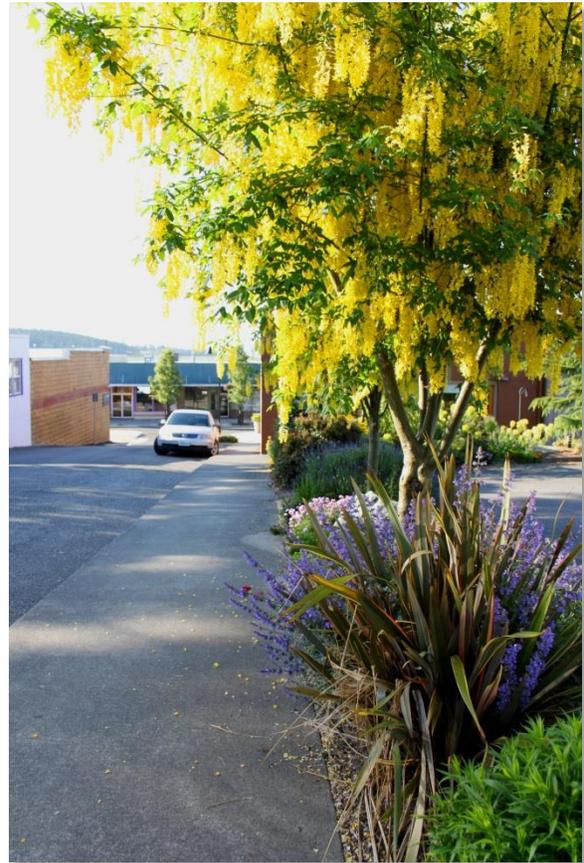


Chapter 9 → Economic Development

In March of 1991, the Department of Defense recommended the closure of NAS Whidbey Island. Although the base was later removed from the closure list, the original action created economic instability in Oak Harbor and the greater north Whidbey Island area. As a result, the "North Whidbey Economic Diversification Action Plan" was prepared to assist the community in diversifying its economy.

This chapter of the Comprehensive Plan is in part based upon the "North Whidbey Economic Diversification Action Plan," which contains the following mission statement:

"North Whidbey is committed to creating a planned and diversified local economy that creates opportunities for fairly paid employment and a strong local tax base, while respecting the unique quality of life we treasure. To accomplish this mission, we will create proactive community and customer service support programs which will maintain NAS Whidbey, support the vitality of existing businesses and encourage compatible new economic activities."



Goals and Policies

Goal 1 - Encourage coordination between Oak Harbor and Island County governments with local, state, and federal entities as well as the public to promote economically diverse opportunities for Oak Harbor.

Policies:

- I.a. To ensure community consensus, representation should be sought from all Oak Harbor Stake-Holders in planning for economic diversification. "Stake-holders" include, but are not limited to, the School District, Skagit Valley Community College, NAS Whidbey, Greater Oak Harbor Chamber of Commerce, Island County Economic Development Council, Downtown Development Council, Partnership Oak Harbor, and the public at large.
- I.b. The City and County should monitor the implementation of the North Whidbey Economic Diversification Action Plan and regularly meet to refine economic development programs.
- I.c. To achieve economic development Goals, the City and County should coordinate, where applicable, zoning, development standards, permit review processes, and land use within the urban growth area.

Discussion - These Goals include, but are not limited to, those listed within the North Whidbey Economic Diversification Action Plan.

- I.d. Ensure that economic development addresses all levels of the demography, including, the youth and retired.
- I.e. The City, working with other governmental agencies and the public sector, shall seek to provide employment opportunities for older adults, particularly those with low-to-moderate incomes.

Goal 2 - Implement the Waterfront Redevelopment, Branding and Marketing Program to increase visitor spending and enhance the quality of life and economic vitality of Oak Harbor.

Discussion - The Waterfront Redevelopment, Branding and Marketing Program focuses on capital and non-capital projects intended to improve the community's economic and recreational opportunities along the waterfront. The mix of existing assets ripe for redevelopment, combined with future development opportunities, will contribute significantly to the community's livability and economic vitality. The existing commercial core area, referred to as the Harborside Shops area, receives special prominence in the program.

Policies:

- 2.a. The City shall pursue a variety of funding strategies as outlined in the Waterfront Redevelopment, Branding and Marketing Program in order to bring about its implementation.
- 2.b. The City will assist the Harborside Shops businesses in forming a Business Improvement District, or other similar funding mechanism, to help implement the capital and non-capital projects identified in the Waterfront Redevelopment, Branding and Marketing Program.
- 2.c. The City should seek, support and assist in grant applications to help fund construction of planned circulation improvements in the downtown area.

- 2.d. The City should support and assist private property owners in the Harborside Shops area with planning projects in conformance with the Waterfront Redevelopment, Branding and Marketing Program.
- 2.e. Improve Harborside Shops area identity from State Highway 20 through signage and other projects identified in the Waterfront Redevelopment, Branding and Marketing Program.

Goal 3 - Increase Oak Harbor's market share of retail sales to reduce the economic leakage off-island.

Policies:

- 3.a. Adequate land should be zoned, where compatible with existing uses, to meet the retail needs of the local community.
- 3.b. The City should support consolidation of segmental strip development into organized groupings by assisting with planning and upgrading of site improvements.

Goal 4 - Continue working with the Navy to enhance economic opportunities.

Policies:

- 4.a. The City supports the continuing operation of NAS Whidbey as a military installation. Should the present character of operations and mission change in the future such that the Navy can support joint use, then the opportunity for joint use of Ault Field should be explored.

Discussion - The opportunity for joint use of Ault Field was explored in the North Whidbey Community Diversification Action Plan of April, 1994. The Plan's conclusion; "The operations of NAS Whidbey and related directives regarding military, security and other logistical, environmental and surplus issues clearly make joint use not a viable option, particularly for the scope of time of this study". Laws, regulations, policies, and criteria regarding joint use of military airports can be found in the Federal Aviation Act of 1958, the Federal Airport and Airways Development Act of 1970, the Federal Airport and Airways Improvement Act of 1982, and Secretary of the Navy Instruction 3770.2. Associated airspace, land use, facilities, environmental, etc., regulations, policies, and/or criteria may also apply and can be found in applicable Public Law, Executive Order, the National Environmental Policy Act, Department of Defense and Department of the Navy policies and regulations, Federal Aviation Regulations, etc..

- 4.b. Consider surplus military lands for economic diversification potential.
- 4.c. The City should work together with the Navy to encourage Naval procurement of local products and services.

Goal 5 - Implement long-range economic diversification projects to provide job opportunities and reduce economic reliance on Naval Air Station Whidbey Island.

Discussion- The majority of the policies within this Goal can be referenced directly to the "North Whidbey Community Action Plan".

Policies:

- 5.a. The City, in cooperation with Island County and other stake-holders, should work to increase the number of jobs in primary industries and the retention of existing employment.
- 5.b. Diversification assistance should be directed towards helping businesses and employees most likely impacted by military realignments.
- 5.c. The City should work to establish the North Whidbey Enterprise Area to facilitate the creation of primary jobs in targeted business sectors (see North Whidbey Economic Diversification Action Plan and map).
- 5.d. The City should plan to annex the Enterprise Area and coordinate the extension of utilities, in conformance with the UGA and Utilities Element.
- 5.e. For consistency with the Enterprise Area concept, review existing standards, such as requirements for fire flow and sanitary sewer.
- 5.f. The City should pursue the financing and construction needed to upgrade Goldie Road and Oak Harbor Road corridors and extension of Cemetery Road, in conformance with the Transportation Element.

- 5.g. Adopt performance zoning and design standards for the Enterprise Area to allow flexibility in site design and use, while requiring a high standard of aesthetics, circulation, and overall compatibility with the small-town character of Oak Harbor and unincorporated Island County.
- 5.h. The City should adopt a minimum target to increase the share of North Whidbey area manufacturing jobs from 4 to 8 percent as well as increase transportation and utility jobs from 1 to 3 percent of all non-agricultural workers by the year 2013.

Discussion - The wording of this policy is to suggest an increase in private sector jobs, rather than governmental jobs.

- 5.i. Encourage non-polluting industries to locate within the city and/or urban growth area.
- 5.j. The City should pursue funding and construction of the North Whidbey Enterprise Area sewer as a means of encouraging economic growth and job creation within this area.

Goal 6 - Ensure tourism with an emphasis on strengthening Oak Harbor as a tourist destination.

Policies:

- 6.a. The City, Oak Harbor Chamber of Commerce and other tourism agencies should participate in regional tourism planning.
- 6.b. Allocate hotel/motel tax funds and leverage additional support for tourism.
- 6.c. The City should encourage the Tourism Promotion and Visitor Information Center programs of the Chamber of Commerce.
- 6.d. Encourage the Economic Development Council to promote and assist existing and new tourist oriented businesses.
- 6.e. A hotel/special events center should be encouraged to locate in the downtown waterfront area, as determined in the Downtown Redevelopment, Branding and Marketing Program.
- 6.f. The City should explore and encourage the development and expansion of eco-tourism and military related tourism, such as reunions and a military museum.

