

WAC 365-196-620 Integration of State Environmental Policy Act process with creation and adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations.

(1) Adoption of comprehensive plans and development regulations are "actions" as defined under State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). Counties and cities must comply with SEPA when adopting new or amended comprehensive plans and development regulations.

(2) Integration of SEPA review with other analysis required by the act.

(a) The SEPA process is supplementary to other governmental decision-making processes, including the processes involved in creating and adopting comprehensive plans and development regulations under the act. The thoughtful integration of SEPA compliance with the overall effort to implement the act will provide understanding and insight of significant value to the choices growth management requires.

(b) SEPA analysis and documentation can serve, in significant part, to fulfill the need to compile a record showing the considerations which went into the plan and why one alternative was chosen over another.

(c) When conducting a SEPA analysis, counties and cities should coordinate the development and evaluation of SEPA alternatives with other evaluations required by the act such as:

(i) Evaluation of fiscal impact required by RCW 36.70A.210;

(ii) Review of drainage, flooding and stormwater runoff required by RCW 36.70A.070;

(iii) The forecast of future capital facilities needs required by RCW 36.70A.070(3); and

(iv) The traffic forecast, identification of system needs and analysis of funding capability required in RCW 36.70A.070(6)(a)(iii)(D), (E) and (F).

(d) Coordination should assure that these evaluations occur against a uniform set of alternatives and provide a complete picture of both the environmental and financial impacts of various alternatives.

(3) Phased environmental review.

(a) The growth management process is designed to proceed in phases, moving, by and large, from general policy-making to more specific implementation measures. Phased review available under SEPA can be integrated with the growth management process through a strategy that identifies the points in that process where the requirements of the two statutes are connected and seeks to accomplish the requirements of both at those points.

(b) In an integrated approach major emphasis should be placed on the quality of SEPA analysis at the front end of the growth management process - the local legislative phases of plan adoption and regulation adoption. The objective should be to create nonproject impact statements, and progressively more narrowly focused supplementary documents, that are sufficiently informative. These impact statements should reduce the need for extensive and time consuming analysis during subsequent environmental analysis at the individual project stage.

(c) The SEPA rules authorize joint documents that incorporate requirements of the act and SEPA (WAC 197-11-210 through 197-11-235). In general, using joint documents can provide time and cost savings related to review and adoption of comprehensive plan amendments.

(d) When evaluating comprehensive plan amendments, these amendments should generally be considered together as one action under SEPA so that the cumulative effect of various proposals can be evaluated together, consistent with RCW 36.70A.130 (2)(b).

(e) In conducting SEPA review and making a threshold determination, the county or city should review existing environmental documents. These documents may already address some or all of the potential adverse environmental impacts posed by the items on the docket. As an example, if an environmental impact statement (EIS) was done on the comprehensive plan, the county or city may only need to update or supplement the information in this existing EIS. The county or city may be able to accomplish this by incorporating a document by reference, adopting a document, or preparing a supplemental EIS or an addendum, as authorized by the SEPA rules (chapter 197-11 WAC).

(f) When creating SEPA documents, counties and cities should consider identifying and incorporating previous environmental analysis statements prepared by other lead agencies in connection with other related plans or projects.

(g) When conducting the SEPA analysis of a comprehensive plan amendment, counties and cities should analyze the impacts of fundamental land use planning choices. Because these choices cannot be revisited during project review, the impacts of these decisions must be evaluated when adopting comprehensive plan amendments. This analysis can serve as the foundation for project review. RCW 36.70B.030 identifies the following as fundamental land use planning choices:

(i) The types of land use;

(ii) The level of development, such as units per acre or other measures of density;

(iii) Infrastructure, including public facilities and services needed to serve the development; and

(iv) The characteristics of the development, such as development standards.

(h) SEPA compliance for development regulations should concentrate on the difference among alternative means of successfully implementing the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan. This approach can serve the goal that project applications be processed in a timely manner, while not compromising SEPA's basic aim of ensuring consideration of environmental impacts in advance of development.

(4) Interjurisdictional impacts. It is recognized that the growth of each county and city will have ripple effects which will reach across jurisdictional boundaries. Each county or city planning under the act should analyze what effects are likely to occur from the anticipated development. This analysis should be made as a part of the process of complying with SEPA in connection with comprehensive plan adoption. Affected jurisdictions should be given an opportunity to comment on this analysis.

(5) Other guidance found in SEPA rules. The SEPA rules (WAC 197-11-230) contain other guidance for preparing and issuing SEPA documents related to comprehensive plan amendments.

(6) Planned actions. One of the opportunities presented by the application of the act, SEPA, and the Regulatory Reform Act of 1995 (chapter 36.70B RCW and WAC 365-197-030) is the creation of a "planned action." A planned action is a nonproject action whose impacts are analyzed in an EIS associated with a comprehensive plan or subarea plan. The impacts and necessary mitigation are identified in a planned action ordinance. Development projects which are consistent with a planned action ordinance may not require additional environmental review. Planned actions are also addressed in WAC 197-11-168 and 197-11-172.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 36.70A.050 and 36.70A.190. WSR 10-03-085, § 365-196-620, filed 1/19/10, effective 2/19/10.]