



CITY OF BLACK DIAMOND

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Meeting Date: September 7, 2021
Staff Report Date: August 17, 2021
To: Planning Commissioners
From: Mona Davis, Community Development Director
Subject: Comprehensive Plan Amendments – Ecological Inventory Feasibility Study Policy

The purpose of this brief is to go over final docket item #2021-08: “Conduct a feasibility study, including costs and scope of operations, on conducting an ecological inventory.”

Proposal

This was a private request (citizen request is attached). The original proposal was to “conduct an ecological inventory of natural areas within the City and propose changes to land uses and regulations to preserve the functions and values of these natural areas. The inventory and proposed actions shall be presented to the Planning Commission for review and action by the City Council in 2022.” This request did not propose a policy change for the Comprehensive Plan, but rather would have required staff to undertake a one-time action—namely the completion of an “ecological inventory” and presentation of that inventory to the Planning Commission and City Council in 2022.

The Planning Commission recommended amending Item #2021-08 to conduct a feasibility study, including costs and scope of operations, on conducting an ecological inventory to be included in the final 2021 docket, which was what was approved by Council. Staff’s focus, regarding the comprehensive plan amendment cycle, is to add a policy to the comprehensive plan regarding the ecological inventory to provide basis for the actual inventory to occur at a later date when it fits into the budget.

Evaluation Criteria (BDMC 16.10.220)

- A. All Amendments. All of the comprehensive plan amendments shall be reviewed under the following criteria:
1. Whether the proposed amendment(s) conform to the Growth Management Act (Chapter 36.70A RCW);
The GMA requires cities to protect critical areas. Adopted development regulations serve to preserve the natural environment, maintain fish and wildlife habitat, and protect drinking water, as well as reduce exposure to risks (landslides, flooding etc.). Including a policy in the comprehensive plan to conduct an ecological inventory conforms to the GMA by committing to protect critical areas and giving the City a specific understanding of



where these natural resources are located within city limits, and therefore if development regulations need to be amended to better protect those areas.

2. Whether the proposed amendment(s) are consistent with and implement the city's comprehensive plan, including the goals, policies and implementation strategies of the various elements of the plan;

The proposal is consistent with the following goals and policies of the adopted comprehensive plan:

- **NE Goal 1: Designate and protect the City's sensitive areas.**
- **Policy NE-1: Use best available techniques to preserve and enhance the functions and values of sensitive areas through policies, regulation programs, and incentives.**
- **NE Goal 2: Protect wetlands as ecosystems, and essential elements of watersheds.**
- **NE Goal 3: Promote preservation of fish and wildlife habitat corridors.**
- **Policy NE-36: Preserve native vegetation within streams, wetlands, and their associated buffers.**
- **Policy LU-58: Create an open space system and map overlay for the primary unifying component of the comprehensive plan.**
- **Policy LU-8: Retain a sense of place by protecting the community's important natural features and Treasured Places and support the City's Tree Preservation Program.**

3. Whether circumstances related to the proposed amendment(s) and/or the area in which it is located have substantially changed since the adoption of the city's comprehensive plan;

A comprehensive ecological inventory has never been completed for the entire City. The development in the City has resulted in changes to many properties in the past several years. The completion of this study would provide the City information on sensitive areas throughout the City, which would aid in GIS mapping, code administration, and development siting. Including a policy within the plan to complete this study would provide support for moving it forward.

4. Whether the assumptions upon which the city's comprehensive plan is based are no longer valid, or whether new information is available which was not considered during the adoption process or any annual amendments of the city's comprehensive plan; and
Related to the answer to criteria number three above, an ecological inventory of the entire City has ever been completed before, and this would be new information that would help guide the future development of the City. It may prove previous assumptions with mapping to be incorrect and would allow the comprehensive plan and associated development regulations to be amended, as necessary, to reflect any new discoveries.

5. Whether the proposed amendment(s) reflects current, widely held values of the residents of the city.

This topic was evaluated as part of the recent 2021 docketing process, which included a public hearing with the Planning Commission and was voted on by Council to be included as part of the final docket.



Staff Recommendation

Staff recommends adding a policy to Chapter 4 Natural Environment, section 4.3 that states:

Policy NE-6: Conduct an ecological inventory of the City to aid in identifying and protecting all sensitive areas.

Next Steps

Following the public hearing, staff will revise the recommendation as necessary based on public comments. Staff will inform the Planning Commission of any changes at the following work session for discussion.

From: [B Stuart](#)
To: [Mona Davis](#)
Cc: [Gary Davis](#); [Karen Bryant](#); [Carina Thornquist](#)
Subject: 2021 Comp Plan Suggestions
Date: Monday, March 1, 2021 4:39:55 PM
Attachments: [Proposed CP Amendments for Docket 2021 Black Diamond.docx](#)

Hi Mona. Attached you will find my suggestions for the 2021 Comp Plan review/adoption process. I look forward to seeing what is proposed this year and working with you and the PC through the process.

Bob Stuart
Black Diamond

Black Diamond Comprehensive Plan Update 2021 Suggestions

Black Diamond Code 16.10.130 provides a process for public suggestions to amend text and policies in the Comprehensive Plan. These suggestions are provided after careful review of past community concerns, other city and county Comprehensive Plans, and in the desire to bring the community together as Black Diamond grows.

Amendment Suggestion 1: Don't Know What You've Got Until It's Gone

New Policy NE-41: Conduct an ecological inventory of natural areas within the City and propose changes to land uses and regulations to preserve the functions and values of these natural areas. The inventory and proposed actions shall be presented to the Planning Commission for review and action by the City Council in 2022.

Rationale: Black Diamond faces an incredible challenge in balancing its future between small town in a natural surrounding and potential development capacity. If not managed more carefully, it will simply be another case of, "you don't know what you've got 'til it's gone." People have already noticed significant change in the type and location of wildlife, and the amount and vegetation of natural space.

The City should study remaining undeveloped land and its: ecosystem value; restoration potential; and open space potential. The study should also include: an evaluation of different ways new development could add conservation and open space, and whether existing zoning should be changed to encourage conservation of remaining open space.

Amendment Suggestion 2: Land Use Chapter Open Space

New Land Use Policy 8.5: Conservation of existing natural areas is preferred, and the city shall consider ways to incentivize such conservation beyond conservation of critical areas. Restoration and reclamation of land as open space and natural space is prioritized.

New Land Use Policy 10.5: The City shall require a significant portion of a development site be conserved as open space with retention of native vegetation or restoration of native vegetation in addition to critical areas and buffers on all development or re-development. Developers will be allowed to contribute funds or land of higher conservation values in exchange for increased development density on land of lower conservation value.