

## **Appendix A Glossary**

**Act:** The State of Washington's Growth Management Act.

**Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU):** A smaller, independent residential dwelling unit located on the same lot as a stand-alone (i.e., detached) single-family home. ADUs go by many different names, including accessory apartments, secondary suites, and granny flats. ADUs can be converted portions of existing homes (i.e., internal ADUs), additions to new or existing homes with at least one shared wall (i.e., attached ADUs), or new stand-alone (i.e., no shared walls) accessory structures or converted portions of existing stand-alone accessory structures (i.e., detached ADUs) per WCC 20.97.010.

**Active Transportation:** Forms of pedestrian mobility including walking or running, the use of a mobility assistive device such as a wheelchair, bicycling and cycling irrespective of the number of wheels, and the use of small personal devices such as foot scooters or skateboards. Active transportation includes both traditional and electric pedal assist bicycles and other devices. Planning for active transportation must consider and address accommodation pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act (U.S.C. Title 42, 1990 as amended) and the distinct needs of each form of active transportation per RCW 36.70A.030(1).

**Active Transportation Facilities:** Per WAC 365-196-200(2), facilities provided for the safety and mobility of active transportation users including, but not limited to, trails, as defined in RCW 47.30.005, sidewalks, bike lanes, shared-use paths, and other facilities in the public right-of-way.

**Affordable Housing:** Residential housing for rental occupancy which, as long as the same is occupied by low-income households, requires payment of monthly housing costs, including utilities other than telephone, of no more than thirty percent of the household's income per RCW 43.185A.010. ~~Residential housing that is rented or owned by a person or household whose monthly housing costs, including utilities other than telephone, do not exceed 30 percent of the household's monthly income. (WAC 365-196-210) The definition of "affordable housing" is to be developed by individual jurisdictions as part of their Comprehensive Plan Process.~~

**Agricultural Land:** Land primarily devoted to the commercial production of horticultural, viticultural, floricultural, dairy, apiary, vegetable, or animal products or of berries, grain, hay, straw, turf, seed, Christmas trees not subject to the excise tax imposed by RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, finfish in upland hatcheries, or livestock, and that has long-term commercial significance for agricultural production. (RCW 36.70A.030(2))

**Agriculture Protection Overlay (APO):** Soils determined by Whatcom County, in consultation with the Natural Resource Conservation Service and local farmers, as being the best soils for farming as identified within WCC 20.38.040.

**Agrivoltaics:** The use of land for both agriculture and solar photovoltaic energy generation (United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), n.d.)

**Alluvial Fan:** A fan-shaped deposit of sediment and organic debris formed where a stream flows or has flowed out of a mountainous upland onto a level plain or valley floor.

**Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA):** Is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in everyday activities.

**Annexation:** The act of incorporating an area into the domain of a city.

**Aquifer:** A geologic formation, group of formations, or part of a formation capable of yielding a significant amount of groundwater to wells or springs. (WAC 173-160)

**Area Median Income (AMI):** The midpoint of a specific area's income distribution, meaning 50% of households in the area have higher income and 50% of households have lower income; calculated on an annual basis by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, and is often used in determining if households qualify for various housing programs. (Opportunity Council).

**Associate Development Organization (ADO):** A local organization working on economic development on behalf of the Washington State Department of Commerce. (Port of Bellingham).

**Battery Energy Storage Systems:** An energy storage system that can store and deploy generated energy as defined within WCC 20.97.020.

**Best Available Science (BAS):** The most reliable and available scientific information, most often used in the context of local government compliance with the State Growth Management Act (RCW 36.70A.172) for developing policies and development regulations to increase climate resilience, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and to protect the functions and values of critical areas (Chapter 365-195 WAC).

**Broadband Service:** Any service providing advanced telecommunications capability and internet access with transmission speeds that, at a minimum, provide 100 megabits per second download and 20 megabits per second upload per RCW 43.330.530(4).

**Building Intensities:** Development variables such as lot coverage, building height, and the spacing between buildings and property lines and between buildings and other structures.

**Built Environment:** Elements of the environment developed by humans, including land uses, transportation systems, and public services and utilities.

**Bus Rapid Transit:** A fixed route bus system that features assets indicating permanent, high capacity service including, but not limited to, elevated platforms or enhanced stations, off-board fare collection, dedicated lanes, busways, or transit signal priority per RCW 36.70A.200(d)(i).

**Capital Facilities Plan:** A required element of the Comprehensive Plan designed to form a better match between development and provision of services. It must include an inventory of existing facilities, forecast of future needs and a six-year financing plan.

**Carbon Sequestration:** Is the process of capturing and storing atmospheric carbon dioxide. Biologic carbon sequestration refers to storage of atmospheric carbon in vegetation, soils, woody products, and aquatic environments. Geologic carbon sequestration is the process of storing carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in underground geologic formations (WSDOC, "*Climate Element Planning Guidance*", December, 2025).

**Clean Energy Coordinated Permitting Process:** A WA State DOE, optional, fully coordinated permit process to help make the process for siting and permitting clean energy projects more effective and efficient as governed under RCW 43.158. (WSDOE "Clean Energy Coordinated Permitting Process").

**Climate Adaptation:** The process of adjusting to new conditions in order to reduce risks to valued assets (WSDOC, "*Climate Element Planning Guidance*", December, 2025).

**Climate Change:** Changes in average weather conditions that persist over multiple decades or longer. Climate change encompasses both increases and decreases in temperature, as well as shifts in precipitation, changes in frequency and location of severe weather events, and changes to other features of the climate system (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**Climate Element Sector:** Per WAC 365-196-060(9), categories of natural resources or community assets (such as physical buildings, infrastructure, and historic places) that can be impacted by or contribute to climate change. The following climate element sectors are defined as follows:

- (a) Agriculture and Food Systems includes food production and distribution; including processing in industrial areas and community gardens in urban areas;
- (b) Built Environment and Energy includes power generation, transmission, and consumption in buildings and the built environment; this excludes transportation infrastructure;
- (c) Cultural Resources and Practices includes historic sites and cultural resources and practices;
- (d) Economic Development includes business continuity and opportunities;
- (e) Emergency Management includes emergency mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery;
- (f) Health and Well-Being includes public health and community well-being;
- (g) Ecosystems includes terrestrial and aquatic species, critical areas, and ecosystem services;
- (h) Transportation includes transportation modes and infrastructure (such as, vehicles, roads, bridges, streetlights, sidewalks, bike lanes);
- (i) Waste Management includes materials recycling and disposal;
- (j) Water Resources includes water quality and quantity; and
- (k) Zoning includes regulations for the land that is designated into areas (or zones), each with specific rules defining what types of development (for example, residential, commercial, and (for example, regulations describing height, bulk, use, and density).

**Climate Impact:** The consequences of realized risks on natural and human systems, where risks result from the interactions of climate-related hazards

(including extreme weather/ climate events), exposure, and vulnerability. Impacts generally refer to effects on lives, livelihoods, health and well-being; ecosystems and species; economic, social, and cultural assets; services (including ecosystem services); and infrastructure (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**Climate Measure:** A goal or policy that can increase resilience to climate change impacts or reduce greenhouse gas emissions or does both per WAC 365-196-060(7).

**Climate Resilience:** The ongoing process of anticipating, preparing for, and adapting to changes in climate and minimizing negative impacts to our natural systems, infrastructure, and communities as defined within RCW 70A.65.010(16).

**Cluster Development:** Cluster Development provides the flexibility to maintain open space and plan around distinctive site features or constraints. Clustering development on smaller lots than conventional development creates a reserve tract, while maintaining the same overall density. As a result, a reserve tract is created, while maintaining the same overall density.

**Co-Living Housing:** A residential development with sleeping units that are independently rented and lockable and provide living and sleeping space, and residents share kitchen facilities with other sleeping units in the building. Local governments may use other names to refer to co-living housing including, but not limited to, congregate living facilities, single room occupancy, rooming house, boarding house, lodging house, and residential suites per RCW 36.70A.535(11)(a).

**Community Facility:** A group care facility operated for the care of juveniles committed to the department under RCW 13.40.185. A county detention facility that houses juveniles committed to the department under RCW 13.40.185 pursuant to a contract with the department is not a community facility per RCW 72.05.020(1).

**Commute Trip:** Trips made from a worker's home to a worksite during the peak period of 6:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m. on weekdays per RCW 70A.15.4010(5).

**Compatible:** Capable of existing together in harmony (as distinguished from "identical").

**Compensation:** Something given or received as an equivalent for services, debt, loss, injury, etc.

**Comprehensive Plan:** An integrated policy planning document designed to guide land use decisions, including the designation of urban growth areas, based on a consideration of land use alternatives, likely impacts, and possible mitigating measures.

**Conditional Use:** A use permitted only after public review and approved by the Hearing Examiner, and to which special conditions may be attached by the Hearing Examiner. (Whatcom County Zoning Code 20.97.075)

~~**Cottage Industry:** Small industrial, commercial, or service operations, on a parcel where the operator resides, frequently with an art or craft orientation or related to information processing or to the natural resources of the area, which meets all of the criteria in Whatcom County Code 20.80.980.~~

**Conservation Easement Program (CEP):** A Whatcom County voluntary program that compensates property owners for the value of their unused development rights and protects the land through the placement of permanent conservation easements.

**Countywide Planning Policies (CWPP):** Required by GMA, the County Council and the City Councils of all the cities adopted a set of policies, which embody a vision for the future of Whatcom County. It is a framework intended to guide the development of comprehensive plans for each jurisdiction in the county.

**Critical Areas:** As defined by each jurisdiction, including at least the following areas and ecosystems: (a) wetlands; (b) areas with a critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water; (c) fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas; (d) frequently flooded areas; and (e) geologically hazardous areas.

**Critical Facilities:** As defined in the Whatcom County Critical Areas Ordinance means buildings and other structures that are intended to remain operational in the event of extreme environmental loading from flood, wind, snow, volcanic activities, or earthquakes pursuant to the most current International Building Code (IBC).

**Current-use Taxation:** Taxing farm and forest lands under their current use, instead of at the higher rate appropriate to lands available for development.

**Decarbonization:** Human actions to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from human activities (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**Density:** A measure of the intensity of development, generally expressed in terms of dwelling units per acre. It can also be expressed in terms of population density (people per acre).

**Density Transfer:** See "transfer of development rights."

**Designated Forestland:** Synonymous with "Forestland", is any parcel of land that is five or more acres or multiple parcels of land that are contiguous and total five or more acres that is or are devoted primarily to growing and harvesting timber as defined within RCW 84.33.035(5).

**Development:** Any activity that requires federal, state, or local approval for the use or modification of land or its resource. These activities include, but are not limited to, subdivisions and short subdivisions, binding site plans, planned unit developments, variances, shoreline substantial development, clearing activity, excavation, embankment, fill and grade work, activity conditionally allowed, building or construction, revocable encroachment permits, and septic approval.

**Distribution Pipeline:** Means a pipeline other than a gathering or transmission line or as defined at 49 CFR 192.3, if amended.

**Downzone:** Reclassification from the current zone designation to one where the density of permitted development is lower.

**Drought:** An exceptional period of water shortage for existing ecosystems and the human population (due to low rainfall, high temperature and/ or wind) (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).



**Easement:** The right, privilege, or interest that one party has in the land of another. (Dictionary of Real Estate Terms)

**Economic Development Investments (EDI) Program:** Synonymous with "Rural Sales Tax Program" is a program which authorizes Whatcom County to retain a portion of sales and use tax to finance public facilities, including affordable housing projects, as authorized under RCW 82.14.370.

**Emergency Housing:** Temporary indoor accommodations for individuals or families who are homeless or at imminent risk of becoming homeless that is intended to address the basic health, food, clothing, and personal hygiene needs of individuals or families per RCW 36.70A.030(15).

**Emergency Shelter:** A facility that provides a temporary shelter for individuals or families who are currently homeless per RCW 36.70A.030(16).

**Emissions Scenarios:** Quantitative illustrations of how the release of different amounts of climate-altering gases and aerosols into the atmosphere from human and natural sources will produce different future climate conditions. Scenarios are developed using a wide range of assumptions about population growth, economic, and technological development, and other factors (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**Environmental Justice:** The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Environmental justice includes addressing disproportionate environmental and health impacts in all laws, rules, and policies with environmental impacts by prioritizing vulnerable populations and overburdened communities and the equitable distribution of resources and benefits as defined within RCW 36.70A.030(17).

**Essential Public Facility:** Those facilities that are typically difficult to site, such as airports, state education facilities and state or regional transportation facilities as defined in RCW 47.06.140, regional transit authority facilities as defined in RCW 81.112.020, improvements to high capacity transportation systems as defined in RCW 81.104.015, bus rapid transit routes and stops or improvements to such routes and stops, state and local correctional facilities, solid waste handling facilities, opioid treatment programs including both mobile and fixed-site medication units, recovery residences, harm reduction programs excluding safe injection sites, and inpatient facilities including substance use disorder treatment abuse facilities, mental health facilities, group homes, community facilities as defined in RCW 72.05.020, secure community transition facilities as defined in RCW 71.09.020), telecommunication towers, water treatment plants, sewer treatment plants, and water storage facilities per RCW 36.70A.200.

**Essential State or Regional Transportation Facilities:** The interstate highway system, interregional state principal arterials including ferry connections that serve statewide travel, intercity passenger rail services, intercity high-speed ground transportation, major passenger intermodal terminals, excluding all airport facilities and services, the freight railroad system, marine port facilities and services that are

related solely to marine activities affecting international and interstate trade, and high-capacity transportation systems serving regions as defined in RCW 81.104.015.

**Extreme Heat:** Temperatures that are much hotter and or humid than average (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**Extreme Precipitation:** An extreme or heavy precipitation event, which is of very high magnitude with a very rare occurrence at a particular place (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**Extremely Low-Income Households:** A single person, family, or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is at or below 30 percent of the median household income adjusted for household size, for the county where the household is located, as reported by the United States department of housing and urban development per RCW 36.70A.030(18).

**Forest Land:** Land primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, including Christmas trees subject to the excise tax imposed under RCW 84.33.100 through 84.33.140, and that has long-term commercial significance. In determining whether forest land is primarily devoted to growing trees for long-term commercial timber production on land that can be economically and practically managed for such production, the following factors shall be considered: (a) The proximity of the land to urban, suburban, and rural settlements; (b) surrounding parcel size and the compatibility and intensity of adjacent and nearby land uses; (c) long-term local economic conditions that affect the ability to manage for timber production; and (d) the availability of public facilities and services conducive to conversion of forest land to other uses. (RCW 36.70A.030(8))

**Gathering Pipeline:** Means a pipeline that transports gas from a current production facility to a transmission or main or as defined at 49 CFR 192.3, as amended.

**General Aviation Airport:** A facility where airplanes can take off and land that is publicly owned or privately owned but used by the public. It can include a terminal, hangers, refueling facilities, and other accessory uses. Aircraft landing areas used solely for personal use, agricultural use, forest management, or to serve the Eliza Island community are not general aviation airports. Airports used solely for commercial service or military use are not general aviation airports.

**Geographic Information System (GIS):** An automated or manual system capable of organizing, storing, analyzing, and retrieving geographically related (mapped) information. It is intended to support sound decision-making regarding the management of a community's resources. Increasingly, the term is applied to computerized systems which combine digital mapping with automated land use data files.

**Greenbelts/Greenways:** ~~These are u~~Undeveloped open space, natural areas, including agricultural lands, recreational lands, golf courses and other recreational uses, wildlife corridors, and other similar uses.

**Green Infrastructure:** A wide array of natural assets and built structures within an urban growth area boundary, including parks and other areas with protected tree canopy, and management practices at multiple scales that manage wet weather that maintain and restore natural hydrology by storing, infiltrating, evapotranspiring and using stormwater as defined within RCW 36.70A.030(23) (WSDOC, "Climate Element Planning Guidance", December, 2025).

**Green Space:** As defined within RCW 36.70A.030(24), an area of land vegetated by natural features such as grass, trees, or shrubs, within an urban context and less than one acre in size that creates public value through one or more of the following attributes:

- (a) Is accessible to the public;
- (b) Promotes physical and mental health of residents;
- (c) Provides relief from the urban heat island effects;
- (d) Promotes recreational and aesthetic values;
- (e) Protects streams or water supply;
- (f) Preserves visual quality along highway, road, or street corridors.

**Greenhouse Gas:** Carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulfur hexafluoride, and any other gas or gases designated by the Department of Ecology by rule per RCW 70A.45.010.

**Greenhouse Gas (GHG) Emissions:** Actions taken to reduce the emissions of greenhouse gases to reduce the rate of climate change (WSDOC, "Climate Element Planning Guidance", December, 2025).

**Groundwaters:** All waters that exist beneath the land surface or beneath the bed of any stream, lake or reservoir, or other body of surface water within the boundaries of this state, whatever may be the geological formation or structure in which such water stands or flows, percolates or otherwise moves. There is a recognized distinction between natural groundwater and artificially stored groundwater (RCW 90.44)

**Group Home:** A residence that is licensed by the state as either a boarding home or an adult family home.

**Growth Management:** A method to guide development in order to minimize adverse environmental and fiscal impacts and to maximize the health, safety, and welfare of the community.

**Growth Management Act (GMA):** State law requiring jurisdictions with certain projected growth rates to prepare a comprehensive land use plan (RCW 36.70A).

**Hazard:** The potential occurrence of a natural or human-induced physical event or trend that may cause loss of life, injury, or other health impacts, as well as damage and loss to property, infrastructure, livelihoods, service provision, ecosystems, and environmental resources (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**High Capacity Transportation Systems:** A system of public transportation services within an urbanized region operating principally on exclusive rights-of-way, and the supporting services and facilities necessary to implement such a system, including interim express services and high occupancy vehicle lanes, which taken as



a whole, provides a substantially higher level of passenger capacity, speed, and service frequency than traditional public transportation systems operating principally in general purpose roadways per RCW 81.104.015.

**Historic Archaeological Resources:** Those properties which are listed in or eligible for listing in the Washington state register of historic places (RCW 27.34.220) or the national register of historic places as defined in the national historic preservation act of 1966 (Title 1, Sec. 101, Public Law 89-665; 80 Stat. 915; 16 U.S.C. Sec. 470) as now or hereafter amended per RCW 27.53.030(9).

**Home-Based Business:** Per WCC 20.97.80, a commercial enterprise for which the principal administrative and managerial activities take place within an individual's personal residence. Home-based businesses must remain incidental to the residential use pursuant to the standards of WCC 20.80.970.

**Impact/Mitigation Fee:** A payment of money imposed upon new development as a condition of approval, as defined and provided by RCW 82.02 and/or 43.21c. This fee must be used exclusively to finance improvements in capital facilities that are necessitated by the development.

**Inclusionary Zoning:** Zoning that requires affordable units to be included within new residential development projects or requires payment for construction of such units elsewhere in the community (Butler, 2016). ~~developers to provide a portion of housing units in a specific project or area to meet the needs of low and moderate income people.~~

**Incompatible:** Not capable of existing together in harmony.

**Incorporated Area:** Area inside city limits.

**In-Fill:** The practice of using developable land that lies within a city, UGA, or developed area outside resource lands, where services are available rather than passing over such parcels in favor of land farther out or farther from available services.

**Infrastructure:** Streets, water and sewer lines, and other public facilities basic and necessary to the functioning of an urban area.

**In-Patient Facilities:** Buildings and accessory uses primarily utilized to provide health care service or medical attention, care, or treatment that requires at least one overnight stay.

**Interlocal Agreement:** An agreement intended to apply within designated Urban Growth Areas to set clear and reasonable criteria for orderly annexations, including guidelines on size and timing of annexations and urban levels of development, appropriate development standards, and tax revenue sharing provisions. Participants in the agreement could include the county, any adjacent city, affected fire districts, (if applicable) and any other utility provider. (CWPP)

**Land Capacity Analysis:** A comparison between the collective effects of all development regulations operating on development and the assumed densities established in the land use element per WAC 365-196-325(2)(a).

**Level of service (LOS):** An established minimum capacity of public facilities or services that must be provided per unit of demand or other appropriate measure of need. Level of service standards are synonymous with locally established minimum standards. (WAC 365-196-210) Level of service for transportation is usually expressed as a proportion derived by comparing a roadway's current volume to its capacity. For example, the level of service of a road segment is expressed by a declining letter scale ("A" is free-flowing traffic; "F" is a traffic jam). For most other facilities, the standard is units of the facility (i.e. acres of park land) per 1,000 people.

**Local Improvement District (LID):** A defined geographical area or special district set up by ordinance to finance streets, sewers, and other public improvements that directly benefit properties in the district. The improvements are paid by the benefited property owners over a period of time, usually 10 to 20 years.

**Long-term Commercial Significance:** Includes the growing capacity, productivity, and soil composition of the land for long-term commercial production, in consideration with the land's proximity to population areas, and the possibility of more intense uses of the land. (RCW 36.70A.030(10))

**Low Impact Development:** A stormwater and land use management strategy that strives to mimic pre-disturbance hydrologic processes of infiltration, filtration, storage, evaporation, and transpiration by emphasizing conservation and use of on-site natural features, site planning, and distributed stormwater management practices that are integrated into a project design. LID strategies can be applied to new development, urban retrofits, infrastructure improvements and revitalization projects to protect aquatic resources.

~~**Low Income Housing:** The federal government defines low-income housing as housing provided for individuals earning 50% or less of the average family wage of the local jurisdiction.~~

~~**Low-Income Households:** A single person, family, or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is at or below 80 percent of the median family income adjusted for family size, for the county, city, or metropolitan statistical area, where the project is located, as reported by the United States department of housing and urban development per RCW 84.14.010(9).~~

**Master Planned Resort:** A self-contained and fully integrated planned unit development, in a setting of significant natural amenities, with primary focus on destination resort facilities, consisting of short-term visitor accommodations associated with a range of developed on-site indoor or outdoor recreational facilities. A master planned resort may include other residential uses within its boundaries, if the residential uses are integrated into and support the on-site recreational nature of the resort.

**Mineral Resource Land:** Land primarily devoted to, or with the documented presence of and/or potential for, the long-term and commercially significant extraction of minerals such as precious metals, coal, sand, and gravel, etc.

**Mitigation:** Measures taken to avoid, minimize, or compensate for adverse environmental impacts associated with a project or non-project land use action.

**Mixed-Use Development:** A development project with a complementary mix of uses such as residential, retail, commercial, employment, civic and entertainment uses in close proximity, sometimes in the same building (MRSC).

**Moderate-Income Households:** A single person, family, or unrelated persons living together whose adjusted income is more than 80 percent but is at or below 115 percent of the median family income adjusted for family size, for the county, city, or metropolitan statistical area, where the project is located, as reported by the United States department of housing and urban development per RCW 84.14.010(10).

**Multimodal Level of Service (MMLOS):** A performance and quality measure, metric, or criterion of transportation networks which assesses the quality of service for all users of a transportation system, including pedestrians, cyclists, transit riders, and drivers, used to ensure that transportation planning, particularly for comprehensive plans, considers the needs of all modes and is consistent with goals for environmental justice per RCW 36.70A.070(6)(b).

**Multimodal Transportation:** Transportation systems that address the movement of people and goods through infrastructure and services for walking, biking, public transit, driving, ferries, and connecting with rail and aviation. These systems should provide safe, well-connected mobility options for people of all ages and abilities, including those who do not drive.

**Natural Hazard:** An environmental phenomenon that have the potential to impact societies and the human environment; not be confused with other types of hazards, such as manmade hazards. (FEMA).

**Natural Resource Lands:** Lands including agricultural, forestry, and mineral resource lands that are not already characterized by urban growth and that have long-term significance for the commercial production of food or other agricultural products, for the commercial production of timber, or that have long-term significance for the extraction of minerals.

**Net-zero:** A state in which a local jurisdiction's greenhouse gases going into the atmosphere are reduced to near-zero, or 95 percent below baseline levels by 2050, and the remaining greenhouse gases that cannot be eliminated are mitigated with carbon dioxide sequestration to bring total net emissions to zero (WSDOC, "Climate Element Planning Guidance", December, 2025).

**New Fully-Contained Community:** A development proposed for location outside of the existing designated urban growth areas, which is characterized by urban densities, uses, and services and meets the criteria of RCW 36.70A.350. (WAC 365-196-210) The criteria include new infrastructure, traffic demand management programs, buffers, a mix of uses, affordable housing, environmental protection, development regulations, mitigation of impacts on resource lands, and protection of critical areas.

**Non-Compatible:** See "Incompatible."

**Nonconforming Use:** A building or land occupied by a legally established use that does not conform with the regulations of the zoning district in which it is located. (Whatcom County Zoning Code 20.97.270)

**Non-federal Land:** The areas of Whatcom County not under federal management (i.e., the areas not included in the Mt. Baker National Forest or North Cascades National Park).

**Nonpoint Source Pollution:** Pollution that does not come from a single source (WSDOE "Nonpoint Source Pollution").

**North American Industry Classification System (NAICS):** The standard used by the Federal agencies in classifying business establishments for the purpose of collecting, analyzing, and publishing statistical data related to the U.S. business economy (USCB).

**Opioid Treatment Programs:** Mobile and fixed-site medication units, recovery residences, and harm reduction programs excluding safe injection sites. Harm reduction programs means programs that emphasize engaging directly with people who use drugs to prevent overdose and infectious disease transmission, improve the physical, mental, and social well-being of those served, and offer low threshold options for accessing substance use disorder treatment and other services per RCW 71.24.590.

**One-number Locator Service (one-call):** A service through which a person can notify utilities and request field marking of underground facilities.

**Open Space:** Any parcel or area of land or water not covered by structures, hard surfacing, parking areas and other impervious surfaces except for pedestrian or bicycle pathways, or where otherwise provided by this title or other county ordinance and set aside, dedicated, for active or passive recreation, visual enjoyment or critical area development buffers, as established in the Whatcom County Critical Areas Ordinance. For properties within the jurisdiction of the Shoreline Management Program (WCC Title 23), submerged lands and/or tidelands within the boundaries of any waterfront parcel that are located waterward of the ordinary high water mark shall not be used in open space calculations per WCC 20.97.150.  
~~Any parcel or area of land or water not covered by structures, hard-surfacing, parking areas and other impervious surfaces except for pedestrian or bicycle pathways.~~

**Open Space Corridor:** Per RCW 36.70A.030, land that is designated and maintained for recreational purposes, wildlife habitat, trail systems, and the connectivity of critical areas as defined in RCW 36.70A.030, and that is not limited or restricted to agricultural or forest use or management.

**Open Space Land:** Per RCW 84.34.020(1), any land area so designated by an official comprehensive land use plan adopted by any city or county and zoned accordingly, or any land area, the preservation of which in its present use would:

- (i) conserve and enhance natural or scenic resources;
- (ii) protect streams or water supply;
- (iii) promote conservation of soils, wetlands, beaches or tidal marshes;
- (iv) enhance the value to the public of abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, nature reservations or sanctuaries or other open space;
- (v) enhance recreation opportunities;
- (vi) preserve historic sites;

(vii) preserve visual quality along highway, road, and street corridors or scenic vistas;

(viii) retain in its natural state tracts of land not less than one acre situated in an urban area and open to public use on such conditions as may be reasonably required by the legislative body granting the open space classification; or any land meeting the definition of farm and agricultural conservation land under RCW 84.34.020(8).

**Overburdened Communities:** Per RCW 70A.02.010(11), a geographic area where vulnerable populations face combined, multiple environmental harms and health impacts, and includes, but is not limited to, highly impacted communities as defined in RCW 19.405.020.

**Paratransit:** Arrangements in which people with special transportation needs, and their attendants, if any, are transported by modes identified within RCW 46.74.010 (WSDOR).

**Parcel:** With regard to the agricultural protection zone, a parcel is defined as contiguous land held in the same ownership but without regard for segregation made for tax purposes. To be contiguous the land must share a common boundary on at least one side. Land is not a contiguous parcel if bisected by a public right-of-way, a Category I stream or a Category 1 or 2 wetland, or divided as part of a subdivision or exempt land division approved pursuant to Chapter 58.17 RCW or Title 21 Whatcom County Code or created after 1959 or created as a legal lot of record.

**Per Capita Vehicle Miles Traveled:** The number of miles traveled using cars and light trucks in a calendar year divided by the number of residents. The calculation of this value excludes vehicle miles driven conveying freight (WSDOC, "Climate Element Planning Guidance", December, 2025).

**Permanent Supportive Housing:** Subsidized, leased housing with no limit on length of stay that prioritizes people who need comprehensive support services to retain tenancy and utilizes admissions practices designed to use lower barriers to entry than would be typical for other subsidized or unsubsidized rental housing, especially related to rental history, criminal history, and personal behaviors per RCW 36.70A.030(33).

**Plat:** A detailed drawing of a land subdivision, recorded with the county. Along with the property lines, it may include notations of easements, rights, and restrictions.

**Point Source Pollution:** Synonymous with "Point Source Discharge", any single identifiable source of pollution from which pollutants are discharged, such as a pipe, ditch, ship or factory smokestack as defined by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (NOA).

**Potable:** Water that is suitable for drinking by the public. (WAC 246-290)

**Productive:** Capable of economically producing resource-based goods such as mineral, timber, fiber, or food products. ~~wood, fiber, or food products.~~

**Private Utilities:** Water and/or sewer service owned and operated by an entity other than a political subdivision of the federal, state or tribal governments.



**Public Benefit Rating System (PBRs):** A tool used by the Whatcom County Open Space Current Use Program, which evaluates properties to determine eligibility and the amount of property tax reduction which can be received for retaining land as open space.

**Public Utilities:** Water and/or sewer services owned and operated by a political subdivision of federal, state or tribal governments (includes water and sewer districts and public utility districts).

**Recreation Resource Management Areas:** Large undeveloped parcels with unique or attractive features where public access is maintained and unique scenic areas preserved through public ownership or private easements.

**Regional Transit Authority Facilities:** Any lands, interests in land, air rights over lands, and improvements thereto, including but not limited to vessel terminals, equipment, vehicles, vessels, trains, stations, designated passenger waiting areas, and other components necessary to support and operate a regional transit system under the jurisdiction of a regional transit authority per RCW 81.112.020.

**Regional Transportation Planning Organization:** An organization created by the Growth Management Act to coordinate regional transportation efforts and to foster cooperation among state and local jurisdictions. The Whatcom Council of Governments has been designated as the Regional Transportation Planning Organization for Whatcom County.

**Renewable Hydrogen:** Hydrogen produced using renewable resources both as the source for the hydrogen and the source for the energy input into the production process per RCW 54.04.190(6)(c).

**Resource Based Industry:** A business or industry that has a direct relationship to natural resources such as agriculture, minerals, forestry, fishing and aquaculture. This type of industry is generally located in close proximity to the resource or resource land.

**Restoration:** Bringing back into existence the natural functions and aesthetic character of a site, including the integrity of its surficial geology, topography, soils, hydrology, and/or vegetative regime. Within the context of threatened and endangered species goals and policies, restore or restoration means an action that improves habitat of threatened and endangered species that is:

- a. Undertaken voluntarily by the landowner; or
- b. Undertaken voluntarily by the County on county property or right-of-way, in accordance with the goals and policies of the comprehensive plan; or
- c. Undertaken as a condition of a permit when the condition has been imposed pursuant to adopted regulations and there is a nexus between new development or new clearing activity and the required restoration.

**Rezone:** Reclassification of an area from its current zoning to a different use.

**Ride Sharing:** Synonymous with Rideshare Service, a carpool or vanpool arrangement whereby one or more groups not exceeding 15 persons each including the drivers, and not fewer than three persons including the drivers are transported

in a passenger motor vehicle with a gross vehicle weight not exceeding 10,000 pounds per RCW 46.74.010(2).

**Right-of-way (ROW):** A recorded right to use or travel over a specified area or strip of land. Most commonly it refers to land on which a street, sidewalk, or railroad is located. It can also be occupied by utilities, transmission lines, oil or gas pipelines, drainageways, or similar facilities, although pathways for these facilities are more commonly referred to as easements.

**Rural lands:** All lands which are not within an urban growth area and are not designated as natural resource lands having long-term commercial significance for production of agricultural products, timber, or the extraction of minerals. (WAC 365-196-210)

**Rural Study Areas (RSA):** Lands within Whatcom County's Rural Zoning District, which are commercially farmed and have many of the characteristics of farmlands in the Agriculture Zoning District, and meet many of the GMA criteria for "Agricultural Lands of Long-Term Commercial Significance".

**Safe Systems Approach:** An internationally recognized holistic and proactive approach to road safety intended to systematically reduce fatal and serious injury crash potential per RCW 47.04.010(36).

**Sea Level Rise:** An increase to the height of sea level, both globally and locally (relative sea level change) due to a change in ocean volume as a result of a change in the mass of water in the ocean (e.g. due to melt of glaciers and ice sheets), changes in ocean volume as a result of changes in ocean water density (e.g., expansion under warmer conditions), changes in the shape of ocean basins and changes in Earth's gravitational and rotational fields, as well as local subsidence or uplift of the land (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**Severe Storm:** An atmospheric disturbance that may include any or a combination of the following: strong winds, large hail, thunderstorms, lightning, tornadoes, rain, snow or other mixed precipitation as defined by Washington State Emergency Management Division (WSEMD).

**State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA):** 1971 state law paralleling the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), which requires state and local agencies to consider environmental impacts in the decision-making process. A determination of environmental significance must be made for all non-exempt projects or actions which require a permit, license, or decision from a government agency. If the action does not have significant adverse environmental impacts, a Declaration of Non-Significance is issued. If the action or project could have major impacts, an Environmental Impact Statement is required. SEPA requires consideration of alternatives and mitigation of environmental impacts for major public and private projects and programs.

**Sprawl:** Low-density development unfolding from the edges of cities and towns. It is unplanned, land-consumptive, automobile-oriented, and designed without attention to its surroundings.

**Subarea:** A geographic division of the county, created for planning purposes. There are ten subareas in Whatcom County.

**Subdivision:** Division of a lot, tract, or parcel of land into two or more lots, tracts, parcels, or other divisions of land for sale or development. (Black's Law Dictionary)

**Sustainable:** An economic state where the demands placed upon the environment by people and commerce can be met without reducing the capacity of the environment to provide for future generations. (Paul Hawken, *The Ecology of Commerce*)

**Telecommunications Systems:** Structured cabling systems that begin at the demarcation point between the local service provider and the customer's premises structured cabling system or the wiring, appliances, devices, or equipment as specified by rule of the department as defined within RCW 19.28.400(13).

**Third-party Damage:** Means damage caused by a party other than the owner/operator of a utility facility or a contractor working for such owner/operator.

**Title 20:** Whatcom County Zoning Code.

**Tiny Home:** Synonymous with "Tiny House", a dwelling unit that is 400 square feet or less in floor area (excluding sleeping lofts) as defined within WCC 20.97.200.

**Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL):** Is a numerical value, used by WA State DOE, which represents the highest amount of a pollutant a surface water body can receive and still meet State standards (WSDOE "TMDL").

**Transfer of Development Rights (TDR):** A program in which the unused portion of a "sending" property's zoned capacity, one of the separable rights of property, is sold to the developer of a "receiving" site, who is allowed to add the capacity to the zoned limit of that site. TDRs can be used to prevent the demolition of affordable housing units, especially in downtowns, or to protect historically significant property or open space.

**Transit Oriented Development (TOD):** A type of land development that maximizes the amount of residential, commercial and activity space near public transportation (WSDOC "TOD").

**Transmission Pipeline:** Means a natural gas or hazardous liquid pipeline that transports within a storage field, or transports from an interstate pipeline or storage facility to a distribution main or a large volume user, or operates at a hoop stress of twenty percent or more of the specified minimum yield strength or as defined at 40 CRF 192.3, as amended.

**Transportation Analysis Zone (TAZ):** Geographic area defined for transportation modeling purposes. (COG, 1996)

**Transportation System:** All transportation infrastructure and services for all forms of transportation within a geographic area, irrespective of the responsible jurisdiction or transportation provider.

**Tree Canopy:** The layer of leaves, branches, and stems of trees that cover the ground when viewed from above and that can be measured as a percentage of land area shaded by trees, as defined within RCW 76.15.010.

**Unincorporated Area:** Area of the county outside city limits.

**Urban Fringe Subarea Plan:** A plan pertaining to the Bellingham Urban Growth Area and a portion of Whatcom County surrounding Bellingham and designating the interface between urban and rural land uses. Part of the Urban Fringe Area is included in an Urban Growth Area. Some of the area already lies within Bellingham's Urban Service Area.

**Urban Growth:** growth that makes intensive use of land for the location of buildings, structures, and impermeable surfaces to such a degree as to be incompatible with the primary use of land for the production of food, other agricultural products, or fiber, or the extraction of mineral resources, rural uses, rural development, and natural resource lands designated pursuant to RCW 36.70A.170.

**Urban Growth Area (UGA):** An area designated, within which urban growth will be encouraged and outside of which growth can only occur if it is not urban in nature. Urban growth areas around cities are designated by the county in consultation with the cities; urban growth areas not associated with cities are designated by the county.

**Urban Growth Area Reserves:** Areas adjacent and contiguous to Urban Growth Areas which appear to be suitable for future inclusion of the respective Urban Growth Area. These lands are held in reserve until it is demonstrated that they are needed for urban growth, and that consideration is given to ensuring adequate public facilities and services, reduction of sprawl, economic development, open space corridors, and natural resource conservation.

**Urban Level of Service:** The minimum level of facilities and services, including sanitary sewer, water service, police protection, fire protection and emergency medical services, parks and recreation programs, solid waste management, electric service, land use controls, communication facilities, and public schools, to support urban levels of development. A full range of services would add urban public transit, natural gas, storm drainage facilities, street lighting, libraries, local parks, local recreation facilities and services, and health services.

**Utility Corridor:** Means an area where an existing utility transmission line is situated, which includes the right-of-way occupied by the existing line and areas immediately adjacent to such rights-of-way in which siting additional utility transmission lines could potentially be considered appropriate.

**Very-Low Income:** Synonymous with "Very-Low Income Household", is a person or household whose income is at or below fifty percent of the median family income, adjusted for household size, for the county where the household is located per RCW 50.72.020(6).

**Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT):** The total annual miles of vehicle travel divided by the total population in a state or in an urbanized area per U.S. Department of Transportation.

**Visioning:** A process of citizen involvement to determine values and ideals for the future of a community and to transform those values and ideals into manageable and feasible community goals. (WAC 365-196-210)

**Climate Vulnerability:** The degree to which physical, biological, and socioeconomic systems are susceptible to and unable to cope with adverse impacts of climate change (USGCRP, 2023: Fifth National Climate Assessment).

**Vulnerable Populations:** Population groups that are more likely to be at higher risk for poor health outcomes in response to environmental harms, due to:

- (i) Adverse socioeconomic factors, such as unemployment, high housing and transportation costs relative to income, limited access to nutritious food and adequate health care, linguistic isolation, and other factors that negatively affect health outcomes and increase vulnerability to the effects of environmental harms; and
- (ii) Sensitivity factors, such as low birth weight and higher rates of hospitalization.

Vulnerable populations include, but is not limited to:

- (i) Racial or ethnic minorities;
- (ii) Low-income populations; and
- (iii) Populations disproportionately impacted by environmental harms as defined within RCW 70A.02.010(14).

**Water Association:** A private corporation which distributes potable water to residential customers.

**Water Rights Adjudication:** The legal process to quantify and prioritize water use, with highest priority given to the oldest, continuous water use per RCW 90.03.

**Watershed:** A geographic region within which water drains into a particular river, stream, or body of water.

**Wetlands Mitigation Bank:** A site where wetlands are restored, created, enhanced, or in exceptional circumstances, preserved expressly for the purpose of providing compensatory mitigation in advance of authorized impacts to similar resources per RCW 90.84.010(5).

**Wildland Fire Hazard:** Per RCW 76.04.005(1), a condition existing on any land in the state:

- (a) Covered wholly or in part by forest debris which is likely to further the spread of fire and thereby endanger life or property; or
- (b) When, due to the effects of disturbance agents, broken, down, dead, or dying trees exist on forestland in sufficient quantity to be likely to further the spread of fire within areas covered by a forest health hazard warning or order issued by the commissioner of public lands under RCW 76.06.180.

**Wildland Urban Interface:** The geographical area where structures and other human development meets or intermingles with wildland vegetative fuels.

**Wildfire:** Fire originating from an unplanned ignition, such as lightning, volcanos, unauthorized and accidental human-caused fires, and prescribes fires that are declared wildfires.

**WUTC:** Is a common abbreviation to refer to the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission.



**Zoning:** A measure by which the community is divided up into districts or zones. In each zone there are permitted uses and special uses, as well as regulations governing lot size, building bulk, placement, and other development standards.