the Urban Growth Area (UGA) provides a distinct division between urban and rural areas. Urban Growth Areas are established as part of the growth management process to allow for the efficient provision of urban levels of government services and to reduce sprawl. The areas outside the UGA are primarily rural land uses. The Comprehensive Plan land use categories provide a general description of the type of uses and activities that are allowed, while the zoning classification defines more specific development regulations.

The following Comprehensive Plan categories are applied to property within Spokane County:

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| <u>Comprehensive Plan Land Use Categories</u> | | |
|--|--|-------------------------|
| Urban | Rural | Natural Resource |
| Low Density Residential | Rural Traditional | Large Tract Agriculture |
| Med. Density Residential | Rural-5 | Small Tract Agriculture |
| High Density Residential | Rural Conservation | Forest Land |
| Neighborhood Center | Urban Reserve | Mineral Land |
| Community Center | Rural Activity Centers | |
| Urban Activity Center | Limited Development Area (Commercial or Industrial) | |
| Mixed Use | Limited Development Area (Residential) | |
| Regional Commercial | | |
| Community Commercial | | |
| Neighborhood Commercial | | |
| Heavy Industrial | | |
| Light Industrial | | |

Application Submittal for Comprehensive Plan/Zoning Amendment

The amendment process begins with a required pre-application conference. Requests for pre-application conferences for amendments can be scheduled anytime. However there is a deadline for application submittals. The pre-application conference provides an initial review of the amendment request, an application packet and information about the process and fees.

The next step of the process, after the pre-application conference, is to submit an application. The applicant must submit a complete application packet to the Building and Planning Department including the materials indicated on the Comprehensive Plan Submittal Checklist and pay the fee(s). **Applications for amendments will be accepted on regular business days, from 7:30 a.m. - 4:00 p.m., between January 2 and March 31st of each year.**

Review Process

The application will first be checked for completeness before being accepted. This is to ensure that all the required submittal items are present in the application packet. If the submittal is determined to be "Complete", the application is accepted and forwarded for review. If the application is determined to be incomplete, it is returned to the applicant with a written statement itemizing the shortcomings. The "Complete" review will be re-conducted after the submittal of the requested items.

Once the applications are complete they will then be considered or "initiated" for further review by the Board of County Commissioners. The Board may opt to screen or limit the number of amendments to consider in the annual amendment process.

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The Building and Planning Department will circulate the “initiated” applications and determine what agencies are impacted and what public notice will be required for the review of the application(s).

Environmental Review

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) requires review of the potential environmental impacts of the proposed amendments be conducted. As a part of the application materials, the submittal of a SEPA checklist and non-project supplemental sheet is required. County staff and interested agencies will review the checklist and the application for potential impacts. The lead agency (in this case, Spokane County), must determine if there are possible significant adverse environmental impacts associated with each proposal or for the cumulative effect of all proposals and issue a threshold determination. The threshold determination may be one of the following:

DS = Determination of Significance - If a DS determination is made, this means the lead agency believes the impacts of the proposal cannot be mitigated through conditions of approval. Therefore the applicant is required to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) prior to the County considering the proposed amendment.

MDNS = Mitigated Determination of Nonsignificance - If a MDNS determination is made, the lead agency believes the impacts of the proposal can be addressed through specific mitigation measures. The conditions are also called mitigation, meaning specific actions the applicant would have to take to offset the impacts of the proposal. The mitigation is normally requirements over and above what County Code would dictate.

DNS = Determination of Nonsignificance - If a DNS determination is made, it means that the lead agency has determined that no significant adverse environmental impacts will occur from the approval of the proposal.

The lead agency’s determination is based upon information provided by the applicant (i.e., a completed Environmental Checklist), public and agency comment, and knowledge of the area and applicable codes. For a DNS or MDNS determination, an analysis will be incorporated within the Staff Report referenced below. For a DS, the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is required prior to any further action. Once the threshold determination has been made by the lead agency, it is then published in the newspaper and /or circulated as required by local ordinance, which may include mailing. The threshold determination is subject to an appeal period of 14 days.

The County will also consider the cumulative aspects of all amendment requests, which may require additional information or mitigating measures.

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Public Hearing Notice

At least fifteen (15) calendar days prior to the Planning Commission public hearing date(s), a notice including the date, time and place of the hearing and describing the proposal will be published in the newspaper, by Spokane County Building and Planning Department. The Planning Commission is a voluntary commission that advises the Board of County Commissioners.

A notice will be mailed, by the applicant, to adjacent property owners within 400 feet for urban amendments and within 1,000 feet for rural amendments. Neighborhood associations, various agencies and community groups will also be notified. The notice will invite interested parties to present testimony at the hearing either verbally or in writing. Spokane County is also required to send a public notice to Washington State Department of Community, Trade and Economic Development and other state agencies 60 days prior to adoption of any amendment.

The (SEPA) environmental determination will also be circulated at this time for a minimum (14) calendar day agency review and comment prior to the public hearing.

Public Hearing

A public hearing(s) for all or groups of amendments will be held before the Planning Commission. During the hearing, the applicant may present their amendment proposal. County staff will present an overview or summary of their analysis, findings and report. Following the staff presentation, the hearing will be open for general public testimony and submission of written comment.

The Planning Commission will deliberate regarding the information presented and forward a recommendation to the Board of County Commissioners regarding the amendments. The Board will consider their recommendation and may have their own public hearing or may accept recommendation(s) from the Planning Commission without a public hearing. The Planning Commission and the Board will provide written findings or reasons for their recommendation and decision.

Comprehensive Plan amendments will not become effective until the Board of County Commissioners makes a decision and signs a written resolution. The County Commissioners decision regarding Comprehensive Plan amendments and concurrent zone changes is final, unless appealed.