



Staff Memo

To City of Ruston Planning Commission
From: Kirsten Peterson, Consultant Planner
Date: August 6, 2025 Planning Commission
Subject Comprehensive Plan Periodic Update – Work Study Session

I. Summary

Over the past couple of years the Ruston Planning Commission has been working with planning staff to prepare an updated Comprehensive Plan for compliance with the periodic update requirements of the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA), RCW 36.70A.130. The purpose of this staff report is to provide the Planning Commission with an overview of the requirements for the periodic update of the Comprehensive Plan as well as the development regulations. The report also identifies recent legislative changes and outlines the local update process to ensure timely and complete compliance.

II. Background

Under the GMA, all fully-planning jurisdictions are required to periodically review and update their comprehensive plans and development regulations to reflect:

- Updates to state law
- Changes in population and land use
- New requirements for housing, environmental protection, and public engagement
- Consistency with Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) and Vision 2050 multicounty planning policies

The periodic update occurs on a 10-year cycle and is intended to ensure that plans remain relevant, internally consistent, and reflective of the most current growth forecasts and policy priorities.

III. Update Requirements

A. Comprehensive Plan Element Updates

At a minimum, the following mandatory elements must be reviewed and updated in accordance with RCW 36.70A.070:

- Land Use
- Housing (with income-based allocations)
- Capital Facilities
- Utilities
- Transportation
- Economic Development
- Parks & Recreation (encouraged, not yet required)

Each of these elements has been updated for compliance with the Department of Commerce checklist, as well as the checklist published by the Puget Sound Regional Council. Because of Ruston's small size, walkable character, and built-out conditions the update focuses on the following:

- Accommodating projected growth through infill and mixed-use redevelopment (Point Ruston, Pearl District, etc.)
- Maintaining community character while increasing housing supply and affordability
- Updating infrastructure planning via the Capital Facilities and Utilities Elements
- Ensuring consistency with Pierce County CPPs and Vision 2050 MPPs

Ruston's Buildable Lands analysis and Housing Equity Report support the City's strategy and provide a strong basis for meeting update mandates.

B. Development Regulations

Zoning, subdivision, shoreline, and critical areas codes must be consistent with the updated plan. Development codes must reflect GMA requirements, including provisions for middle housing and affordable housing strategies.

The City Council recently adopted the required missing middle and unit lot subdivision ordinance as mandated for compliance with State law. Having met the June 30, 2025, deadline for missing middle, Planning Staff is proceeding on with other development code updates, including a full reorganization of the code. Other periodic updates will also be accounted for.

C. Urban Growth Area (UGA) Review

While Ruston's UGA is contiguous with existing city boundaries and is fixed, the City must verify that land capacity is adequate to accommodate projected population, housing, and employment

growth through 2044. This has been addressed in the land use, housing and economic development chapters .

D. Critical Areas and Resource Lands

Critical Areas Ordinances (CAOs) must be reviewed for consistency with Best Available Science (BAS) and updated state guidance. While resource lands are limited in Ruston, development adjacent to designated lands must not interfere with their continued use.

The Critical Areas Checklist provided by Commerce has been completed and the work of updating the CAO is underway.

IV. New State Mandates (2024-2027 cycle)

The Washington State Legislature passed several bills affecting comprehensive plans:

- **HB 1220**: Requires cities to plan for and accommodate housing for all income levels and include emergency housing and shelters.
- **HB 1241**: Extends the update cycle to 10 years and requires a 5-year implementation progress report.
- **HB 1717**: Strengthens tribal consultation during planning processes.
- **SB 5818** and others: Reduce barriers to housing production, such as SEPA streamlining and zoning flexibility.

These changes are already addressed in Ruston's draft Housing and Land Use Elements, which emphasize affordability, infill, and flexibility.

V. PROCEDURAL REQUIREMENTS

Amendments to the development code regulations are considered a legislative process per the Ruston Municipal Code, which requires that a recommendation from the Planning Commission be forwarded to City Council as the final decision-making authority.

The Planning Commission reviewed each of the individual elements of the Comprehensive Plan during their regular monthly meetings over the past year or so. The Planning Commission held a public hearing during their meeting of July 2, 2025, after which they made a motion to recommend approval to City Council.

This work session with the Planning Commission provides another opportunity for the Planning Commission to provide any additional input on the Comp Plan update prior to review by City Council.

In addition to review by the Planning Commission, additional comment periods have been advertised as follows:

- A SEPA Determination of Significance was issued on July 3, 2025 and the comment period ended on July 18, 2025.

- The draft Comprehensive Plan was submitted to the Department of Commerce on July 16, 2025, with the 60-day notice period ending on September 14, 2025.
- The draft Comprehensive Plan was also submitted PSRC (Puget Sound Regional Council) on July 16, 2025.

At the conclusion of the various comment periods, if warranted or necessary, additional updates will be made to the Comp Plan to ensure compliance with state legislation.

The final step in the process will include review and adoption by City Council, with upcoming meetings scheduled to take place as follows:

- November 4 – City Council Public Hearing and 1st Reading
- November 18 – City Council – 2nd Reading and Adoption

Attachment:

Draft Comprehensive Plan