

WAC 365-196-410 Housing element. (1) Requirements. Counties and cities must develop a housing element ensuring vitality and character of established residential neighborhoods. The housing element must contain at least the following features:

(a) An inventory and analysis of existing and projected housing needs.

(b) A statement of the goals, policies, and objectives for the preservation, improvement, and development of housing, including single-family residences.

(c) Identification of sufficient land for housing including, but not limited to, government-assisted housing, housing for low-income families, manufactured housing, multifamily housing, group homes and foster care facilities.

(d) Adequate provisions for existing and projected housing needs of all economic segments of the community.

(2) Recommendations for meeting requirements. The housing element shows how a county or city will accommodate anticipated growth, provide a variety of housing types at a variety of densities, provide opportunities for affordable housing for all economic segments of the community, and ensure the vitality of established residential neighborhoods. The following components should appear in the housing element:

(a) Housing goals and policies.

(i) The goals and policies serve as a guide to the creation and adoption of development regulations and may also guide the exercise of discretion in the permitting process.

(ii) The housing goals and policies of counties and cities should be consistent with countywide planning policies and, where applicable, multicounty planning policies.

(iii) Housing goals and policies should address at least the following:

(A) Affordable housing;

(B) Preservation of neighborhood character; and

(C) Provision of a variety of housing types along with a variety of densities.

(iv) Housing goals and policies should be written to allow the evaluation of progress toward achieving the housing element's goals and policies.

(b) Housing inventory.

(i) The purpose of the required inventory is to gauge the availability of existing housing for all economic segments of the community.

(ii) The inventory should identify the amount of various types of housing that exist in a community. The act does not require that a housing inventory be in a specific form. Counties and cities should consider WAC 365-196-050 (3) and (4) when determining how to meet the housing inventory requirement and may rely on existing data.

(iii) The housing inventory may show the affordability of different types of housing. It may provide data about the median sales prices of homes and average rental prices.

(iv) The housing inventory may include information about other types of housing available within the jurisdiction such as:

(A) The number of beds available in group homes, nursing homes and/or assisted living facilities;

(B) The number of dwelling units available specifically for senior citizens;

(C) The number of government-assisted housing units for lower-income households.

(c) Housing needs analysis.

(i) The purpose of the needs analysis is to estimate the type and densities of future housing needed to serve all economic segments of the community. The housing needs analysis should compare the number of housing units identified in the housing inventory to the projected growth or other locally identified housing needs.

(ii) The definition of housing needs should be addressed in a regional context and may use existing data.

(iii) The analysis should be based on the most recent 20-year population allocation.

(iv) The analysis should analyze consistency with countywide planning policies, and where applicable, multicounty planning policies, related to housing for all economic segments of the population.

(d) Housing targets or capacity.

(i) The housing needs analysis should identify the number and types of new housing units needed to serve the projected growth and the income ranges within it. This should be used to designate sufficient land capacity suitable for development in the land use element.

(ii) Counties and cities may also use other considerations to identify housing needs, which may include:

(A) Workforce housing which is often defined as housing affordable to households earning between 80 to 120 percent of the median household income.

(B) Jobs-to-housing balance, which is the number of jobs in a city or county relative to the number of housing units.

(C) Reasonable measures to address inconsistencies found in buildable lands reports prepared under RCW 36.70A.215.

(D) Housing needed to address an observed pattern of a larger quantity of second homes in destination communities.

(iii) The targets established in the housing element will serve as benchmarks to evaluate progress and guide decisions regarding development regulations.

(e) Affordable housing. RCW 36.70A.070 requires counties and cities, in their housing element, to make adequate provisions for existing and projected needs for all economic segments of the community.

(i) Determining what housing units are affordable.

(A) In the case of dwelling units for sale, affordable housing has mortgages, amortization, taxes, insurance and condominium or association fees, if any, that consume no more than 30 percent of the owner's gross annual household income.

(B) In the case of dwelling units for rent, affordable housing has rent and utility costs, as defined by the county or city, that cost no more than 30 percent of the tenant's gross annual household income.

(C) Income ranges used when considering affordability. When planning for affordable housing, counties or cities should use income ranges consistent with the applicable countywide or multicounty planning policies. If no such terms exist, counties or cities should consider using the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) definitions found in 24 C.F.R. 91.5, which are used to draft consolidated planning documents required by HUD. The following definitions are from 24 C.F.R. 91.5:

(I) Median income refers to median household income.

(II) Extremely low-income refers to a household whose income is at or below 30 percent of the median income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the housing unit is located.

(III) Low-income refers to a household whose income is between 30 percent and 50 percent of the median income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the housing unit is located.

(IV) Moderate-income refers to a household whose income is between 50 percent and 80 percent of the median income where the housing unit is located.

(V) Middle-income refers to a household whose income is between 80 percent and 95 percent of the median income for the area where the housing unit is located.

(ii) Affordable housing requires planning from a regional perspective. Countywide planning policies must address affordable housing and its distribution among counties and cities. A county's or city's obligation to plan for affordable housing within a regional context is determined by the applicable countywide planning policies. Counties and cities should review countywide affordable housing policies when developing the housing element to maintain consistency.

(iii) Counties and cities should consider the ability of the market to address housing needs for all economic segments of the population. Counties and cities may help to address affordable housing by identifying and removing any regulatory barriers limiting the availability of affordable housing.

(iv) Counties and cities may help to address affordable housing needs by increasing development capacity. In such an event, a county or city affordable housing section should:

(A) Identify certain land use designations within a geographic area where increased residential development may help achieve affordable housing policies and targets;

(B) As needed, identify policies and subsequent development regulations that may increase residential development capacity;

(C) Determine the number of additional housing units these policies and development regulations may generate; and

(D) Establish a target that represents the minimum amount of affordable housing units that it seeks to generate.

(f) Implementation plan.

(i) The housing element should identify strategies designed to help meet the needs identified for all economic segments of the population within the planning area. It should include, but not be limited to, the following:

(A) Consideration of the range of housing choices to be encouraged including, but not limited to, multifamily housing, mixed uses, manufactured houses, accessory dwelling units, and detached houses;

(B) Consideration of various lot sizes and densities, and of clustering and other design configurations;

(C) Identification of a sufficient amount of appropriately zoned land to accommodate the identified housing needs over the planning period; and

(D) Evaluation of the capacity of local public and private entities and the availability of financing to produce housing to meet the identified need.

(ii) The housing element should also address how the county or city will provide for group homes, foster care facilities, and facilities for other populations with special needs. The housing element should provide for an equitable distribution of these facilities among neighborhoods within the county or city

(iii) The housing element should identify strategies designed to ensure the vitality and character of existing neighborhoods. It should show how growth and change will preserve or improve existing residen-

tial qualities. The housing element may not focus on one requirement (e.g., preserving existing housing) to the exclusion of the other requirements (e.g., affordable housing) in RCW 36.70A.070(2). It should explain how various needs are reconciled.

(iv) The housing element should include provisions to monitor the performance of its housing strategy. A monitoring program may include the following:

(A) The collection and analysis of information about the housing market;

(B) Data about the supply of developable residential building lots at various land-use densities and the supply of rental and for-sale housing at various price levels;

(C) A comparison of actual housing development to the targets, policies and goals contained in the housing element;

(D) Identification of thresholds at which steps should be taken to adjust and revise goals and policies; and

(E) A description of the types of adjustments and revisions that the county or city may consider.

[Statutory Authority: RCW 36.70A.050 and 36.70A.190. WSR 23-08-037, § 365-196-410, filed 3/29/23, effective 4/29/23; WSR 10-03-085, § 365-196-410, filed 1/19/10, effective 2/19/10.]