

ENVIRONMENT ELEMENT

GOAL

Protect and enhance Renton's natural ecosystems, natural beauty, and environmental quality.

Introduction

A goal of the Washington State Growth Management Act is to use Comprehensive Plans to protect the environment. Specifically this goal directs jurisdictions to: “Protect the environment and enhance the state's high quality of life, including air and water quality, and the availability of water.” The purpose of the environment element is to achieve this goal. This element provides the policy background and basis for future environmental actions by the City of Renton as it attempts to balance urbanization, economic development, tree canopy cover, natural area protection, and a high quality of life for all residents. Environmental policies will be implemented through economic development decisions, natural resource management and planning, critical areas regulations, and incentives for environmental protection.

Resource Protection

The quality of Renton’s environmental resources holds great importance for the citizens. Environmental resources, such as wetlands or wildlife habitat, are intrinsically valuable and should be protected for the unique features that are provided. The City of Renton, unlike many major Puget Sound cities, has several unique areas of habitat, many of which coincide with our wetlands and water resources. The Cedar River supports major fish runs during the year. Springbrook Creek, Honey Creek, and May Creek also provide habitat for salmonids. The Black River Riparian Forest provides habitat for over 35 species of birds, including heron and eagles, and many small mammals. The Cedar River, May Creek, and Panther Creek corridors have forested, meadow, and shrub habitats that provide shelter and food for many species. Policies that preserve these areas not only preserve their unique features, but also enhance the quality of life and provide recreational opportunities for Renton residents.

It is important to protect natural areas for public health and safety reasons, as well as for recreational and environmental reasons. Human and natural systems are interrelated, thus when natural systems are threatened, human health and quality of life is threatened. Preservation and protection of riparian corridors can prevent storm water effects such as erosion and sedimentation. Aquifer protection policies and ordinances, limit discharges of pollutants to Renton’s water supply. For areas that have already been degraded, all efforts should be made to naturalize them. For new areas, the natural systems should be protected. When natural systems are protected and enhanced, human health and quality of life is protected and enhanced.

Objective EN-A: Protect and enhance water quality of surface water resources including the City's lakes, rivers, major and minor creeks, and intermittent stream courses.

Policy EN-1. Manage water resources for multiple uses including recreation, fish and wildlife, flood protection, erosion control, water supply, energy production, and open space.

Policy EN-2. Minimize erosion and sedimentation by requiring appropriate construction techniques and resource practices.

Policy EN-3. Limit discharges of pollutants such as chemicals, insecticides, pesticides, and other hazardous wastes to surface waters.

Policy EN-4. Degraded channels, streams, creeks, and banks should be naturalized by public programs and new development.

Objective EN-B: Preserve and protect wetlands for overall system functioning.

Policy EN-5. Achieve no overall net loss of the City's wetlands. In no case should development activities decrease net acreage of existing wetlands.

Policy EN-6. When development may impact wetlands, the following hierarchy should be followed in deciding the appropriate course of action:

- a. avoid impacts to the wetland,
- b. minimize impacts to the wetland,
- c. restore the wetland when impacted,
- d. recreate the wetland at a ratio which will provide for its assured viability and success,
- e. enhance the functional values of an existing degraded wetland.

Policy EN-7. Protect buffers along wetlands to facilitate infiltration and maintain stable water temperatures, provide for biological diversity, reduce amount and velocity of run-off, and provide for wildlife habitat.

Policy EN-8. Water level fluctuations in wetlands used as part of storm water detention systems should be similar to the fluctuations under natural conditions. The utilization, maintenance, and storage capacity provided in existing wetlands should be encouraged.

Policy EN-9. Pursue an overall net gain of wetland functions and values by enhancing significant wetlands and providing incentives for the enhancement of wetland functions and values through private development.

Objective EN-C: Ensure the long-term protection of the quality and quantity of the groundwater resources of the City of Renton in order to maintain a safe and adequate potable water supply for the City.

Policy EN-10. Emphasize the use of open ponding and detention, vegetated swales, rain gardens, clean roof run-off, right-of-way landscape strips, open space, and stormwater management techniques that maximize water quality and infiltration where appropriate and which will not endanger groundwater quality.

Policy EN-11. Acquire the most sensitive lands such as wetlands and flood plains for conversion to parks and greenbelts.

Objective EN-D: Protect and enhance wildlife habitat throughout the City.

Policy EN-12. Identify unique and significant wildlife habitat as defined by Washington State Habitat and Species Project and ensure that buildings, roads, and other features are located on less sensitive portions of a site.

Policy EN-13. Encourage protection of existing habitat areas through regulation and the preservation and enlargement of existing habitat areas through development incentives.

Policy EN-14. Re-establish self-sustaining fisheries resources in appropriate rivers and creeks through habitat improvement projects that encourage and enhance salmonid use.

Hazards

Renton is located in a geographically unique area filled with recognized hazards such as: landslide hazards, erosion hazards, seismic hazards, steep slopes, floodways, and coal mine hazards. The walls of the plateaus and river valleys contain both steep and erosive conditions. Numerous landslides create costs borne by the public agencies every year and private owners often suffer property damage from these same events. Due to the high annual rainfall and soil conditions, erosion damage can occur on relatively level areas as well as steep ones. In addition to natural hazards, Renton has a long history of coal mining. Although these operations have ceased, there may be subterranean dangers that are often unnoticeable on the surface. These policies set up standards which will protect public health, safety and welfare and allow development to proceed in appropriate areas.

Objective EN-E: Protect the natural functions of 100 year floodplains and floodways to prevent threats to life, property, and public safety associated with flooding hazards.

Policy EN-15. Prohibit permanent structures from developing in floodways and limit development within the 100 year floodplain.

Policy EN-16. Emphasize non-structural methods in planning for flood prevention and damages reduction.

Policy EN-17. Dredge the Cedar River bed within the existing engineered channel as one method of flood control.

Objective EN-F: Reduce the potential for damage to life and property due to seismic events and geologic hazards.

Policy EN-18. Land uses in areas subject to geologic hazards should be designed to prevent property damage and environmental degradation before, during, and after construction. Existing vegetation and tree canopy coverage should be preserved and enhanced to the

maximum extent possible in order to protect the integrity of natural drainage systems, existing land forms, and maintain wildlife habitat values.

Policy EN-19. Allow land alteration only for approved development proposals or approved mitigation efforts that will not create unnecessary erosion, undermine the support of nearby land, or unnecessarily scar the landscape in areas subject to geologic hazards.

Policy EN-20. Protect high landslide areas from land use development and roads.

Objective EN-G: Reduce the potential for damage to life and property due to abandoned coal mines, and return this land to productive uses.

Policy EN-21. Allow land uses to locate in coal mine hazard areas, provided the hazards are precisely located and all significant hazards associated with the mines are eliminated, making the site as safe as a site which has not been previously mined.

Sustainable Development

Planning for hazards, and for the protection of natural resources, are steps that clearly meet the environment goal of the Growth Management Act. However, it is necessary to go beyond these steps to achieve sustainable development that will ultimately enhance quality of life in the long term. Environmental systems, whether at the scale of the global climate, or at the scale of local forest, often change incrementally. Cumulative effects are best managed through a combination of engineering, preservation of natural systems, education, and collective action.

Objective EN-H: Protect and promote clean air and minimize individual and cumulative noise impacts to ensure a healthful environment.

Policy EN-22. Maintain high air quality standards through efficient land use patterns promote air quality through reduction in emissions from industry, traffic, commercial, and residential uses.

Policy EN-23. Analyze Renton's existing tree canopy cover, establish canopy cover goals, and promote urban forestry programs in order to maintain healthy atmospheric conditions.

Policy EN-24. Use land use planning and development regulations to ensure that the design, construction, and on-going operations of land uses do not create noise impacts on adjacent land uses and activities.

Objective EN-I: Implement a stormwater management program which optimizes Renton's water resources and promotes low impact development to combine engineering with the preservation of natural systems.

Policy EN-25. Maintain, protect, and enhance natural drainage systems and natural surface water storage sites to protect water quality, reduce public costs, and prevent environmental degradation.

Policy EN-26. Promote the return of precipitation to the soil at natural rates near where it falls through development design which minimizes impermeable surface coverage and maximizing infiltration through the exposure of natural surfaces through the use of grassy swales, trees, landscaping, where feasible.

Objective EN-J: Create a sustainable urban forest that enhances the livability of the community.

Policy EN-27. Promote development of Renton's urban forest through tree planting programs, tree maintenance programs that favor the use of large healthy trees along streets, in parks, in residential, commercial, and industrial areas, and through the protection and restoration of forest ecosystems.

Policy EN-28. Require trees and other vegetation along newly constructed or reconstructed streets to reduce impacts from development.

Policy EN-29. Establish canopy cover goals for public and private development through the survey of forested areas and the development of site specific forest management plans.

Policy EN-30. Integrate urban forestry plans with other City plans and projects to maximize environmental, economic, and health benefits.

Objective EN-K: Protect, restore and enhance environmental quality through land use plans and patterns, surface water management programs, park master programs, urban forestry programs, transportation planning, development reviews, incentive programs and work with citizens, land owners, and public and private agencies.

Policy EN-31. Reduce the impact of new development on the environment by encouraging the use of sustainable design techniques in public and private development, by encouraging low impact stormwater techniques, and through certification programs such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) and Built Green.

Policy EN-32. Build civic facilities and other City buildings to LEED silver standard or better.

Policy EN-33. Establish regulatory standards for sustainably developed public and private projects, to include standards for site design and layout, construction, and on-going maintenance and operation.

Policy EN-34. Promote elements of sustainability in development and redevelopment of Renton's transportation network by expanding non-motorized and alternative transportation modes.

Policy EN-35. Establish and maintain a secondary system of corridors to protect agriculture, forest lands, and wildlife habitat, and to provide linkages between critical areas in order to provide for public health and safety, and provide visual relief from urban structures and development.

Policy EN-36. Where appropriate combine environmentally sensitive areas with to provide public access and educational opportunities.

Policy EN-37. Utilize review at the project specific level for the final identification of environmentally sensitive or critical areas, hazardous sites or portions of sites.

Policy EN- 38. Develop the urban forestry program to maintain and expand vegetation on public and private property in order to minimize the impact of development on natural systems such as forests and individual trees and increase canopy cover to increase the ecosystem services that trees and other vegetation provide.

Objective EN-L: Support and sustain educational, informational, and public involvement programs in the City over the long term in order to encourage effective use, preservation, and protection of Renton's resources.

Policy EN-39. Provide information for and participate in informing and educating individuals, groups, businesses, industry, and government in the protection and enhancement of the quality and quantity of the City's natural resources and to promote conservation.

Policy EN-40. Increase the community's understanding of the City's ecosystem and the relationship between the overall health of the ecosystem and quality of life for Renton residents. .

Policy EN-41. Create the long-term community commitment that will be necessary to sustain efforts to protect, maintain, and improve the City's natural resources through educational programs.

Policy EN-42. Educate residents adjacent to critical areas about the value of the resources present and encourage residents to protect the vegetative cover from damage.

Objective EN-M: Increase the participation by the City of Renton in resolution of regional ecological issues that may impact Renton residents.

Policy EN-43. Promote the use of interlocal agreements with other agencies to restrict land use in sensitive aquifer recharge areas to minimize possible sources of pollution and the potential for erosion, and to increase infiltration.

Policy EN-44. Actively participate in regional highway planning, construction, and traffic restrictions.

Policy EN-45. Discourage the continued use of, and hauling of waste to, the Cedar Hills landfill through the City of Renton.

Policy EN-46. Use interlocal agreements and cooperative planning programs to coordinate, where appropriate, with King County, Tukwila, and Kent and other agencies for stormwater management, land use decisions, and waste water treatment.

Policy EN-47. Actively participate in non-point source pollution watershed plans including those for the May Creek, Cedar River, and Green River Basins.

Policy EN-48. Actively participate in state and regional efforts to control the atmospheric pollutants responsible for global climate change.