

Chapter Four CAPITAL FACILITIES

INTRODUCTION

Capital facilities as defined here, and for purposes of the plan, include facilities owned by Whatcom County and other public entities. Capital facilities typically have long useful lives, significant costs, and are not mobile. Whatcom County capital facilities include buildings, land, parks, and roads.

Capital facilities provided by other public entities may be included in this plan by reference. Those capital facility plans that may be adopted by reference include plans for water, sewer, fire protection, storm water, schools, parks and recreation facilities.

Purpose

This chapter contains policies to guide Whatcom County in providing adequate public services within the county's financial capability, and provides a unifying framework for facilities planning. It also establishes levels of service for county-owned and operated capital facilities. The cities and other public owners of capital facilities are encouraged to use the *Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan* as a guide in preparing their own plans and capital improvement programs, particularly with respect to designated urban growth areas (UGAs).

Process

In 1991, the firm of Henderson, Young and Company (HYCo) was hired to obtain the necessary expertise in capital facilities planning to assist the county in preparing this chapter. Unlike most other chapters of this plan, Capital Facilities did not involve a citizen's committee or a technical advisory committee per se. The functions assumed by committees for other chapters were not required for completion of this chapter. Methodology, however, was needed to bring together technical expertise concerning all county organizational divisions that manage the capital facilities of the county. HYCo provided that methodology. Department and division administrators have been called upon repeatedly to provide detailed information on existing facilities, levels of service, funding, projected improvements, and revenue sources. Through that process, they participated in the plan as an ad hoc technical committee. Because of the complexity of this topic, the County Council went through an exercise to establish preliminary levels of service after receiving recommendations from department heads. After review and input by the public, these preliminary levels of service were finalized.

HYCo was responsible for organizing the effort toward completion of this chapter in the original 1997 Comprehensive Plan, with much of the actual work performed by the Whatcom County Planning Division. This chapter was updated in 2004 as part of the seven-year review required under the Growth Management Act and in 2009.

GMA Goals, County-Wide Planning Policies, and Visioning Community Value Statements

The goals, policies, and action plans in this chapter contribute to achievement of several of the GMA planning goals, including those considering urban growth, open space and recreation, and public facilities and services. The chapter has been written to satisfy those goals while also meeting the intent and requirements of the County-Wide Planning Policies (CWPP), and general guidelines of the Visioning Community Value Statements.

Although CWPPs do not separately address capital facilities, as defined in this chapter, they are addressed within a number of the policies. Policies requiring fiscal and physical ability to provide adequate public facilities, services, and infrastructure are satisfied in this chapter. The interlocal agreements specified in the policies must address reasonable criteria for annexation and ensure adequate public services including transportation, parks, administrative services and corrections facilities.

In relation to capital facilities, the Visioning Community Value Statements emphasize the importance of law enforcement, crime prevention, and other social services, as well as encourage retention and development of recreational opportunities.

Growth Management Goals, County-Wide Planning Policies, and Visioning Community Value Statements will be served by adoption of this chapter and implementation of its goals, policies, and action plans.

GMA Requirements

The Growth Management Act mandates that counties required to plan under the Act adopt comprehensive plans including an inventory of facilities, a forecast of future needs for such facilities, the proposed location and the capacities of expanded or new facilities, minimum levels of service of facility capacity, a six-year plan for financing those facilities with indication of sources for that funding, and a requirement to re-assess the Land Use chapter of this plan if there are funding shortfalls. The Land Use element must be consistent and coordinated with the capital facilities plan with respect to adopted minimum levels of service and adequacy of facilities to serve development. These Growth Management Act requirements are addressed in this chapter of the Comprehensive Plan, the 20-Year Capital Facilities Plan (Appendix E) and in the *Six-Year Capital Improvement Program (Appendix F)*.

BACKGROUND SUMMARY

Once a level of service standard is established for a particular facility, then a cost can be assigned to achieve the desired level of service. The next step is to develop funding mechanisms to pay for the desired levels of service.

Levels of service for different facilities are defined differently. In this chapter, the level of service for most facilities is defined as a unit per population; for example, a fraction of a square foot of office space per capita or a number of jail beds or park acres per 1,000 population. The major exception is roads, for which level of service is measured as volume over capacity ratios, i.e. how many cars are anticipated to use a particular section of road (volume) divided by how many cars the road can theoretically accommodate over a specific period of time (capacity).

One of the major issues confronting Whatcom County in relation to capital facilities is the question of availability of revenue versus ability to provide services. While it is generally desirable to provide high levels of service for roads, law enforcement, and other essential services, costs for those services continue to rise and, generally, new or additional taxes are undesirable.

Whatcom County has kept additions to its capital facilities to a minimum over the past ten years (1999-2009) in order to contain the cost of government operations. Whatcom County has relied on a pay-as-you go approach for funding capital expenditures under one million dollars. Large capital acquisitions have been financed with general obligation debt. The 2009 budget for debt service is \$1,893,618, or one per cent of 2009 budgeted revenues of \$188,439,728.

The GMA expressly authorizes cities and counties to impose impact fees on new development to help finance the capital facilities required to serve new development. This authorization applies only to capital facilities owned or operated by government entities: (a) public streets and roads; (b) publicly owned parks, open space, and recreation facilities; (c) school facilities; and (d) fire protection facilities in jurisdictions that are not part of a fire district. Certain background information that must be included in a capital facilities element of the Comprehensive Plan in order to collect transportation impact fees is included in Appendix G.

If the desired level of service cannot be achieved without acquiring major debt, raising taxes beyond acceptable levels or establishing unacceptable impact fees, then the level of service standard must be adjusted, facility costs must be reduced, or growth must be curtailed until a balance is achieved. Adjusting land use to achieve desirable levels of service is one means of attaining concurrency. Concurrency, as required by the GMA, means that adequate facilities as defined by adopted levels of service are available at the time that the impacts of development occur or within a specified time thereafter. The GMA, at minimum, requires concurrency for transportation facilities. Concurrency is obviously desirable for all other capital facilities as well if the overall goal is to provide for new development while maintaining a quality of life that people desire.

With regard to fire protection, Whatcom County has not adopted level of service standards (NFPA 1720 or any other response-time based level of service) for most urban or rural areas. The County should define an urban level of service for fire protection during the required 7-year comprehensive plan review and update process. The 7-year plan review and update process should demonstrate that the urban growth areas have adequate existing fire protection facilities and service capacities to meet the urban level of service and any additional needed fire facilities and services. If the level of service standard adopted by the County can not be provided over the 20-year planning period, then re-designation of UGAs to rural designations should be considered.

ISSUES, GOALS, AND POLICIES

Adopted levels of service are incorporated within the following goals, policies, and action plans.

GOAL 4A: **Within the county's financial capacity, adopt a carefully planned program of county services and facilities.**

Policy 4A-1: Establish appropriate level of service standards for county facilities commensurate with the ability of the county to fund them.

Policy 4A-2: Extend County facilities and services in a manner that supports future urban growth in urban growth areas (UGAs).

Policy 4A-3: Evaluate all types of facilities to determine whether they should be provided at county-wide, or strictly unincorporated levels of service. Transportation facility levels of service should be evaluated for appropriateness as to adopted urban or rural levels of service.

Policy 4A-4: The land use element of the comprehensive plan must be reassessed to ensure that land use is coordinated and consistent with the financing plan within the capital facilities element and to ensure probable funding does not fall short of meeting existing needs.

GOAL 4B: **Develop a six-year financing program for capital facilities that meets the requirements of the GMA, achieves the county's levels-of-service, and is within financial capability as determined by projected financial resources.**

Policy 4B-1: Maintain and update, on at least a biennial basis, a six-year capital improvement program (CIP) that identifies projects, outlines a schedule, and designates realistic funding sources for all county capital projects based on a review of population and revenue conditions existing at that time.

GOAL 4C: **Locate county facilities which require urban infrastructure, serve primarily urban populations, and are urban in character within identified urban growth areas (UGAs).**

Policy 4C-1: Evaluate all new capital facilities requiring a new site for urban characteristics and limit selection of sites for urban projects to designated UGAs.

GOAL 4D: **Develop and implement a coordinated program of facility expansion for the departments and agencies which together carry out the county's law enforcement and corrections functions.**

Policy 4D-1: Complete those capital improvement projects necessary to eliminate any space deficiencies in law enforcement facilities.

GOAL 4E: Develop and carry out a realistic long-range program of facility expansion or improvement to accommodate the county's projected staffing requirements for departments and agencies.

Policy 4E-1: Include in the capital facilities plan, a program of building and space improvements to efficiently provide quality work space for projected staffing levels through the 20-year planning period.

Policy 4E-2: Investigate alternatives to Capital Facility construction through the private sector, and pursue technologically feasible alternatives.

GOAL 4F: Achieve level of service targets for park and recreational facilities identified in this chapter and which support objectives and priorities identified in the *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space Plan*, in the *Natural Heritage Plan*, and in this plan.

Policy 4F-1: Seek non-capital opportunities to acquire, enhance and maintain park lands, trails, and other recreational facilities.

Policy 4F-2: Include acquisition and development costs in the six-year CIP for future trails projects.

Policy 4F-3: Develop a recreational facilities program that achieves and maintains the level of service for athletic fields and courts, trails, and support facilities for shoreline access, picnicking, and camping without adding to capital costs.

Policy 4F-4: Place a high priority on improvements to existing county recreational sites and facilities and using them to their full potential, including those outlined in the *Whatcom County Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space Plan*, before investing capital in the acquisition and development of new facilities.

Policy 4F-5: Continue to provide centers for use by senior citizens and others.

GOAL 4G: Establish levels of service for roads, parks, corrections, and administrative services.

Policy 4G-1: For purposes of transportation management systems, adopt level of service standards (LOS) for transportation facilities as listed in Chapter 6, Transportation, Policy 6A-3.

Policy 4G-2: Adopt the following level of service standards for park facilities:

developed parks 9.6 acres per 1,000 population
trails 0.60 of a mile per 1,000 population
activity centers..... five centers per 100,000 population

Policy 4G-3: Adopt the following level of service for correction facilities:

jails 1.42 beds per 1,000 population
juvenile detention 0.125 beds per 1,000 population

Policy 4G-4: Adopt the following levels of service for administrative facilities:

office space (unincorporated).....0.51 sq. ft. per capita
 maintenance & operations (unincorporated)0.41 sq. ft. per capita
 sheriff's office (unincorporated)0.26 sq. ft. per capita
 office space (county-wide).....0.63 sq. ft. per capita
 sheriff emergency ops (county-wide).....0.011 sq. ft. per capita

GOAL 4H: Coordinate with non-county facility providers such as cities and special purpose districts to support the future land use pattern promoted by this plan.

Policy 4H-1: Establish interagency planning mechanisms and interlocal agreements to assure coordinated and mutually supportive capital facility plans from special districts, cities, and other major non-county facility providers which are consistent with this and other chapters of the comprehensive plan.

Policy 4H-2: In consultation and coordination with special districts, cities, and other major non-county facility providers, review and update as appropriate capital facility plans supporting UGAs in conjunction with GMA 7-Year Review and 10-Year UGA Review.

Policy 4H-3: Whatcom County should define an urban level of service for fire protection by December 1, 2011. The 7-year comprehensive plan review and update process should demonstrate that the urban growth areas are served by urban levels of fire protection facilities and service. If the level of service standard adopted by the County can not be provided over the 20-year planning period, then re-designation of UGAs to rural designations should be considered.

GOAL 4J: Maintain effective concurrency measures and procedures for all facilities and services necessary for development.

Policy 4J-1: Based on established levels of service for all road segments under control of the county, administer a concurrency management program that provides for consistent and predictable evaluation of the impacts of future proposed development.

GOAL 4K: Consider alternative funding sources to assure levels of service adopted in the plan.

Policy 4K-1: After all other financing options have been exhausted, consider the use of bonded indebtedness to finance major capital investments in infrastructure.

Policy 4K-2: Identify and promote public private partnerships to provide and enhance the provision of necessary services.

GOAL 4L: Ensure that capital facilities provide protection for threatened and endangered fish and wildlife species.

- Policy 4L-1: Fish and wildlife habitat should be carefully considered when selecting projects for the Six-Year Capital Improvement Program.
- Policy 4L-2: Projects selected for the Six-Year Capital Improvement Program shall not degrade habitat for threatened and endangered species.
- Policy 4L-3: Projects selected for the Six-Year Capital Improvement Program should strive to restore degraded habitat for threatened and endangered species, when the projects are in direct contact with such habitat. The County Council will determine when such restoration is financially feasible through adoption of the six-year capital improvement program and the County budget.
- GOAL 4M:** Enable school districts to receive impact fees to fund a proportionate share of system improvements reasonably related to new development by adopting into this plan their capital facilities plans and establishing interlocal agreements with the districts to collect and transfer funds.
- Policy 4M-1: The capital facilities plan for the Bellingham School District, adopted by the district on July 16, 2009, is adopted into the comprehensive plan by reference.
- Policy 4M-2: The capital facilities plan for the Ferndale School District, adopted by the district on December 23, 2005, is adopted into the comprehensive plan by reference.
- Policy 4M-3: The capital facilities plan for the Lynden School District, adopted by the district on June 29, 2006, is adopted into the comprehensive plan by reference.
- Policy 4M-4: The capital facilities plan for the Meridian School District, adopted by the district on June 30, 2009, is adopted into the comprehensive plan by reference.
- Goal 4N:** **Adopt special district and County capital facility plans for unincorporated UGAs into this plan by reference when consistent with the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.**
- Policy 4N-1: The Birch Bay Water and Sewer District Comprehensive Water System Plan, dated March 2009, is adopted by reference into the comprehensive plan.
- Policy 4N-2: The Birch Bay Water and Sewer District Comprehensive Sewer System Plan, dated May 2009, is adopted by reference into the comprehensive plan.
- Policy 4N-3: The Birch Bay Comprehensive Stormwater Plan, dated July 2006, is adopted by reference into the comprehensive plan.
- Policy 4N-4: The North Whatcom Fire and Rescue Capital Facilities Plan, dated August 2009, is adopted by reference into the comprehensive plan.

- Policy 4N-5: The Public Utility District No. 1 Comprehensive Water System Plan, dated October 2004, is adopted by reference into the comprehensive Plan.
- Policy 4N-6: The Evergreen Water-Sewer District Comprehensive Water System Plan, dated June 2004, is adopted by reference into the comprehensive plan. This water system serves a portion of the Columbia Valley UGA.
- Policy 4N-7: The Water District No. 13 Water System Plan, dated February 2005, is adopted by reference into the comprehensive plan. This water system serves a portion of the Columbia Valley UGA.
- Policy 4N-8: The public stormwater facilities sections relating to the Columbia Valley UGA in the Water Quantity and Quality Report Foothills Subarea (Aspect Consulting, July 18, 2008, pp. 2-3, 36-39, and 55-56) are adopted by reference into the comprehensive plan.

CAPITAL FACILITIES - ACTION PLAN

1. Adopt a county six-year CIP to meet the GMA specifications including concurrency and all other capital needs for the six-year financing program component of the capital facilities element.
2. Identify appropriate levels of long-term bonded debt to finance major capital investments in infrastructure.
3. Explore alternative funding sources as authorized under the GMA to help fund the cost of infrastructure expansions required to serve new development.
4. Maintain a concurrency management or monitoring process for transportation and adequacy reviews of new development as an integral part of land use and building permit review.
5. Explore alternative funding techniques for law and justice facilities and operations, including contracts for service with other agencies, private providers, and joint use of facilities.
6. Analyze probable future staffing and space requirements in conjunction with the budget process and updating of the capital facilities plan.
7. Pursue acquisition strategies for resource conservancy and linear parks (trails) on an other than fee simple basis to reduce cost without significant reduction in public use/benefit potential.
8. Pursue joint ventures with cities, school districts, and other potential partners in developing regional athletic parks as recommended in the *Comprehensive Park and Recreation Open Space Plan*.
9. Work with special districts, cities, and other major non-county facility providers including water and sewer districts, fire districts, public utility districts and others as appropriate to establish levels of service for urban growth areas. This must be done in order to assure facilities adequate to provide for anticipated population growth and development consistent with land use plan designations and zoning.
10. Explore alternative technology to create cost savings for capital facility needs.
11. Establish public/private partnership alternatives to capital financing.
12. Capital facility plans for water, sewer, stormwater, fire and schools that serve unincorporated UGAs will be incorporated by reference when consistent with the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.