

Regional Centers Framework

2018 SEPA Addendum to the VISION 2040 Final Environmental Impact Statement

Prepared pursuant to the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (Chapter 43.21C RCW)
and WAC 197-11-625.

January 25, 2018

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Dear Member of the Puget Sound Regional Council or Interested Parties:

The Puget Sound Regional Council has prepared this State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) addendum for the Regional Centers Framework project. This addendum updates the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) issued in April 2008 and provides information about the Regional Centers Framework project.

The Regional Centers Framework project considers changes to the regional council's procedures, criteria and support for regional centers to implement the policy direction of VISION 2040.

Copies of this addendum and project documents are all available online at psrc.org or from the Puget Sound Regional Council's Information Center at (206) 464-7532.

Sincerely,

Erika Harris, AICP
SEPA Responsible Official

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Description of Proposal

This document is an addendum to the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for VISION 2040. The purpose of this addendum is to assess and document the environmental impacts of an update to the Regional Centers Framework. The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is proposing the update of the framework to include new and modified criteria and procedures to guide the designation of regional centers, including regional growth centers and manufacturing/industrial centers. This project implements policy stated in VISION 2040 and its environmental scope falls within the range of environmental review considered in the original Environmental Impact Statement for VISION 2040. This addendum complies with the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) rules under Revised Code of Washington (RCW) 43.21C and Chapter 197-11 of the Washington Administrative Code (WAC).

Lead Agency and Source of Proposal

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Licenses Required: No licenses are required.

Adopted SEPA Documents

VISION 2040 Draft, supplemental, and Final EIS
<https://www.psrc.org/environmental-review-vision-2040>

**Potential Date of Adoption of the Regional Centers Framework by the Executive Board:
March 22, 2018**

Location of Documents

Available online at: www.psrc.org/VISION

Copies available from:

Puget Sound Regional Council Information Center
1011 Western Avenue, Suite 500
Seattle, Washington 98104
206-464-7532

No cost for individual copies

Need for the Addendum

VISION 2040, the long-range plan for the central Puget Sound region, was adopted in May 2008 following the preparation and review of a State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).

The Puget Sound Regional Council (PSRC) is updating the criteria and procedures, known as the Regional Centers Framework, used to designate regional centers consistent with the adopted direction of VISION 2040. Related VISION 2040 policies include:

MPP-DP-5: Focus a significant share of population and employment growth in designated regional growth centers.

MPP-DP-6: Provide a regional framework for designating and evaluating regional growth centers.

MPP-DP-8: Focus a significant share of employment growth in designated regional manufacturing/industrial centers.

MPP-DP-9: Provide a regional framework for designating and evaluating regional manufacturing/industrial centers.

MPP-DP-12

Establish a common framework among the countywide processes for designating subregional centers to ensure compatibility within the region.

VISION 2040 also includes the following actions on centers:

Evaluate Designated Centers: DP-Action-3: The Puget Sound Regional Council will study and evaluate existing regional growth centers and manufacturing/industrial centers to assess their designation, distribution, interrelationships, characteristics, transportation efficiency, and performance.

Other Centers, Including Countywide and Local Centers: DP-Action-5

The Puget Sound Regional Council, together with its member jurisdictions and countywide planning bodies, will develop a common framework for identifying various types of central places beyond regional centers. Address the role of smaller nodes that provide similar characteristics as centers.

Consistent with VISION 2040, the update to the Regional Centers Framework includes amended criteria and procedures to implement VISION 2040's regional objectives for growth patterns and center-oriented development.

Currently, the region has 29 designated regional growth centers and nine designated manufacturing/industrial centers. When the Draft and Final VISION 2040 Environmental Impact Statements were completed, 27 of these same regional growth centers and eight manufacturing/industrial centers were designated and evaluated as part of the environmental review. Under the proposed updates to the framework, all existing centers continue to be regionally designated

and play an important role in attracting future growth. VISION 2040 anticipated the designation of additional regional centers over time, as has occurred. With changes to the criteria some new centers and other places are likely to become regionally designated or recognized. The following may occur with the changes to the framework:

- Subject to periodic performance monitoring, existing regional centers remain designated and are expected to accommodate a significant share of regional growth
- New regional growth centers will be required to demonstrate consistency with revised designation criteria, including evidence of planning and environmental review, existing or planned transit service, and existing housing.
- Existing large regional growth centers will be required to plan for a higher level of growth (a minimum of 30 activity units per acre)
- Additional manufacturing/industrial centers may be designated under a new designation path with a lower jobs threshold
- New guidance for countywide centers provides a base level of consistency between counties
- Four large military facilities are recommended to be recognized in the next update of VISION 2040 for their regional significance
- Planning expectations for existing and new regional centers will increase to address factors such as transit, housing, equity and environmental conditions
- Long-term performance monitoring may improve overall implementation of VISION 2040

With these changes, the region may expect a modest number of new places seeking regional designation, plus regional recognition of major military installations. An exact number of new eligible places cannot be determined due to factors such as community interest and local plans. The region can also expect enhanced planning for regional centers that better addresses planning for growth, transit access, housing, social equity, and environmental suitability compared to the current framework.

Overall, the framework update is consistent with the policies and actions identified in VISION 2040 and the review of environmental impacts considered in the VISION 2040 Draft and Final Environmental Impact Statements. The updated Regional Centers Framework is expected to have similar environmental impacts as those identified in the Draft and Final EIS.

Subsequent Environmental Review and Project Review Process: Updating the Regional Centers Framework does not commit the region or individual counties or cities to designate new centers. Designation of new centers begins as a local process and will be subject to planning and environmental review during local plan adoption.

The centers framework establishes a policy guide to update additional implementing actions, including updating designation procedures for new centers, planning checklists, regional plans, and countywide planning policies.

Subsequent updates to VISION 2040 policies that may address aspects of the centers framework will be considered in the next update to the regional VISION plan, VISION 2050, which will include additional review pursuant to SEPA.

Project Information

VISION 2040's Regional Growth Strategy is structured around accommodating significant new residential and employment growth in dense urban centers that are well served by transit and other services. VISION 2040 also calls for preserving industrial land into the long term and accommodating new employment growth in designated manufacturing/industrial centers. The Regional Centers Framework is a set of criteria and procedures that aim to focus and support growth while creating vibrant, livable communities. This proposal

- Defines the types of central places—both larger and smaller—within the region that are the focus of growth, planning, and investment.
- Provides for designation of centers at the regional and countywide levels in a way that improves consistency across the region.
- Establishes planning expectations that ensure centers are developing as thriving, equitable, and connected communities.

The framework incorporates procedural changes, but retains the basic structure of designating new centers. Local governments are responsible for seeking designation, with the concurrence of the countywide organization in each county. PSRC's Executive Board is responsible for designating new regional centers. The draft proposal encourages local governments to designate other types of centers locally.

The following supporting documents are incorporated by reference into this addendum:

- Regional Centers Framework Update [Board Proposal](#) (Dec 2017 version)
- Regional Centers Framework Update Project [Scope of Work](#)
- 2016 Regional Centers Framework Update Project [Background & Findings Report](#)
- The full background & findings report and other project resources are available online at: <https://www.psrc.org/our-work/centers-framework-update>

Additional Environmental Information

The 2006 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) and 2008 Final Environmental Impact Statement addressed a wide variety of environmental impacts and mitigation for each alternative, considering impacts to transportation, air quality, climate change, land use (population, employment, and housing), noise, visual and aesthetic resources, water quality and hydrology, ecosystems and Endangered Species Act issues, energy, earth, environmental health, public services and utilities, parks and recreation, historic and cultural resources, and environmental justice. The updated Regional Centers Framework would not create significantly different environmental impacts.

Impact of more centers: The draft proposal changes the regional criteria, which may allow some new regional centers to be designated. In particular, the criteria propose a lower employment threshold for manufacturing/industrial centers, which may lead to designation of new manufacturing/industrial centers. However, these are areas that have long been designated for manufacturing/industrial uses. The draft proposal also establishes basic standards for countywide centers, which would create a more consistent system of places planning for growth and prioritized for countywide transportation funds. This may lead to designation of new countywide centers. The VISION 2040 EIS found that:

Generally, alternatives with a more focused growth pattern (such as Metropolitan Cities, Preferred Growth, and Larger Cities) have potentially lower overall environmental impacts, but high growth areas could have higher localized impacts with higher development impacts on people and/or services. Because less land would likely be required to meet growth needs, growth in rural or natural resource areas could be reduced or avoided. Compact growth also reduces the regional levels of automobile use and congestion, and improves transit use, carpooling, walking and bicycling, which in turn lowers air pollution, water pollution, and energy use. Redevelopment of older properties to today's standards could also improve localized conditions and environmental performance in a wide array of areas, ranging from transportation to energy, hazardous materials, and stormwater. Regionally, governments could provide public services more efficiently and public services and other cultural and educational amenities could be closer to more people. However, the localized costs for providing services and facilities in the highest growth areas would be concentrated, with some governments bearing higher costs than others.
(ES-14)

The FEIS contemplated adding additional regional growth centers or subregional centers, particularly in Larger Cities (FEIS p. 5.2-18). Designation of new centers may lead to potential city reclassification, increased density, and infill development in areas supported by transit and other services.

Greater growth for larger centers. By establishing a different type of regional growth center, larger centers would be encouraged to plan for greater levels of growth, and VISION 2040 could better address the different characteristics and growth trajectories of centers.

Military installations. The draft proposal recommends identifying major military installations in the update to VISION 2040 to recognize the influence these installations have on regional growth patterns, the economy, and the transportation system. This may provide new opportunities for collaboration and coordinated infrastructure investment to support future growth and improved mobility. Smaller military installations may be designated as a type of countywide center to recognize their role as employment centers within each county. This provides a more consistent system across the region.

Planning expectations. The draft proposal does not recommend removing regional designation for any existing regional centers in the VISION 2040 update. The proposal does establish a time period and expectations for existing regional centers to meet the revised criteria and planning expectations. This may result in enhanced local planning efforts to attract development in centers, address needs for transportation, housing, equity, and services, and help create vibrant neighborhoods in the region.

Conclusion

Environmental impacts for the updated centers framework are similar to those documented for the 2008 Final Environmental Impact Statement. The Final EIS found that, in general, center-oriented growth would result in fewer environmental impacts compared to more distributed growth patterns. The updated centers framework continues to support VISION 2040's policies that support center-based development patterns at multiple scales throughout the region, where centers develop as thriving, equitable, connected communities. While the updated framework may ultimately support the designation or recognition of some new center places, those places will continue to be within the designated urban area, and due to the updated criteria, will largely be locations within cities, supported by transit, and that have greater access to housing, employment, and public services.

The change the Regional Centers Framework does not change VISION 2040's Regional Growth Strategy or require amendments to the types and locations of regional geographies, although changes could be contemplated in the update to VISION 2040.

The SEPA Responsible Official concludes that the updated Regional Centers Framework is consistent with VISION 2040 and would not create new significant adverse environmental impacts beyond those addressed in the 2006 Draft Environmental Impact Statement and 2008 Final Environmental Impact Statement. For proposed new centers, further environmental review is required as part of the designation process.