



**Steering Committee -  
Winslow Subarea Plan Update &  
Comprehensive Plan Periodic Review  
February 8, 2024  
3:30 – 5:00 PM  
City Council Conference Room, 280 Madison Ave N  
Bainbridge Island, WA 98110**

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Meeting of the Steering Committee Overseeing the  
Winslow Subarea Plan Update and the Comprehensive Plan Periodic Review

February 8, 2024

City Council Conference Room

<https://bainbridgewa.zoom.us/j/85074579238>

*This meeting will be recorded*

**AGENDA**

**Welcome/Roles and Meeting Ground Rules/ January Meeting Notes**

**Meeting Topics:**

1. Discuss paper on density per request by Steering Committee member Jon Quitslund (attached)
2. Looking Ahead at EIS Outreach
3. Written report outs on Winslow Subarea Plan Alternatives and Updates to the Outreach Chapter

**For special accommodations, please contact Planning & Community  
Development 206-780-3750 or at [pcd@bainbridgewa.gov](mailto:pcd@bainbridgewa.gov)**



Meeting of the Steering Committee Overseeing the Winslow Subarea Plan Update and the  
Comprehensive Plan Periodic Review

**Thursday, January 11th, 2024**

3:30 – 5:00 PM

Participants: Council members Jon Quitslund, Kirsten Hytopoulos, and Leslie Schneider; Planning Commissioners Sarah Blossom (remote); Planning Director Patty Charnas; Senior Planners Jennifer Sutton and Peter Best; Facilitators Linda Paralez and Matty Dunham

**Meeting Agenda**

- Year in review
- Report Out on Fall Scoping Process for Expanded EIS and Comprehensive Plan
- Brief Review of Kitsap Draft EIS and Draft Comprehensive Plan
- Discussion of Draft EIS and Comprehensive Plan conceptual alternatives
- Upcoming Milestones in March, April, and May
- February Agenda Topics

**Year in Review:**

A presentation reviewing the events of 2023 was delivered. One significant focus of the prior year was the development of the Housing Action Plan, which received unanimous Planning Commission and City Council approval last June. The Steering Committee was reminded of their high level of interest along with the Planning Commission regarding implementation of the Housing Action Plan especially in the updates to the Winslow Subarea Plan and Comprehensive Plan.

Another significant portion of the previous year's efforts were the kickoff and early outreach accomplishments of the Winslow Subarea Plan and the formulation of alternatives based on community priorities. The three Winslow Subarea Plan alternatives can be summarized as no action, densification with walkable corridors, and distributed density with middle housing expansion. Throughout these activities for as long as the Steering Committee has been assembled, feedback and ideas have been given on the proposed Winslow Subarea Plan alternatives as well as the community outreach workshops associated with both the Winslow Subarea Plan and the Comprehensive Plan.

Toward the end of 2023 and the start of the new year, work has concentrated on the preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), which provides technical analysis and essential information for the preferred alternative. The draft EIS will help provide decision-support for a preferred alternative, integrating components from the various proposed alternatives for Winslow.

**Three Documents from the Scoping Process for Expanded EIS and Comprehensive Plan:**

A document summarizing the scoping process for the Comprehensive Plan was presented, accompanied by a summary of the orientation interviews conducted in the fall. In September, a



series of orientation interviews were conducted to provide insights for the benefit of the Comprehensive Plan's consulting group. The scoping process facilitated the consultant's understanding of community issues. The Comprehensive Plan's fall outreach was extensive, employing digital platforms, community posters, a 32-day comment period, and a series of interviews with in-person and virtual open houses, yielding 1,211 comments and 306 participants. Input received from the orientation interviews and workshops affirmed the alignment of the Comprehensive Plan's vision statement with community values. Environmental stewardship, community identity, and the placement of density were highlighted as priority concerns for the community.

Steering Committee members raised concerns regarding the summary provided at the end of the orientation interview document. Committee members desired a more detailed summary that reflected community priorities including environmental impact, open space, and land use patterns. Staff appreciated the feedback and adjusted the final documents.

### **Kitsap Draft EIS:**

A slideshow presenting an overview of the Kitsap Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Draft Comprehensive Plan t was displayed. The Kitsap County draft EIS was released in December and includes three alternatives. Community engagement will take the form of a 45-day period for open comment on the county's website, as well as an in-person meeting on January 18<sup>th</sup> in Port Orchard.

The Kitsap draft EIS alternatives include a no-action scenario, compact growth/urban center focus, and dispersed growth approach. Alternative 2 will focus on growth in high-capacity transit centers and will reduce rural growth pressure. This alternative emphasizes multi-family housing types, while alternative 3 involves increasing rural growth. Presently, only alternative 2 aligns with the state housing mandates for Kitsap County. The fundamental purpose of the Environmental Impact Statement is to serve as an assessment tool to evaluate the various alternatives to help determine the preferred alternative. Steering Committee members appreciated the overview as it helps members know what to expect when the City issues it similar plans and documents. The illustration of alternatives, puzzle pieces and how a preferred alternative can be arrived at was helpful.

### **Comprehensive Plan Conceptual Alternatives:**

A visual graphic was presented regarding the conceptual approach to the Comprehensive Plan alternatives. The visual document provided a high-level conceptual summary. The framework for the Comprehensive Plan alternatives is informed by the Winslow Subarea Plan alternatives as "flip sides of a coin."

Alternative 1 proposes a no-action scenario, where there are no changes to zoning, development regulation and any growth would predominantly occur in areas outside of Winslow currently characterized as conservation areas. Alternative 2 focuses on conceptually intensifying density in existing neighborhood centers while reducing capacity in conservation areas. Alternative 3



conceptually involves a distributed density model by expanding walkability in neighborhood centers and encouraging more middle housing. Steering Committee members commented that conceptual alternatives for the rest of the island are more properly raised at a city council meeting and the alternatives appeared to need more validation before moving substantially forward. Staff appreciated the feedback and will return to discuss outreach with Steering Committee after discussing with city council.

**February Agenda topics:**

A February agenda item was requested by Steering Committee member Jon Quitslund who wrote an essay on density.

| Upcoming Agenda Items <i>(Dates Tentative)</i> |                                                     |
|------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Steering Committee Meeting Date                | Topics for Consideration                            |
|                                                | Scoping, Integrated EIS, Alternatives Discussion    |
|                                                | Comprehensive Plan General Discretionary Amendments |
|                                                | Preferred Alternative for Winslow                   |
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## Thinking about Density, Trying to Get It “Done Right”

January 4, 2024

The paragraphs that follow represent a slowly developing pattern of reflection and inquiry. If I felt my thinking was going nowhere, I wouldn't make it public; I'm hoping that I can engage others in similar lines of thinking about a problematic policy issue. Don't look for conclusions or final solutions, however; this is unfinished business. But we have to start somewhere, examining assumptions and seeking common ground.

In the kick-off meeting for the *Comprehensive Plan* update process, back on September 27 of last year, Planning Commissioner Peter Schaab and I were at the same table for the workshop portion of the meeting. Among several other topics, the small group discussed the need for housing to accommodate the anticipated population growth. Peter quietly observed, “Affordability touches everything.” That enigmatic insight has stuck with me.

Planning for more affordable housing usually acknowledges that to achieve more affordable housing, you need to accept “higher density.” All too often, that's where the conversation has stalled, because who wants high density development on Bainbridge Island? Let's shift our feet, and consider specifically where density should be increased, and how much density would be sufficient to achieve our goals.

Density, it seems, touches everything, and although it's a nebulous concept, it's as unwieldy as a brick. Why do density measurements matter so much? What are we regulating with our distinctions between the least dense and the highest-density zones? Like “affordability,” “density” is a term without a precise meaning, even though numbers are used to quantify what's being measured. Density is among the familiar concepts that, when you stop to think about them, resemble a clown car: how many meanings are packed inside?

What is it that we want to limit, or to increase, with density regulations? (When one set of numbers is used both to limit and to increase anything, it should be used with care – with an awareness of which purpose is being served.) In both long-range planning and formulating regulations, we're almost always involved in seeking a balance between different and potentially conflicting interests.

In a place like Bainbridge Island, which is incredibly varied in its terrain and the potential value of real estate, what's desirable or undesirable depends on where you are. Is it the size of a building's footprint and its height that matters most? Is it the number of people that will be optimal on a parcel of land, or the number of cars they are likely to use every day? How much clearing will suffice? Should we care about the amount of water that residents or businesses will use in a month, and/or how much wastewater they will produce?

Outside of downtown Winslow, the control of density is focused on the number of single-family homes that will be allowed on an acre of land. (R-2 means two houses per acre; R-0.4 means one house per 2.5 acres.) In practice, that's a very simple and imprecise standard, because lot sizes and their physical characteristics vary considerably, and so do the proportions of houses and other permitted structures. Also, within the expanse of the R-0.4 zone (the broad white space on the zoning map), many of the lots are an acre or less in size; they were platted and, in many cases, developed in the years before the City's zoning overlays were imposed. These

nonconforming lots establish, for better or worse, higher density neighborhoods within the Island's most rural and low-density heartland.

The short-term and long-term impacts of development on the natural environment matter a great deal here on Bainbridge because they are directly related to our sense of place and our quality of life. Sensitivity to such impacts tends to be expressed in knee-jerk fashion, based on an easy assumption that any more people amount to many more impacts on the environment. In my opinion, such assumptions are obstacles to intelligent long-range planning and land use regulation.

Low-density zoning has been justified by saying that it limits environmental impacts, but paradoxically, since low-density zoning limits the land's ability to absorb population growth, it promotes sprawl and a potentially destructive expansion of the built environment. (Maybe "environmental impacts" should be recognized as another clown car packed with different meanings: some strike with insidious and cumulative effects while others are superficial, like footprints on a trail.)

The shorelines of Bainbridge Island set limits on our community's expansion outward, and in many ways that's a good thing, since expansion isn't the only way to grow. Growing up, reaching one's full height, doesn't put an end to personal and intellectual development, after all. Pushing against limits is an all-too-human trait, but learning how to live within limits is essential to civilized life, and it's a character trait much valued in our community – now more than ever before, perhaps.

There is, I believe, a happy medium density that will support our living within limits for an indefinite future. It won't be the same density everywhere – not even close, because we shouldn't have the same kind of housing everywhere. Moderate density increases might take one form in the urban and suburban zones and be governed by a different set of standards in the lower density zones.

Many of the physical characteristics of Bainbridge Island will continue to limit the feasibility of higher-density development: the patchwork character of existing development; the prevalence of critical areas and forests that must be protected; the unevenness of our essential infrastructure, from rural to suburban to small-scale urban facilities for transportation, water, and waste; the broad extent of high-value conservation areas that will never be developed. Everything that defines our "special character" tells us that no simple set of rules for controlling density (and, on the other hand, allowing higher density) will serve us well.

If we can be clear about the purposes to be served by our development regulations, perhaps they can still be relatively simple. However we go about changing them, it is imperative that we both increase and diversify the supply of housing to meet the needs of households in all income sectors.

In the Housing element of our current *Comprehensive Plan*, Policy HO 3.1 reads, in part, **"Encourage innovative zoning regulations that increase the variety of housing types and choices suitable to a range of household sizes and incomes in a way that is compatible with the character of existing neighborhoods."** Where should we plan for and accommodate these housing types? Should we wait for the Planning staff and consultants to determine future density levels, or does the Council, with the Planning Commission, have a role to play in developing fundamental land use, housing, and commercial development policies?