

PROPOSED BY: ELENBAAS
INTRODUCED: _____

ORDINANCE NO. _____

**AMENDING WHATCOM COUNTY CODE CHAPTER 20.40 AGRICULTURE DISTRICT TO
INCLUDE AGRICULTURAL STORAGE AS A PRIMARY PERMITTED USE**

WHEREAS, agriculture is a cornerstone of Whatcom County's economy and culture, with 100,000 acres of productive farmland across the county generating over \$500 million in market value from agriculture production ([Whatcom County](#)); and

WHEREAS, the state [Growth Management Act](#) requires Whatcom County to designate agricultural lands "that have long-term significance for the commercial production of food or other agricultural products" ([RCW 36.70A.170](#)) and to adopt development regulations to assure the conservation of agricultural and other natural resource lands ([RCW 36.70A.060](#)); and

WHEREAS, the current Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan ([Chapter 8, Resource Lands](#)) calls for to county to "conserve and enhance Whatcom County's agricultural land base for the continued production of food and fiber" ([Goal 8A](#)) and to "... maintain and enhance the economic viability of the agricultural industry in the county over the long term" (Policy8A-3); and

WHEREAS, agricultural operations depend on adequate facilities for storing crops, feed, seed, harvested products, farm machinery, and equipment; and

WHEREAS, areas within Whatcom County are particularly vulnerable to flooding, necessitating the storage of crops and equipment outside of the floodplain to increase food system resilience; and

WHEREAS, under current code interpretation, agricultural storage is often treated as an accessory use, creating a barrier for farmers wishing to build barns, silos, grain bins, cold storage, or equipment sheds in an offsite location outside of the floodplain; and

WHEREAS, designating agricultural storage as a primary permitted use within the Agricultural Zone provides certainty to farmers, reduces unnecessary permitting conflicts, and supports a functional agriculture economy; and

WHEREAS, permitting agriculture storage under WCC 20.40.50 will also allow agriculture storage as a permitted use under WCC 20.38 Agriculture Protection Overlay.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED by the Whatcom County Council that Whatcom County Code 20.40 is hereby amended as shown in Exhibit A of this ordinance.

ADOPTED this ____ day of _____, 2025

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Cathy Halka, Clerk of the Council

Kaylee Galloway, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

WHATCOM COUNTY EXECUTIVE
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

Kimberly Thulin (by email 9/4/25/ko)
Civil Deputy Prosecutor

Satpal Sidhu, County Executive

() Approved () Denied

Date Signed: _____

EXHIBIT A

Chapter 20.40 AGRICULTURE (AG) DISTRICT

Sections:

- [20.40.010 Purpose.](#)
- [20.40.050 Permitted uses.](#)
- [20.40.100 Accessory uses.](#)
- [20.40.130 Administrative approval uses.](#)
- [20.40.150 Conditional uses.](#)
- [20.40.200 Prohibited uses.](#)
- [20.40.250 Division or modification of parcels.](#)
- [20.40.350 Building setbacks.](#)
- [20.40.450 Lot coverage.](#)
- [20.40.550 Maximum density.](#)
- [20.40.650 New or modified parcel siting criteria.](#)
- [20.40.651 Landscaping.](#)
- [20.40.652 Drainage.](#)
- [20.40.662 Use of natural resources.](#)

20.40.010 Purpose.

The primary purposes of this district are to implement the agricultural designation of the Comprehensive Plan, established pursuant to RCW [36.70A.170](#), preserve, enhance and support the production of food and fiber in Whatcom County, to maintain a sufficiently large agricultural land base to ensure a viable agriculture industry and to maintain the economic feasibility of supporting services. Whatcom County supports agricultural activities as the highest priority use in the Agriculture District, with all other uses being subordinate to agricultural activities. Whatcom County seeks to minimize conflict with surrounding zoning districts, in conjunction with Chapter [14.02](#) WCC, Right to Farm. In order to limit the further fragmentation of the commercial agricultural land base, the Agriculture District includes smaller areas of land with poorer quality soils or nonagricultural uses, which do not meet the definition of agriculture lands of long-term commercial significance.

A secondary purpose of this district is to serve as a holding district when located within the urban growth area Comprehensive Plan designation to allow agricultural uses in the near term while protecting the area from suburban sprawl and preserving the potential for future urban development consistent with the protection of the resource land. (Ord. 2013-040 Exh. 1, 2013; Ord. 2009-071 § 2 (Exh. B), 2009; Ord. 2005-079 § 1, 2005; Ord. 2001-020 § 1 (Exh. 1 § 1), 2001).

20.40.050 Permitted uses.

Unless otherwise provided herein, permitted, accessory, and conditional uses shall be administered pursuant to the applicable provisions of Chapters [16.08](#) WCC (SEPA), 20.80 WCC (Supplementary Requirements), and 22.05 WCC (Project Permit Procedures), and WCC Titles [21](#) (Land Division Regulations), and [23](#) (Shoreline Management Program). The following are permitted uses:

.051 Dairying, raising of livestock, husbandry of small animals, raising of crops, horticulture, apiculture, and temporary portable equipment used for processing of locally harvested crops.

.052 Small wood-lot management, tree farming, commercial forestry and reforestation, including the temporary use of portable harvesting or processing equipment, excluding chemical processing such as lumber treatment.

.053 One single-family dwelling per legal lot of record.

.054 Gravel bar scalping projects within the jurisdiction of the Shoreline Management Program.

.055 One one-story detached accessory storage building per lot; provided, that the floor area shall not exceed 200 square feet and shall only be used for personal storage and not for habitation or business; and provided further, that the storage building shall contain no indoor plumbing but may be served with electrical power for lighting.

.056 Agricultural storage facilities, including but not limited to barns, equipment sheds, silos, grain bins, cold storage, feed storage, and other structures primarily used for the storage of crops, seed, harvested products, farm equipment, and machinery necessary to support agricultural operations.

.057 *Repealed by Ord. 2022-012.*

.058 Trails, trailheads, restroom facilities and associated parking areas for no more than 30 vehicles.

.059 *Repealed by Ord. 2022-011.*

.088 Adult family homes as defined in Chapter [70.128](#) RCW.

.089 Boarding homes that are similar in size, facilities and occupancy to other residential structures permitted in the zoning district.

.090 Mental health facilities that provide residential treatment and are similar in size, facilities and occupancy to other residential structures permitted in the zoning district.

.091 Substance abuse facilities that provide residential treatment and are similar in size, facilities and occupancy to other residential structures permitted in the zoning district.

[...]