



TO: Whatcom County Council
FROM: Whatcom County ADO/Port of Bellingham, Regional Economic Partnership
RE: Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) 2020 Update

What is a CEDS and why do we need it?

A Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) is a planning document that is a prerequisite for the US Economic Development Administration (EDA) designation as an Economic Development District (EDD). CEDS documents must be updated at least every five years in order to qualify for EDA assistance under the Public Works and Economic Adjustment Assistance program.

Currently there are at least two programs in Whatcom County that require an updated CEDS in order to continue eligibility or maintain good standing in the program: the EDA Revolving Loan Fund (RLF) and the EDA pandemic grant funding, both administered via the Port of Bellingham. The RLF has been in existence since 1985 and due to the success of the Port's program the Port recently applied for and was awarded an additional \$500,000 in RLF funds for businesses impacted by COVID-19. Whatcom County EDI funding (.09 funding) also requires an up to date CEDS report and for eligible projects to be on the annually updated Project List. There are other federal funding sources that also require a CEDS. These are important sources of funds for public agencies and small local businesses.

Finally, the CEDS provides a starting place for conversations, discussions, and strategic planning across jurisdictions that can guide Comprehensive Plan updates.

Who writes the CEDS?

The last time Whatcom County completed a [CEDS update was 2015](#) and it was undertaken by the Whatcom Council of Governments (WCOG). The CEDS was transferred, appropriately, to the Whatcom County Associate Development Organization (ADO), which is the Port of Bellingham, in late 2019. The Regional Economic Partnership at the Port is therefore working to update the CEDS by December 2020 for Council and EDA approval.

How will this CEDS be different?

This CEDS will be different from past versions in two significant ways. First, the report and all of its components will be online rather than a PDF. The REP team has contracted with LiveStories, a company that specializes in and has experience in meeting the required content of the CEDS, as well as obtaining relevant specific data and creating dynamic visualizations. This data will be live, so when the sources are updated, so too will any associated graphics. This will make the CEDS much more useful over time and will allow users to easily access basic economic data (historical to present) about Whatcom County.

Second, the report will include a section on disaster and pandemic recovery and specifically discuss the economic impacts of COVID-19 on our community and economy. In addition to highlighting how COVID-19 has changed, and may continue to change, our economy, it will also discuss resiliency and mitigation strategies moving forward.

We are excited about this update and new format as we believe it will allow us to better respond to changes in our regional economy. It is our intent to both fulfill the federal requirements for funding opportunities as well as create a true working strategy with a detailed programmatic approach that will move Whatcom County forward into the future.