

Frequently Asked Questions



Question: What is a Comprehensive Plan?

- **Answer:** A Comprehensive Plan is a policy document that guides future growth and development in the county. All cities and counties over a certain size in Oregon must adopt and regularly update their Comprehensive Plans. These documents address topics such as land use, housing, economic development, transportation, parks and recreation and air, water and land resources. Comprehensive Plans must be consistent with state and regional goals, laws, administrative rules and other requirements and guidelines. For each topic addressed, the plan typically includes information about existing and future conditions and goal and policy statements.

Question: Does the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan address County social service programs?

- **Answer:** While the County provides many social and other services to residents throughout the County, the Comprehensive Plan will provide very limited information and policy direction related to non-land-based facilities and services. However, to the extent that public health issues impact these other topics, they may be addressed to some degree in the plan.

Question: How long will the planning process take?

- **Answer:** The Comprehensive Plan Update process is designed to run through approximately mid-2016. Citizens will have a variety of opportunities to be engaged during this process, with an emphasis on identifying key issues and concerns early in the process, reviewing work completed by the planning team and advisory committees during the middle, and reviewing a draft Comprehensive Plan at the end of the process. Go to our [project schedule page](#) for a more detailed timeline.

Question: Does the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan apply to the entire county?

- **Answer:** The Comprehensive Plan focuses on the unincorporated, rural areas of the county, namely the West Hills, the areas east and west of the Sandy River, and Sauvie Island/Multnomah Channel. It also addresses unincorporated areas in Interlachen and a portion of Pleasant Valley. It will not focus on the unincorporated, urban areas of the county, which lie within the Metropolitan Urban Growth Boundary. Each city within the county has jurisdictions for planning within its urban planning area boundary and has its own Comprehensive Plan. Those cities coordinate with the county and the regional government (Metro) to ensure that all of these plans are generally compatible with one another. [See a map](#) of the study area.

Question: How does the Comprehensive Plan relate to zoning in the county?

- **Answer:** The Comprehensive Plan provides a set of broad policies that establish the basis for future land use development patterns and regulations in the county. The County's [Zoning Map](#) and [Development Code](#) provide specific regulations about how property owners may use and develop their land consistent with state, regional and local laws and other requirements. The county will be updating its Development Code as part of the Comprehensive Plan update process, to ensure that the code fully complies with statutory requirements and that it is consistent with any new plan policies that direct code changes. Similar to the Comprehensive Plan, the Development Code only applies to the rural areas of the county. Within incorporated cities in the county, each city has jurisdiction for land use planning and zoning and applies its own development code. This also applies to some rural areas that are within the Metro Urban Growth Boundary but have not been annexed to a city.

Question: Does the Comprehensive Plan address roads in the county?

- **Answer:** The Comprehensive Plan currently includes policies related to transportation facilities. As part of the Comprehensive Plan Update process, the county also will be updating its Transportation System Plan (TSP). The TSP will guide future construction, improvements and maintenance of new and existing roads, as well as facilities for bicyclists, pedestrians and transit users. The County currently has multiple TSP documents, similar to the various Rural Area Plans. As part of this process, the County will consolidate all of these TSPs, including information from a separate but linked transportation planning process for Sauvie Island, along with key elements of the County's Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plans into a single updated TSP. Although it will be a stand-alone document, the new TSP will function as the transportation element of the Comprehensive Plan and be referenced in the Comprehensive Plan as such.

Question: What will happen to the new [Sauvie Island/Multnomah Channel Rural Area Plan](#)?

- **Answer:** The Sauvie Island/Multnomah Channel Rural Area Plan was adopted in September 2015 as a separate document. It will be essential to incorporate information and policies associated with that rural area plan into the County Comprehensive Plan Update. While the Comprehensive Plan update process represents an opportunity to decide how best to integrate that information, the County does not intend to revisit policies adopted as part of the Sauvie Island process, except where a policy may be applicable countywide.

Question: What are the major topics that will be addressed in the comprehensive plan?

- **Answer:** The comprehensive plan covers 12 topic areas, all of which are being evaluated and updated as part of this project. The topic areas encompass and generally correspond to the Oregon Statewide Planning Goals that apply to Multnomah County. For example, “Natural Resources” will address Statewide Goals 5 (Natural Resources) and 6 (Air, Land and Water Quality). The topic areas are:

1. Citizen Involvement
2. Land Use
3. Farm Land
4. Forest Land
5. Natural Resources
6. Cultural and Historic Resources
7. Natural Hazards
8. Parks and Recreation
9. Rural Economy
10. Housing
11. Public Facilities
12. Transportation / TSP

Question: Can you give me an example of a policy issue or question that the Comprehensive Plan might address?

- **Answer:** One example has to do with how agri-tourism uses are allowed and regulated on agricultural lands (also called Exclusive Farm Use or EFU lands). State law allows counties to adopt provisions for agri-tourism and other commercial events or activities that are related to and supportive of agriculture in the EFU zones. Currently, Multnomah County has not adopted the optional agri-tourism provisions allowed by the state but does allow the other events and activities as prescribed in state law. Counties have a certain amount of discretion to craft specific requirements related to these uses, including the extent to which they are allowed and the applicable review process. The policy questions that will be addressed as part of this update include:
 - Should the County continue to be more restrictive than the state allows or allow for the minimum permissible level of these activities prescribed in state law?
 - Should agri-tourism be allowed in only certain areas of the County?
 - What is an appropriate level of review and what criteria should be considered in crafting applicable requirements?

Question: Will policies or development code requirements for the area within the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area change?

- **Answer:** To the extent new county-wide policies are adopted for rural areas, they would also apply to the Scenic Area. However, land use and development within the Scenic Area are governed to a significant degree by requirements in the Scenic Area Plan and the County's requirements must be consistent with that Plan. As a result, the County does not plan to adopt new policies specific to that area. In addition, the County will continue to apply separate, specific development code regulations for the Scenic Area to maintain consistency between county and Scenic Area requirements.

Question: Because state law prescribes what is allowed in Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) and Commercial Forest Use (CFU) zones, does the County have any flexibility in changing the allowed uses and other standards that apply to these zones?

- **Answer:** In some instances, the County has flexibility to change allowed uses and standards in the EFU and CFU zones. For example, the County's current regulations for additional dwellings in the CFU zone are more restrictive than state law. Therefore, the County could opt to relax those regulations somewhat (thereby allowing more opportunity for new homes on forest land) if permitted under all applicable state laws. In those instances where flexibility exists within state law, the County will be considering whether or not to make changes as part of this update project.

Question: Will there continue to be different policies for different rural areas of the County?

- **Answer:** Yes. One goal of this update project is to provide a more streamlined comprehensive plan that contains all policy language in one user-friendly document. Currently, there is significant overlap in the policies for the different rural areas; where overlap exists, those policies will be consolidated and where it makes sense, policies will be consistent for the whole County. However, the rural areas each have unique attributes and histories that, in some cases, will necessitate unique policy language. Where policy language differs among the rural areas, the updated comprehensive plan will highlight those differences so they are clear and understandable.

Question: How will climate change be factored into the Comprehensive Plan?

- **Answer:** This update will consider two recent initiatives that will help to guide potential new climate change policies for the County. The [2015 Climate Action Plan](#) serves as the 40-year roadmap for the institutional and individual change needed to reduce community-wide greenhouse gas emissions 80% by 2050. The [Climate Smart Strategy for the Portland Metropolitan Region](#), produced by [Metro](#) responds to a state mandate to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2035. Some of the actions identified in the Climate Action Plan will be incorporated in updated Comprehensive Plan policies.

Question: Is the County's approach to regulating natural resources and environmentally sensitive lands like streams and wetlands likely to change?

- **Answer:** No significant changes in the County's overall approach are being proposed at this time. However, some changes to policies associated with natural resources and hazard areas are being recommended, including protecting several additional streams and wildlife habitat areas identified as significant since the last update of the Comprehensive Plan. In addition, the County will take advantage of more current and accurate data showing the location of resources and hazards as it updates maps of those areas for the Comprehensive Plan.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

Question: What is the Community Advisory Committee and what role will it have in the comprehensive plan update?

- **Answer:** The [Community Advisory Committee \(CAC\)](#) is a collaborative group whose purpose is to assist with updating the Multnomah County Comprehensive Plan. By representing the interests of stakeholders in the rural areas of the County, this committee, comprised of County residents, will help insure that the plan update reflects the needs and expectations of the public. The group will meet approximately monthly and will provide feedback and recommendations to Multnomah County staff and ultimately to the County's Planning Commission and Board of Commissioners. All CAC meetings will be open to the public and will include opportunities for public comment.

Question: How can I participate in the planning process?

- **Answer:** The Comprehensive Plan Update process represents an important opportunity to strengthen the County's relationship with its residents, property owners, business owners and other stakeholders. It is an opportunity to better understand people's needs and reflect those in the County's plans for the future. A variety of strategies will be used to inform people about the Comprehensive Planning process and encourage their involvement, including:
 - The County's website and social media - updates, event announcements, draft documents.
 - [Email updates](#) (by voluntary sign-up)
 - News releases to local media outlets
 - Community meetings or meetings with existing community groups
 - Online meetings or surveys
 - Community Advisory Committee (CAC) and Subcommittee meetings
 - Opportunities to comment and talk with staff via e-mail, phone or in person

Go to our [meeting and events page](#) to stay involved!

Question: When will the County be conducting more public meetings on this project?

- **Answer:** The next round of community meetings is tentatively scheduled for late March or early April. Similar to the previous rounds of meetings held in November 2014 and September 2015, the County will hold meetings in both the eastern and western parts of the County. The meetings will provide information about, and opportunities to comment on, drafts of the Comprehensive Plan and TSP, including draft policies associated with all aspects of the Plans. More information about these upcoming meetings will be posted on our [meeting and events page](#) as it becomes available.

Question: What are the remaining steps in the Comprehensive Plan process?

- **Answer:** The project team is currently preparing a draft of the Comprehensive Plan and TSP for review by the CAC and other community members. Remaining steps include:
 - Completion of draft documents for CAC review by mid-February.
 - Public meetings to review the plans in late March or early April, as well as opportunities for the public to review the plans online.
 - Revision of the plans to reflect community comments.
 - Work session with the Multnomah County Planning Commission tentatively scheduled for April or May.
 - Public hearings with the Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioners to adopt the Plan expected to begin in June.

Question: How can I get more information about the planning process?

- **Answer:** This website provides the most up to date information about upcoming events and draft work products. [Sign up](#) to be on the project mailing list to stay informed. You can also contact Senior Planner Rich Faith at [503-988-3931](tel:503-988-3931) or rich.faith@multco.us for more information.