

# CHAPTER 1: Introduction

The City of Des Moines (City) Comprehensive Plan is a 20-year plan that articulates community's vision and values about how to grow into the future. The goals, policies and implementation strategies included in this Plan provide a basis for the City's regulations and guide future decision-making. The Plan also addresses targeted population, housing, and employment growth, and how facilities and services will be maintained or improved to accommodate expected growth between now and the year 2044.

The Comprehensive Plan guides how Des Moines will work with Tribal Nations, partners, stakeholders, state and regional agencies, and the public and plans for growth that will occur on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples. In respect for and acknowledgment of their legacy, this Plan seeks to create a livable, equitable, and sustainable home for current and future generations.

This introduction section provides information about our community, our vision for 2044, and a description of the comprehensive planning process.

## LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Comprehensive Plan guides how the City of Des Moines will work with Tribal Nations, partners, stakeholders, state and regional agencies, and the public as we plan for growth that will occur on the ancestral lands of the Coast Salish peoples. The City recognizes the importance of continuous collaboration with the Coast Salish peoples who have stewarded the Salish Sea since time immemorial. In respect for and acknowledgment of their legacy, this Plan seeks to foster meaningful exchange of information with Tribes, preserve the region's cultural heritage, and create a livable, equitable, and sustainable home for current and future generations.

## OUR COMMUNITY

Des Moines is situated on Puget Sound midway between Seattle and Tacoma, Washington. Geographically, the City is long and narrow (6.3 miles long and 2.1 miles wide) and covers 4,340 acres. The City is divided into nine neighborhoods, each providing a variation in density, housing, commercial opportunities, and amenities (Figure 1-1).

The City was incorporated on June 17, 1959 and is currently developed as a suburban residential community. Between the time of incorporation and the year 2000, the City experienced significant population growth which

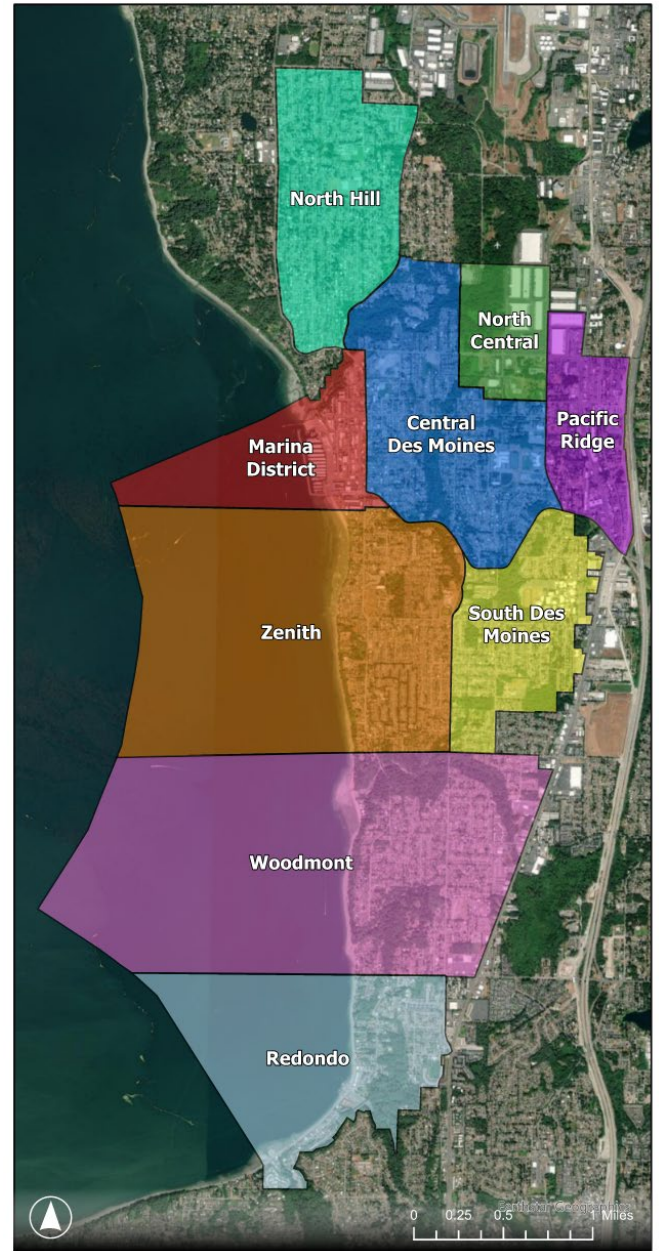
# IMAGINE DES MOINES 2044

was primarily the result of annexations from King County. In more recent years, the City has experienced moderate growth, and will continue to grow per its classification as a High Capacity Transit Community.

According to the 2024 Washington State Office of Financial Management estimates, Des Moines had a population of 33,400 in 2024, ranking as the 29th largest city in the state and the 14th largest city in King County. Figure 1-2 shows the growth trend.

With each passing year, Des Moines becomes more diverse in race. Figure 1-3 shows the makeup of the community, which is roughly 50% white, with the Hispanic/ Latino population (of any race) at 19%, followed by Asian at 12% and Black or African American at 9%. One-quarter of the population is foreign-born.

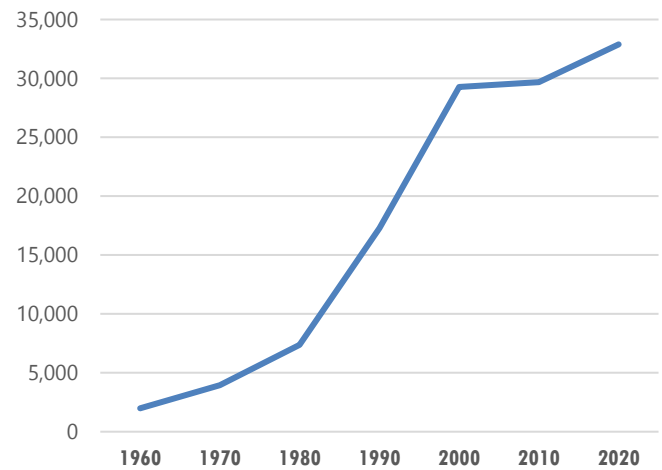
Per the U.S. Census Bureau's 2019-2021 American Community Survey (ACS), the median age in Des Moines was 38; the share of population which is age 62 or older was 18%.



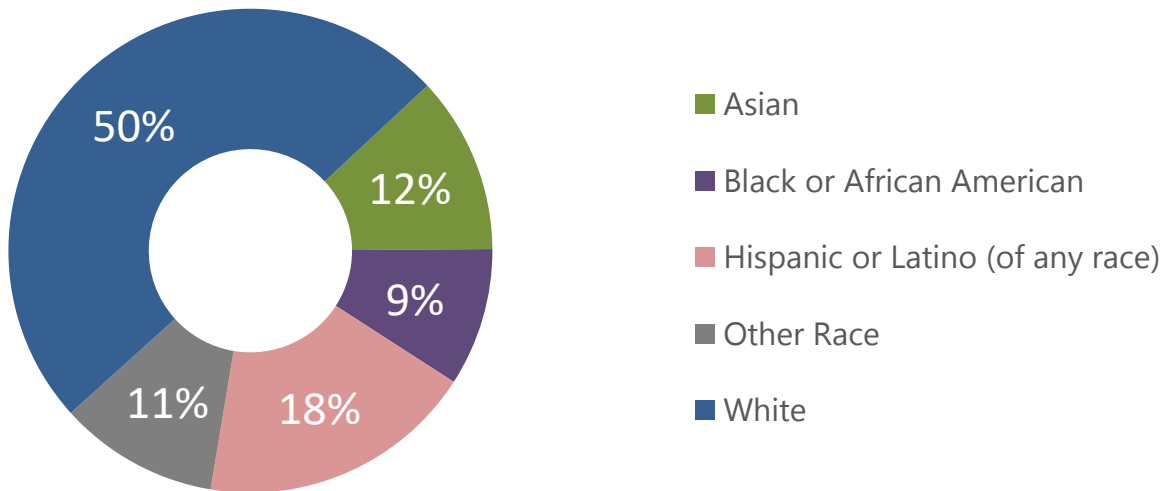
*Figure 1-1: Des Moines, Washington Neighborhoods*

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The ACS data show the median income for a household in the City was \$73,131 while the per capita income for the city was \$38,185. Approximately 11% of the city's population lives at or below the poverty level, which indicates an improvement as compared to the previous figure of 15% which was reported by the US Census for 2008-2013 data. Major employers in Des Moines are the Highline School District, Highline College, the City of Des Moines, the US government (General Services Administration's and Federal Aviation Administration) and two retirement centers.



*Figure 1-2: Population Growth*



*Figure 1-3: Des Moines Population by Race and Hispanic or Latino ethnicity, 2020*

Source: US Census Bureau, 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates (Table DP05); Washington Department of Commerce, 2023

## LOOKING FORWARD TO 2044

The City's mission (as revised by the Council during a November 2024 retreat) is "Des Moines is a waterfront community; building a safe, sustainable environment by providing a high quality of life for all to live, work, and play." Looking forward to the year 2044, the City Council's vision for Des Moines is :

***"Be the premier waterfront destination in the Pacific Northwest."***

Additionally, the core values of the City of Des Moines are:

# IMAGINE DES MOINES 2044

- Safety
- Sustainability
- Integrity
- Transparency
- Innovation

Growth and development within Des Moines are influenced by activities outside the city and external factors including state regulations; regional economic trends, development plans, transportation systems and commuting patterns; development within bordering jurisdictions; and local influences such as Seattle-Tacoma International Airport (Sea-Tac Airport) and Highline College.

Just over 4 million people live in the central Puget Sound region and forecasts indicate the region will grow to 5.8 million by 2050. The region is projected to add about 1.2 million jobs by 2050. This growth, identified in the Puget Sound Regional Council's (PSRC) VISION 2050 plan for the region, is being allocated to the four-county region – King, Pierce, Snohomish, and Kitsap Counties. King County will need to accommodate 366,377 new housing units and 490,103 new jobs between 2019 and 2044.

King County's Growth Management Planning Council (GMPC) has historically set household and employment growth targets for cities in the county, documented in the Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs). In addition, the process of allocating growth is now based on the amount of net new housing needed to plan for and accommodate an equitable distribution of housing choices across all jurisdictions that is affordable to all economic segments of the population of the county, as provided by the Department of Commerce. These targets have been distributed in accordance with the PSRC's regional geographies of Metropolitan Cities, Core Cities, High-Capacity Transit Communities, Cities and Towns, and Urban Unincorporated areas. Des Moines falls within the "High-Capacity Transit Communities" regional geography. The current targets established by the GMPC are for the period 2019-2044<sup>1</sup>.

***Des Moines needs to plan for an additional  
3,800 Housing Units and 2,380 New Jobs  
plus 726 new permanent Emergency Housing Units.***

It is important to consider how the community can grow in ways that support economic development and job growth; create strong neighborhoods with a range of housing, commercial, and transportation options; and champion healthy neighborhoods that provide residents and visitors with a clean environment.

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<sup>1</sup> 2021 King County Countywide Planning Policies amended via King County Ord. 19660 (Aug 15, 2023; ratified Nov. 30, 2023)

# IMAGINE DES MOINES 2044

## THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN

The *Des Moines Comprehensive Plan* serves as a roadmap that expresses our community's goals and aspirations for how we want to grow and prosper into the future. It is the City's official policy guide that defines—through goals, policies, and implementation strategies—how Des Moines should best accommodate forecasted household and job growth, manage traffic, provide open space and recreational opportunities, and deliver other vital services. The plan is "comprehensive" in both scope and coverage. It addresses the use of land and buildings, the movement of traffic and pedestrians, the provision of parks, schools, and public facilities, and protection of the environment. It also addresses residential neighborhoods, commercial areas, public and institutional lands, and public rights-of-way. It provides a guide for public investments and capital improvements and can help to ensure that public taxes and revenues are invested wisely. Finally, the comprehensive plan serves as a marketing tool to promote Des Moines' unique assets, and help to attract new people, families, businesses, investment, and development to our community.



As a companion to the Comprehensive Plan, the Des Moines Municipal Code along with federal and state regulations provide the requirements for the permitting, development and use of land and buildings that implement many of the goals, policies, and implementation strategies contained in the Plan.

### ***RELATIONSHIP TO THE GROWTH MANAGEMENT ACT***

The State of Washington adopted the Growth Management Act (GMA) in 1990. This legislation requires comprehensive plans to include specific elements; obligates cities to adopt implementing regulations and counties to develop Countywide Planning Policies (CPPs) to address regional issues; and establishes protocols and deadlines for these tasks. The state legislature frequently adjusts the GMA; it has evolved over the past decades and extensive, substantial changes legislation passed in 2022 and 2023 regarding climate and housing.

The GMA now sets out fifteen statutory goals that guide the development of comprehensive plans. For a plan to be valid, it must be consistent with these goals and the specific requirements of the Act. Consistency, in this context, means that the comprehensive plan shall be consistent with the state statutory goals, CPPs, and plans of adjacent jurisdictions. The fifteen statutory goals identified in the state legislation are summarized as follows:

- |                                                                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| • Guide urban growth to areas where urban services can be adequately provided;                                                                 |
| • Reduce urban sprawl;                                                                                                                         |
| • Encourage efficient multi-modal transportation systems that reduce the amount of vehicle miles traveled and reduce greenhouse gas emissions; |



# IMAGINE DES MOINES 2044

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the availability of affordable housing to all economic segments of the population;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage economic development throughout the state;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assure private property is not taken for public use without just compensation;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage predictable and timely permit processing;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maintain and enhance natural resource-based industries;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage retention of open space and green space and development of recreational opportunities;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protect and enhance the environment and enhance the state's quality of life;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encourage the participation of citizens in the planning process including those in vulnerable populations or from overburdened communities;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure adequate public facilities and services necessary to support development;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and preserve lands and sites of historic and archaeological significance;</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate while supporting reductions in greenhouse gas emissions; and</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manage shorelines of statewide significance.</li> </ul>

## ***RELATIONSHIP TO THE COUNTYWIDE PLANNING POLICIES AND VISION 2050***

As part of the comprehensive planning process, King County and its cities have developed Countywide Planning Policies. These policies were designed to help the 39 cities and the County to address growth management in a coordinated manner. The policies are adopted by the King County Council, and subsequently ratified by cities. Taken together, the CPPs try to balance issues related to growth, economics, land use, and the environment including climate change. Specific CPP objectives include:

- Implementation of Urban Growth Areas;
- Promoting contiguous and orderly development;
- Siting of public and capital facilities;
- Establishing transportation facilities and strategies;
- Creating affordable housing plans and criteria;
- Addressing social equity and health; and
- Ensuring favorable employment and economic conditions in the county.

In addition to the GMA and CPPs, Des Moines' Comprehensive Plan is guided by the multi-county policies (known as MPPs) of VISION 2050, the regional plan developed by PSRC. VISION 2050 is an integrated, long-range vision for maintaining a healthy region by promoting the well-being of people and communities, economic vitality, and a healthy environment. It contains an environmental framework, a Regional Growth Strategy, and policy sections that are guided by overarching goals, implementation actions, and measures to monitor progress.

## ***WHY IS THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN IMPORTANT?***

The Comprehensive Plan is used as a guide to decide where housing and business growth should occur, what transportation system and public services will be needed to support the growth, what types of businesses and

# IMAGINE DES MOINES 2044

jobs to attract, what types of housing to allow and encourage, how to protect environmentally sensitive areas and promote environmental sustainability and resiliency, and what values unite the community. The Plan is the basis for zoning and other associated development regulations, which in turn guides development permits and projects in the City and guides city investments.

## ***HOW IS THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN USED?***

The Plan sets the framework for the City's land-use pattern and what uses are allowed where. It also provides for the basis for regulations such as zoning, building height, landscaping, sign standards, protection of streams and wetlands, and other development regulations. The Plan is also the policy basis for decisions in reviewing development projects and evaluating and/or mitigating impacts under the State Environmental Policy Act.

## ***WHO DECIDES WHAT THE PLAN SAYS?***

The City engages the community to develop a shared vision based on common values, desires, and goals. Public meetings and hearings are held to obtain public comment on the draft Plan. The City Council takes the public comments and testimony into consideration before approving the final Plan.

For the 2024 Plan update, public engagement was at the forefront of the project. The City established a dedicated website for the project which was called "Imagine Des Moines 2044" and used a consistent branding and logo to identify the effort in a unique way. A public survey (conducted in English and Spanish) was held in late 2023 which garnered 482 responses, far exceeding the number of survey responses from the 2015 update process (which had 125 survey participants). The survey was promoted online via social media and in-person at the Farmers Market and National Night Out. Questions in the survey sought to identify community priority areas to address in the update. Survey results identified priority areas respondents would like to see more of, including increased neighborhood commercial uses, community facilities, and general commercial uses. Respondents also expressed a desire to focus on equity, outreach, and representation of all community members. The following topics were identified as the top five areas of importance in the city, listed in order of priority:

1. Preserving natural space
2. Public health and safety
3. Accommodating future growth
4. Affordability (housing, taxes, etc.)
5. Economic opportunity (including access to jobs)

Next, articles in the city's newsletter, "City Currents" were also featured to inform the community and drive meaningful engagement. Community Development department staff and consultants also talked directly to community members at the Farmers Market and at a National Night Out event booth.

Des Moines' Comprehensive Plan has been updated to incorporate the community's vision and values into goals, policies, and implementation strategies that will carry and sustain our City into the future.



# IMAGINE DES MOINES 2044



## ***WHAT TOPICS ARE ADDRESSED IN THE COMPREHENSIVE PLAN?***

The GMA (RCW 36.70A) specifies “required” elements – those that must be included in the Comprehensive Plan; and “optional” elements – those that can be included by a jurisdiction if desired. Below is a list of the elements currently required under GMA (denoted by \*) and additional optional elements contained in Des Moines Comprehensive Plan:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Land Use Element\*

Chapter 3: Transportation Element\*

Chapter 4: Conservation, Energy, and Environment Element\*

Chapter 5: Capital Facilities, Utilities, and Public Service Element\*

Chapter 6: Parks, Recreation and Open Space Element

Chapter 7: Housing Element\*

Chapter 8: Economic Development Element

Chapter 9: North Central Neighborhood Element

Chapter 10: Marina District Neighborhood Element

Chapter 11: Pacific Ridge Neighborhood Element

Chapter 12: Healthy Des Moines Element