

Introduction

Oregon's rapid population growth and development during the 1960s and 1970s prompted concern about the effect growth might have on the environment, natural resources, and the livability of communities. In a state where agriculture and timber are two of the largest industries, there was concern that conversion of farm and resource lands for development presented a threat to the state's economy. Sprawling development was also thought to increase the cost of public services, as unplanned cities require more streets, longer sewers, and more police and fire fighters.

These concerns led to the passage of the Land Conservation and Development Act (Senate Bills 100 and 101) in 1973. The legislation established the Land Conservation and Development Commission (LCDC), which was charged with adopting state land use goals, and the Department of Land Conservation and Development (DLCD), charged with assisting the commission and local governments in the implementation of those goals and with coordinating state agencies in land use matters. SB 100 directed local governments to adopt and implement comprehensive plans and revise them periodically in accordance with statewide goals and with the needs and desires of the public.

Statewide Planning Goals

The foundation of Oregon's statewide land use planning program is a set of 19 statewide planning goals. The goals express the state's policies on land use and related topics, such as citizen involvement, housing, and natural resources.

Most of the goals are accompanied by "guidelines," which are suggestions about how a goal may be applied. As noted in Goal 2, guidelines are not mandatory. The goals and guidelines are, however, adopted as administrative rules (Oregon Administrative Rules chapter 660, division 15).

City and County Planning

The statewide planning program does not mandate the adoption of a state plan. Instead, the state's cities and counties are responsible for adopting local comprehensive plans, zoning land to implement the plan, administering land use regulations, and handling land use permits for Oregon's non-federal land. City and county comprehensive plans include statements of issues and problems to be addressed, various inventories and other technical information, the goals and policies for addressing the issues and problems, and implementation measures. Plans must be done in accordance with state standards outlined in statute, statewide planning goals, and administrative rules.

The local comprehensive plans must be consistent with the statewide planning goals. LCDC reviewed plans for goal compliance, and when LCDC approved a local government's plan, the plan was "acknowledged" as consistent with the goals. Upon

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acknowledgment, the comprehensive plan becomes the controlling document for land use in the area covered by that plan.

Today, every city and county has a comprehensive land use plan that has been acknowledged by the state as being consistent with the statewide planning goals. Each plan represents years of effort and a consensus by citizens and officials about the future of their community. Oregon's planning laws apply not only to local governments, but also to special districts and state agencies. The laws strongly emphasize coordination—keeping plans and programs consistent with each other, with the goals, and with acknowledged local plans.

While local comprehensive plans must conform with the statewide planning goals, they are not limited to goal compliance – local plans address a variety of other land use issues that are not the subject of state goals. Comprehensive plans are the vehicle for defining land use issues and problems and establishing solutions through local goals and policies. Plans across the state address many similar issues, but there are many problems unique to a locality and there is wide variation in how issues are addressed. The goals provide a framework and obligations for local government planning, but no two plans are alike.

A Partnership

Oregon's planning program is a partnership between the state, local governments, and special districts. State law requires cities and counties to plan, and it sets the standards for such planning. On the other hand, plans and programs carried out by state agencies must comply with local comprehensive plans and zoning. For example, a state agency cannot issue a permit for land use in a location where local zoning prohibits the use.

The state does not write comprehensive plans. It does not zone land or administer permits for local planning actions such as variances and conditional uses. Unlike some other states, Oregon does not generally require environmental assessments or impact statements.

Land Conservation and Development Commission

LCDC establishes the goals and policies for Oregon's statewide planning program. The commission's seven members are unsalaried volunteers, appointed by the governor and confirmed by the state senate. The term of appointment is four years. The commission must have members from various geographic regions around the state, and it must include a sitting elected county official and a current or former elected city official.

The commission sets land use policy for the state through adoption and amendment of the statewide planning goals and administrative rules to implement the goals. LCDC decides whether a local government's comprehensive plan complies with the statewide planning goals through "acknowledgment" of the plan. The commission does not generally review subsequent plan amendments, but certain local land use decisions are review by LCDC to determine whether they comply with the goals.