

Planning Department  
**San Juan County**

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**A GENERAL GUIDE TO THE  
1998 SAN JUAN COUNTY  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN  
AND UNIFIED DEVELOPMENT CODE**

Additional information is available from the Planning Department.

# The 1998 San Juan County Comprehensive Plan and Unified Development Code (UDC)

## What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A comprehensive plan is a set of goals and policies for meeting those goals, all of which are aimed at achieving the vision for the future of the county as expressed in the Vision Statement. The 1998 San Juan County Comprehensive Plan will be used as a guide for the physical, economic and community development of the county for the next twenty years. The Comp Plan is:

- **Long-range** in scope.
- Designed to establish clear and **predictable** outcomes for the ways land will be used and developed, providing the policy basis for the implementing regulations, the Unified Development Code (UDC).
- **Comprehensive**. It addresses the interrelationships among land, resources, people, natural systems, and public facilities, to protect the future health, safety and welfare of county citizens.
- **Flexible**. It will continue to evolve after its initial adoption through annual updates and five-year reviews. It will be adjusted to meet changing needs and circumstances over time.

<b>Foundations:</b>	The San Juan County Vision Statement The WA State Growth Management Act The WA State Shoreline Management Act
<b>Goals:</b>	The Growth Management Act (GMA) has fourteen goals. In developing the proposed Plan, the county's citizen committees, staff, and appointed and elected officials were guided by these goals and also by the Vision Statement, an expression of what the community envisions for the county over the next 20 years and beyond. More history on the development of the Plan is given below.

## What's in the new Comprehensive Plan?

The Plan has five parts:

Section A is the **Introduction**: it includes a description of the GMA goals and outlines the public participation process involved in developing the Plan.

Section B contains the **Elements** of the Plan: **Governance, Land Use, Shoreline Master Program Goals & Policies, Water Resources, Housing, Transportation, Capital Facilities, Utilities, and Historic & Archaeological Preservation.**

Section C contains the **Definitions.**

Section D is **Administration**: this addresses responsibilities and procedures for Plan implementation, amendments, review, and public participation.

Section E contains the **Appendices**: 1) Population Projections and Buildout Analysis, and Land Use Inventory; 2) Countywide Planning Policies; 3) the Friday Harbor Urban Growth Area Management Agreement; 4) Water Resources; 5) Housing Needs Assessment; 6) Transportation; 7) Capital Facilities; 8) Utilities; and 9) the Final Environmental Impact Statement on the Plan (10-2-96) and the Final Supplemental EIS (11-12-97).

## **Background:**

The Washington State Growth Management Act of 1990 (GMA) required all counties to designate and protect “critical areas” and “resource lands” and required the fastest-growing counties to adopt comprehensive plans and implementing regulations in accordance with the GMA goals and procedures. San Juan County, having grown at a fast pace through the 1970s and ’80s, was given the option to plan under the GMA. In 1990, the Board of County Commissioners decided to do so, particularly because the county’s 1979 Comprehensive Land Use Plan was deemed inadequate to deal with the effects of population growth and development pressures.

Until 1990 state law authorized but did not require local plans. The 1979 Plan was a local effort, begun in 1973. Rather than adopt a zoning code, the county at that time adopted regulations as a part of the land use plan. Those regulations left much discretion to decision-makers as to what uses would be allowed where, and under what conditions. This arrangement became less effective as development pressures grew through the 1980s and into the ’90s.

The county completed the first GMA planning steps in 1992: adopting interim regulations designating and protecting critical areas and resource lands and adopting county-wide planning policies to coordinate planning between the county and Town of Friday Harbor. Then, in 1993, the Board of County Commissioners appointed forty-six individuals to three citizen advisory committees—one for each commissioner district—to develop a new comprehensive plan that would address all of the requirements of the GMA. The committees began by articulating a vision for the county over the next twenty to fifty years, then prepared plans for achieving it. A steering committee made up of members from the district committees then developed the results into a county-wide Vision Statement and Comprehensive *Plan*.

The formal adoption process for the Plan began in October 1995. The Comp Plan proposal evolved throughout this process, and together with the UDC was presented in public hearings held jointly in November and December 1997 by the County Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners. Further changes were recommended by the Planning Commission in February 1998. The Board considered these and others raised by the public during hearings held in March 1998, as well as matters raised by the Board itself, and approved the new Plan and UDC on June 15, 1998, subject to State agency review. Some additional modifications were made by the Board to the Plan, UDC, and Official Maps in December 1998 in order to respond to the review comments. The new Plan, UDC, and Official Maps became effective on December 20, 1998.

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## **How is the new 1998 Plan different from the old 1979 Plan? What are the Changes to the Land Use Pattern?**

The 1979 Comprehensive Plan designated much of the county as Rural, with different residential densities assigned to different areas (*e.g.*, five acres per unit). In general, the regulations implementing the Plan allowed most uses in most locations subject to the conditional use permit process. Over time, with population growth and new development pressures, the lack of predictability about land use decisions and the lack of specific guidance for decision making in the regulations caused considerable problems, especially in the Rural areas.

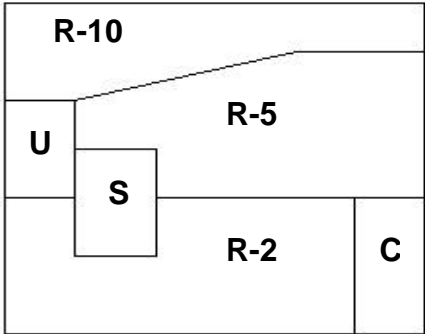
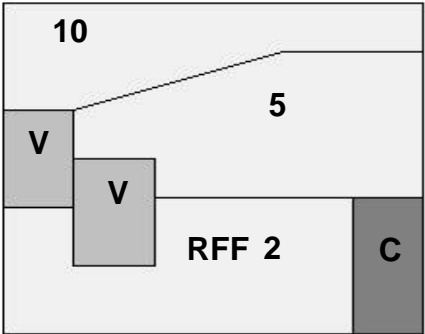
The Official Maps for the new 1998 Comprehensive Plan apply a range of land-use designations to:

- 1) accomplish GMA goals to concentrate urban growth and prevent suburban sprawl, and
- 2) to carry out the vision of the county as a place of rural landscapes, rural character, and rural activities and communities, and as a place of rich natural beauty on which much of the local economy and quality of life depend.

Based on the purpose of each designation the implementing regulations, for the first time, specify what uses are allowable or not and under what level of review or permit. This system is designed to be predictable and clear as to the uses allowed in a given designation, with fewer uses requiring a conditional use permit and a public

hearing before a decision is made.

An example of the difference between the new 1998 Plan maps and those of the old 1979 Plan is given below to help illustrate the change in the land use pattern:

Old 1979 Comp Plan Map – Example	New 1998 Comp Plan Map – Example
 <p>The diagram shows a rectangular area divided into several sections. At the top is a section labeled 'R-10'. Below it, on the left, is a section labeled 'U'. To the right of 'U' is a section labeled 'R-5'. Below 'U' and 'R-5' is a section labeled 'S'. Below 'S' and 'R-5' is a section labeled 'R-2'. To the right of 'R-2' is a section labeled 'C'.</p>	 <p>The diagram shows a rectangular area divided into several sections. At the top is a section labeled '10'. Below it, on the left, is a section labeled 'V'. To the right of 'V' is a section labeled '5'. Below 'V' and '5' is a section labeled 'RFF 2'. To the right of 'RFF 2' is a section labeled 'C'.</p>
<p>The 1979 Plan map designations of U (Urban), S (Suburban), R (Rural), and R-T/A (Rural Timber/Agriculture), are replaced on the proposed Plan maps. The original C (Conservancy) and N (Natural) remain with few changes. The densities remain unchanged, and are shown on the new maps as a density "layer" visible within the new colored designations.</p>	<p>The new 1998 maps show the former U and S areas as either activity centers (such as V for Village as here) or Rural Residential. Most of the former R areas are shown as Rural Farm-Forest while others, with those now in R-T/A, are shown as Agricultural or Forest Resource Lands.</p>

### The Land Classification System—Districts and Designations

The land classification system is designed to identify different types of land use districts based on Comp Plan goals and policies. The Land Use element of the proposed Plan explains the purposes of the different districts and the designations within them. The shoreline designations are described in Element 3 of the Plan. These are the same as those adopted in 1976 with changes only to the names of the original Suburban and Rural shoreline designations, and the addition of certain subarea designations. In general, the maps illustrate the land use patterns that put the principles of the Plan in place.

### What do the Designations Mean?

**Activity Centers.** The only “Urban Growth Area” designation is next to the Friday Harbor boundaries on San Juan Island. This is to provide for the town's growth needs over the 20 year planning period. Elsewhere, unincorporated but traditional community centers are classified according to their size and scope of services, as **Villages, Hamlets, Island Centers, or Master Planned Resorts.**

**Resource Lands.** The GMA requires designation and protection of resource lands determined locally to be of long-term commercial significance for resource production. These are the **Agricultural Resource** and **Forest Resource** designations and the **Mineral Resource Overlay District** designation.

**Special Lands.** These are the **Conservancy** and **Natural** designations established in the 1979 Comprehensive Plan.

**Rural Lands.** The Rural districts include the following designations:

**Rural Farm-Forest** is applied to rural areas where the predominant uses are agriculture and forestry mixed with residential uses, with parcel sizes generally five to ten acres. Its purpose is to maintain the predominance of farming and forestry and residential uses. Commercial and industrial uses would generally not be allowed but cottage enterprises would be.

**Rural Residential** is generally applied to established residential subdivisions with a small-lot development pattern. It would allow for single-family residential uses (including home occupations) but most non-residential uses would not be allowed.

**Rural Commercial** is intended for commercial uses specifically oriented to rural areas, such as animal boarding and plant nurseries, and for small-scale hospitality-commercial uses.

**Rural Industrial** is for those industrial uses that aren't appropriate for activity centers, such as lumber mills and asphalt plants.

**Rural General Use** is the designation closest to the 1979 Rural designation, in that a variety of uses could be allowed if a conditional use permit is granted.

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## What is the Unified Development Code?

The Unified Development Code (UDC) is *unified* because it is a compilation of all county land use and development codes in one document, with each part adapted and updated as needed to reflect the changes in the Comprehensive Plan goals and policy direction. The UDC builds extensively on the existing county codes, including the Comprehensive Land Use Plan regulations, Shoreline Master Program, and Land Division code. Many existing provisions are incorporated unchanged while there are also new provisions to address new directives in the proposed Comprehensive Plan.

## Background

The GMA requires the county to develop regulations to implement the GMA Comprehensive Plan. Also, under the GMA, the development regulations must be consistent with the Comprehensive Plan. Although San Juan County has always tied its use regulations to its Plan, the new character of the GMA Comp Plan required a new character for the implementing regulations.

The Board of County Commissioners created a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to assist county staff in preparing the implementing regulations. A majority on that committee had been members of the citizen advisory committees on the Comp Plan, and others were appointed for their expertise and experience in land development practices. The TAC began its work based on the 1995 Steering Committee Plan proposal.

The TAC completed a first draft of the UDC in July 1996, and took it out to informal public meetings around the county that month. A number of changes were made based on the comments received. Also, as changes continued to be made to the Comp Plan as it proceeded through the public process, the TAC continued adapting the UDC to reflect those changes. The final TAC draft was completed in September 1997. The UDC was presented together with the proposed Comp Plan in public hearings held jointly in November and December 1997 by the County Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners. Further changes were recommended by the Planning Commission in February 1998. The Board considered these and others raised by the public during hearings held in March 1998, as well as matters raised by the Board itself, and approved the

new Plan and UDC on June 15, 1998, subject to State agency review. Some additional modifications were made by the Board to the Plan, UDC, and Official Maps in December 1998 in order to respond to the review comments. The new Plan, UDC, and Official Maps became effective on December 20, 1998.

## What's in the Unified Development Code?

There are ten sections, as follows

- 1 - Introductory Provisions—applicability, official maps, *etc.*
- 2 - Definitions
- 3 - Land Use Districts—allowable and prohibited uses, overlay districts, environmentally sensitive areas (critical areas), subarea plans, *etc.*
- 4 - Uses Subject to Performance Standards—specific standards for specific land uses
- 5 - Shoreline Master Program regulations
- 6 - Development Standards—water, sewage disposal, density, grading, drainage, parking, *etc.*
- 7 - Land Divisions
- 8 - Permitting Procedures—applications, notice, review, *etc.*
- 9 - Legislative Procedures—amendments, redesignations, and subarea plans
- 10 - Enforcement and Penalties

There are three appendices:

- A - Wetlands Rating System
- B - Wetlands Mitigation/Enhancement Plan Contents
- C - Performance and Maintenance Bonds for Wetlands

(all as originally adopted in 1992 with the interim regulations for critical areas)

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## What do the Plan and UDC Mean to Me and My Property?

Here are a few steps to help find out:

1. **Start with the Comp Plan Map.** Find the designation for your area. If you're within 200 feet of a shoreline, find the shoreline designation, too.
2. **Turn to the UDC and Find the Use Tables in Section 3.** There are two tables, one for activity centers and one for all other areas. Look down the column for your designation to see how the different uses are marked. The markings indicate if a use is allowed and the level of review required for it within each designation.

<b>Yes</b>	It's allowed, subject to meeting the development standards in UDC Section 6 (parking, setbacks, <i>etc.</i> )
<b>Prov</b>	It's allowed provisionally, subject to the development standards and to the performance standards for the use in Section 4.
<b>R</b>	It's allowed subject to administrative review and to the development and performance standards. A conditional use permit may be required if impacts are high (see the impact table 8.2 in UDC Section 8).
<b>C</b>	A conditional use permit is required, including a public hearing.
<b>No</b>	It's prohibited. Existing uses are allowed as nonconforming, but new ones would not be allowed.

- 3. For Shorelines, the Regulations in UDC Section 5 also Apply.** These include shoreline use regulations, regulations by shoreline designation (or “environment”), and shoreline permit or exemption procedures.