



**RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS OF THE
WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION
AUGUST 28, 2025**

Public Hearing and Work Session

1

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Whatcom County Planning Commission Chair, Kelvin Barton at 6:01 p.m.

Roll Call

Present: Kelvin Barton, Rud Browne, Daniel Dunne, Dominic Mocerri, Scott Van Dalen

Suneeta Eisenberg, Nicholas Greif – arrived at 6:04p.m

Jim Hansen – arrived at 6:08p.m

Absent: Julie Jefferson

Staff Present: Mark Personius, Kelly Chamberlain, and Aileen Kogut-Aguon

Department Update

Mark Personius, Director of Planning and Development Services (PDS), provided a schedule update for September:

- September 11th will be a public hearing and work session on city and county UGA proposals including Blaine, Everson, Nooksack, Sumas, Birch Bay and Columbia Valley.
- September 16th is the joint Council/Commission meeting at Council Chambers. The meeting will have a presentation by the Port of Bellingham with Tyler Schroeder on the port's industrial land study, and a work session to finish up the conversation of the UGA proposals from the last joint meeting.
- September 25th will be a public hearing and work session on the remaining UGA proposals including, Bellingham, Ferndale, Lynden, Cherry Point and rural/resource lands of the unincorporated county.
- September 30th will be a work session on Chapter 12: Climate with Lauren Clemens and possible follow-up discussion on the UGA proposals.

Open Session Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Commissioner Comments

There was no Commissioner comment.

Approval of Meeting Minutes

Timestamp: 6:07p

1 Commissioner Van Dalen moved to approve the meeting minutes from July 24, 2025 and August 14, 2025.

Commissioner Mocerri seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Brown, Dunne, Eisenberg, Grief, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Barton

Abstain- Hansen (Ayes- 7; Nays- 0; Abstain- 1) The motion carried.



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2025 Comprehensive Plan Update – Chapter 7: Economic Development

Timestamp: 6:09

Mr. Personius provided an overview of Chapter 7 – Economic Development, highlighting background information on the labor force, employment trends, income levels, and the Port of Bellingham's role as the Associate Development Organization. He summarized the chapter's goals and policies, which focus on economic diversification, partnerships, infrastructure and permit processing, business retention, natural resource industries, unemployment, geographic diversity, and the local food system. He concluded with proposed updates to background data, figures, and related goals and policies.

a) Public Hearing

Timestamp: 6:12p

Rhys-Thorvald Hansen, co-director of Whatcom Food Network and Chair of Whatcom Food System Committee provided public comment on one Goal 7L in the chapter regarding safe and healthy working conditions for farm workers. She appreciates focus on farm workers but would like to extend those protections to all food chain workers.

b) Work Session

Timestamp: 6:15p

Commissioner Mocerri asked for clarification on Food System Committee and what department staffs it.

Mr. Personius clarified that it is not a PDS-staffed committee so he does not know their staffing or funding measures.

Commissioner Dunne asked if Ms. Hansen could point to where her suggestion would fit in Goal 7L.

Ms. Hansen clarified it would fit in Policy 7L-9. She suggested leaving "farmworkers" at the end, and add "and other food chain workers" afterwards.

2 Commissioner Dunne moved to add "other food chain workers" after "farmworkers" to Policy 7L-9.

Commissioner Mocerri seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Dunne, Eisenberg, Greif, Hansen, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Brown, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 6:26p

Commissioner Dunne asked Mr. Schroeder to clarify CEDs.

Mr. Schroeder answered, stating the document was approved by County Council, most recently in 2022. It helps local businesses grow and expand. The next update will be from 2027 to 2031. The goals that are in the CEDs document focus on the base economy that is working with our existing businesses to be able to help them grow and expand. He stated that 85% of job growth comes from the local businesses. There is also a strategy on infrastructure, identifying all of the jurisdiction's infrastructure projects, and how they fit within an overall strategy and are prioritized.



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3 Commissioner Greif moved to replace "high wage" anywhere it appears in the document with "living wage or above" including but not limited to on pages 7-1, 7-9, 7- 10, 7-11, 7-14.

Commissioner Brown seconded.

Commissioner Greif explained his preference for the term "living wage or above" especially in relevance to Whatcom County's economy.

Commissioner Dunne asked Mr. Schroeder in terms of semantics describing wages, is there any sort of standard about living wage versus high wage jobs.

Mr. Schroeder answered in support of changing "high wage" to "living wage jobs". He stated that it is a little bit of semantics; he also added MIT has created a living wage calculator which can zero in on Whatcom's population and income.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Greif, Hansen, Mocer, Van Dalen, Brown, Dunne, Eisenberg, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 6:30p

4 Commissioner Greif moved to instruct staff to revise the vision statement section on page 7-8 to flow more naturally, and revise typo at the bottom of page 7-22 "higher that," to "higher than".

Commissioner Mocer seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Eisenberg, Greif, Hansen, Mocer, Van Dalen, Brown, Dunne, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 6:32p

5 Commissioner Browne moved to add immediately after "Issues Goals, and Policies" title on page 7-9:

Leverage our historical strengths – recognize and address our weaknesses

Whatcom County's economy thrives when its intrinsic strengths are leveraged with entrepreneurial talent and investment capital. The county's well-educated workforce, proximity to the Canadian market, accessible health care services, seaport facilities, and high-quality natural environment collectively invites domestic investment.

The County has also historically benefited from its distinctive capacity to attract Canadian businesses interested in accessing the U.S. domestic market. The proximity of Vancouver, BC, to Whatcom County uniquely allows Canadian professionals to manage their U.S. operations during the day while still being able to return home to their families in Canada each evening - a convenience available nowhere else along a 2,000-mile stretch of the border.



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Established domestic businesses that offer living wages (or better), recruit skilled graduates from local educational institutions (such as cyber security and CNC technicians). However, due to limited affordable workforce housing and a shortage of developable industrial land, these businesses typically relocate these new hires to other counties where such resources are more accessible.

Traditionally, as skilled professionals advance in their careers, some choose to establish startup enterprises, with a portion achieving success as high-wage employers for future generations. Similarly, certain graduates from our programs go on to serve as educational mentors, instructors, or venture capital investors.

Companies that are unable to secure affordable housing and industrial land for local employment not only contribute to the outmigration of skilled workers, but also remove the potential for these individuals to become local high-wage employers or educators within Whatcom County.

Among the significant factors determining our success in attracting and retaining family and **living wage or above** employment opportunities is our capacity to offer affordable housing and "shovel-ready" industrial land. Raising wages for all is closely linked to ensuring these foundational resources are accessible.

Commissioner Van Dalen seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Hansen, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg, Greif, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 6:47p

6Commissioner Browne moved to amend policy 7C-5 and add:

But do not allocate any further county funding for a public internet infrastructure as private satellite and 5G terrestrial systems are proving far more cost effective at providing "last-mile" delivery in rural areas.

Commissioner Greif seconded.

The commissioners debated on whether or not the policy needs the proposed addition.

Commissioner Browne withdrew the motion.

Timestamp: 6:55p

7Commissioner Browne moved to add the following after "demands" on page 7-16 under Regulations/Processing section:

Any land capacity analysis should include all known data from all available resources on potential and actual wetlands, including consideration of the impact of current and potential increases in buffers which could come into effect during the 20-year planning period covered by the Comprehensive Plan.

Commissioner Mocerri seconded.



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Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Mocer, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg, Greif, Hansen, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 7:12p

8Commissioner Browne moved to add a new policy 7D-11 on page 7-17:

Policy 7D-11: To further facilitate development of housing and land for industry consider making Advanced Wetlands and Buffer Mitigation Credit creation and Compensatory Offsite and Wetlands and Buffer mitigation an outright permitted use in all R5, R10, Forestry and AG zones outside of Urban Growth and Urban Growth Reserve Areas.

Commissioner Mocer seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg, Grief, Hansen, Mocer, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 7:21p

9Commissioner Browne moved to add a new policy 7D-12 on page 7-17:

Policy 7D-12: To further facilitate development of housing and land for industry, the county should evaluate allowing land that has been planted and maintained USDA Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) habitat to qualify as Advanced Wetlands and Buffer Mitigation Credit and Compensatory Offsite mitigation creation with the effective date of the CREP contract serving as the commencement date of the mitigation creation.

Commissioner Eisenberg seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg, Greif, Hansen, Mocer, Van Dalen, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 7:37p

10Commissioner Browne moved to add a new policy 7E-5 on page 7-18:

Policy 7E-5: Actively recruit Canadian businesses using Whatcom County's unique ability to allow Canadian professionals to manage their U.S. operations during the day while still being able to return home to their families in Canada each evening - something unavailable anywhere else along a 2,000-mile stretch of the border.

Commissioner Dunne seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Dunne, Eisenberg, Greif, Hansen, Mocer, Van Dalen, Browne, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 7:47p



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11 Commissioner Browne moved to amend policy 7A-4 to read:

Employ innovative techniques to remove the barriers preventing construction of new homes and "shovel ready" industrial land necessary to recruit and develop a diversified mix of businesses for a broader economic base

Commissioner Van Dalen seconded.

Commissioners discussed the language in the motion and came up with a **friendly amended motion to read:**

Employ innovative techniques to recruit and develop a diversified mix of businesses for a broader economic base using the economic development program funded with monies collected under RCW 82.14.370.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Eisenberg, Greif, Hansen, Moceri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Barton

(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 7:58p

12 Commissioner Browne moved to amend policy 7A-9 on page 7-11 to read:

Enhance the environment for attracting employment to the communities in eastern Whatcom County by rezoning nearby land suitable for companies who need the type of skills already possessed by residents in the eastern areas.

Commissioner Moceri seconded.

Commissioner Hansen asked why there needs to be a rezone in rural cities without a request from the cities where these residents live. This could come into play when Planning Commission discusses UGAs in Chapter 2: Land Use.

Commissioner Browne stated that it only applies to Columbia Valley UGA because the decision maker in that area is the County.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Greif, Moceri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Barton

Nays- Hansen

Abstain- Eisenberg

(Ayes- 6; Nays- 1; Abstain- 1). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 8:10p

13 Commissioner Browne moved to amend policy 7A-13 on page 7-11 to read:

Policy 7A-13: Encourage Bellingham Technical College, Whatcom Community College, and Western Washington University to develop and design training programs in rapidly growing industries such as alternative home construction technology and renewable energy industries.

Commissioner Eisenberg seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Hansen, Moceri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg, Greif, Barton



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(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 8:19p

14 Commissioner Browne moved to add after "willingness" at the end of section:
Coordination/Cooperation and Public/Private Partnerships, on page 7-12:

to eliminate the significant barriers we have created to building affordable new homes and establishing "shovel ready" industrial land which are preventing our other economic development initiatives from having a meaningful impact.

Commissioner Dunne seconded.

Commissioner Browne stated that the County does not need to allocate additional financial resources, but address the issues which are a lack of housing and a lack of land to support industry.

Commissioner Hansen stated this amendment is conflating two issues; economic development and housing affordability. He stated that talking about "significant barriers" indicates there are simple, readily identified obstacles put in place by governing bodies which can easily be removed to lower the cost of housing; maybe streamlining permits, creating mitigation banks, etc., but a cost is a cost, someone along the permit pathway will pay it.

Commissioner Hansen suggested removing language regarding affordable housing because the topic is too complex for this section.

Commissioner Browne stated that supply and demand will affect the cost of housing.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Mocerri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Greif, Barton

Nays- Hansen

Abstain- Eisenberg

(Ayes- 6; Nays- 1; Abstain- 1). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 8:34

15 Commissioner Browne moved to add after "utilities" on page 7-14 under
Infrastructure:

And an adequate supply of "shovel ready" buildable land for workforce housing and industrial development.

Commissioner Dunne seconded.

Mocerri – language edit

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Eisenberg, Greif, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Brown, Dunne, Barton

Abstain- Hansen

(Ayes- 7; Nays- 0; Abstain- 1). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 8:38



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16 Commissioner Browne moved to add the following at the end of Policy 7G-7 after biofuels:

by ensuring there is adequate affordable workforce housing and "shovel ready" industrial land to support investment in these industries to be located within Whatcom County.

Commissioner Dunne seconded.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Greif, Hansen, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne, Eisenberg, Barton

Nays- Mocer

(Ayes- 7; Nays- 1; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.

Timestamp: 8:39

17 Commissioner Browne moved to add the following after the word "community" in the Economic Growth and Environmental Quality section on page 7-19:

Forcing people to forgo affordable family housing by using habitat protections as the justification for preventing development will likely prove to be an unsustainable public policy to future generations of voters. Mindful that laws made by one generation can be overturned by the next, the willingness of future generations to maintain current critical areas' protections will depend on our success at finding ways to meet their need for affordable single-family housing where kids can thrive in harmony with our natural environment.

Commissioner Mocer seconded.

Commissioner Browne stated that both opposing forces of development and environmental protections must be addressed, or one force may take power and undo any protections for the other force.

Commissioner Dunne agreed that balance is needed but the language is aggressive. He supports the idea but not the language of this motion.

Commissioner Hansen stated that affordable single-family housing is a myth; that is planning for the past. High to moderate-income residents live in apartments and duplexes, reflecting a land scarcity issue. He is in support of affordable single-family housing, but believes priority should be given to multi-family housing for the purpose of long-term ownership.

Commissioner Browne doesn't believe the environment should be sacrificed, but is trying to work in line with the equal values of the GMA.

Commissioner Hansen responded, stating aspirations for every family to live and raise their family in a single-family residence is a reflection of the post-war boom and is no longer a reality due to the systemic redirection of wealth for decades.

Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Mocer, Van Dalen, Browne, Barton

Nays- Hansen, Greif, Eisenberg, Dunne



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1 **(Ayes- 4; Nays- 4; Abstain- 0). The motion failed.**

2 Commission Chair Barton shared that being able to buy a less expensive house in his
3 time was a huge benefit to his family; local governments can't fix every problem, but
4 some things can be addressed.

5 **18** *Commissioner Van Dalen moved to pass the chapter on to County Council.*

6 **Commissioner Mocerri seconded.**

7 **Roll Call Vote: Ayes- Greif, Hansen, Mocerri, Van Dalen, Browne, Dunne,**
8 **Eisenberg, Barton**

9 **(Ayes- 8; Nays- 0; Abstain- 0). The motion carried.**

10 **Adjournment**

11 **Timestamp: 8:53**

12 The meeting was adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

13 Minutes prepared by Aileen Kogut-Aguon.

14 WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION ATTEST:

15 _____

16 Kelvin Barton, Chair

Aileen Kogut-Aguon, Secretary