



PORT OF BELLINGHAM
Washington State



WHATCOM COUNTY COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY (CEDS) 2026 ANNUAL UPDATE



Presented By: Tyler Schroeder



PORT OF BELLINGHAM ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TEAM



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TRI-FUNDERS UPDATE



PURPOSE



2025-2026 Annual update from the Port of Bellingham Economic Development Division.

2027-2031 Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS).

CEDS 2025-2026 HIGHLIGHTS

4

1

BASE ECONOMY

Build upon and strengthen Whatcom County's economic base.

2

INFRASTRUCTURE

Develop and enhance critical infrastructure that promotes economic development and resiliency

3

WORKFORCE

Develop a skilled workforce, expand educational attainment, and align employer needs with educational programs and curriculum

HIGHLIGHT: BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

GOAL 1: BASE ECONOMY



The Port's Economic Development team assisted Pure Blue Tech with **expansion efforts into a new 48,800 SF facility at 800 Cornwall Avenue**, supporting projected growth from 10 employees today to **50+ high-wage jobs** in the coming years.

Pure Blue Tech is a cutting-edge clean-tech company developing patented water filtration technology to reduce energy use, chemicals, and waste for industrial systems.



HIGHLIGHT: AGRICULTURE



GOAL 1: BASE ECONOMY

The Port of Bellingham and Whatcom County acquired the former Boxx Berry Farm property and established the **Whatcom Food and Farming Station**, a first-of-its-kind agricultural research facility focused on innovation, sustainability, and the future of local farming.

The **58.81-acre property** will support agricultural research, education, local farms, and future job growth in Whatcom County.

6621 Northwest Drive serves as the home of the Whatcom Food and Farming Station, a nonprofit agricultural research and innovation facility supporting Whatcom County's farming community.



HIGHLIGHT:

INDUSTRIAL LAND STUDY

GOAL 2: INFRASTRUCTURE



Port of Bellingham Economic Development Division led and coordinated the **Whatcom County Industrial Lands Study**, a countywide assessment of industrial land supply, demand, and constraints to inform long-term planning.

The study identified a limited amount of developable industrial land, highlighting key areas for future investment and planning focus.

POB supports regional collaboration, helping align jurisdictions and partners around infrastructure priorities and strategies to strengthen Whatcom County's industrial and job-generating capacity.



HIGHLIGHT:

MARINE CAREER PATHWAYS

GOAL 3: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Port of Bellingham Economic Development and Career Connect NW hosted the **2nd annual Blue Tech by the Bay** in partnership with marine and education agencies.

The annual event connects students from five Northwest Washington counties with hands-on, employer-led marine and maritime career activities, aimed to build workforce pipelines for the growing blue economy.

Blue Tech by the Bay is hosted by the Port of Bellingham and Career Connect NW in partnership with:

- Working Waterfront Foundation & Coalition
- NW Maritime Apprenticeship
- NW Center of Excellence for Marine Manufacturing Technology; and
- Bellingham SeaFeast.



HIGHLIGHT: STRENGTHENING PARTNERSHIPS



GOAL 3: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Port of Bellingham Economic Development Division:

- Cohosted the regional **“Forging Maritime Capacity: Welding the Future of Shipbuilding & Repair,”** workforce forum with the Center of Excellence for Marine Manufacturing & Technology at the Bellingham Cruise Terminal.
- Participates in the **Northwest Education & Workforce Coalition** led by the NW Education Service District 189, supporting alignment of education and workforce systems and expansion of work-based learning.
- Serves on the **Northwest Workforce Council Business Engagement Taskforce** to streamline employer engagement and workforce services.

CEDS 2027-2031 Updates

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- 60-day public survey with 617 responses
- Jurisdiction & Sector SWOTs completed
- 75 interviews completed to date
 - Almost every sector representative of WCBCC
 - 44 private sector, 23 electeds, 4 edu, 4 nonprofit
 - 2 private sector, 2 elected, 1 edu pending
- 19 1:1 with Team Whatcom completed (94 total)
- Engagement Sessions:
 - WCBCC
 - Team Whatcom
 - Port of Bellingham Directors
 - Nooksack Indian Tribe Leadership
- Forums:
 - Developers + Homebuilders
 - Tribal Businesses + Entrepreneurs
 - Postsecondaries (Work-Based Learning)



ENGAGEMENT GAPS

Through the end of May and early June, we will be focused on gathering additional inputs from:

- Tribal leadership
- Tribal businesses and entrepreneurs
- Manufacturing



TRENDS



WHAT DID WE HEAR?

1. Infrastructure. Infrastructure. Infrastructure.
2. Affordability, cost of living, rising costs in all areas, especially housing and healthcare overhead costs.
3. Labor shortages ongoing.
4. Market hesitancy and uncertainty is very high.
5. The regulatory environment is extremely challenging - "Death by a thousand cuts."
 - a. Planning + Permitting
 - b. Wetlands + critical areas



PRIORITIES

EMERGING PRIORITIES

Given all of the community engagement input, priorities that are rising to the top are: **infrastructure, affordability, and accessibility.**



CEDS 2027-2031 UPDATE

DRAFT VISION

We commit to work together to create a welcoming, innovative economy with opportunities for everyone.



'Downtown Sounds'
by Aaron Brick



**ACTION
ORIENTED**



**DESIRED
FUTURE
STATE**



**REFLECTS
INPUT**

DRAFT CEDS 2027-2031 GOALS

1

INFRASTRUCTURE

Prioritize investments in infrastructure that enhances commerce, connectivity, and resiliency.

2

VITALITY

Prioritize investments in businesses and entrepreneurs.

3

WORKFORCE

Coordinate and expand programs in workforce development, education, and training to address local employer needs.

4

AFFORDABILITY

Prioritize housing and childcare investments that support Whatcom County's workforce.

5

RESILIENCY

Prepare the region and partners to mitigate against, respond to, and recover from natural and human-caused disasters.

WHAT'S NEXT? CREATING ACTION ITEMS ☸

GOAL

- **Sub-goals**
 - **Action Items**

Action Items to be developed with partners over the next two months (by approx June 30, 2026).

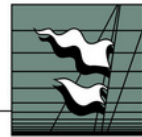
Every Action Item will:

- Identify a Lead who will responsible for implementation + reporting
- Identify collaborating, non-reporting partners (not observers)
- Have an outcome / metric / deliverable associated
- Have a specific timeline (Qtr/Year)
- Leaning away from “normal course of business” and toward deeper strategic items
- Be reported on annually



Remaining CEDS 2027-2031 Update Schedule





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APPENDIX: DRAFT 2027-2031 CEDS SUB-GOALS

CEDS 2027-2031 DRAFT GOALS

GOAL 1: INFRASTRUCTURE

Prioritize investments in infrastructure that enhances commerce, connectivity, and resiliency.



INFRASTRUCTURE SUB-GOALS

- a. Invest in impactful transportation infrastructure and roadways.
- b. Invest in multimodal transportation, including regional trail development.
- c. Modernize maritime and waterfront infrastructure.
- d. Expand and improve communications infrastructure.
- e. Invest in sector specific infrastructure (e.g. agriculture, recreation, cultural arts, etc.).
- f. Expand, improve, and diversify efficient, renewable, low-cost energy infrastructure.



CEDS 2027-2031 DRAFT GOALS

GOAL 1: INFRASTRUCTURE

Prioritize investments in infrastructure that enhances commerce, connectivity, and resiliency.



INFRASTRUCTURE SUB-GOALS

- g. Invest in strategic infrastructure improvements to create permit-ready industrial and commercial sites with utilities (including broadband), transportation access.
- h. Promote enhanced connection and coordination between Whatcom County, British Columbia, Tribal and First Nations to work towards an open and welcoming US-Canadian border.



CEDS 2027-2031 DRAFT GOALS

GOAL 2: BUSINESS SUPPORT

Prioritize investments in businesses and entrepreneurs.



BUSINESS SUPPORT SUB-GOALS

- a. Strengthen business retention and expansion.
- b. Strengthen support for innovative start-ups and early stage entrepreneurs.
- c. Pursue innovative financing options to support entrepreneurs, businesses, and economic development.
- d. Support recruitment opportunities in key sectors that supplement existing and emerging industry clusters and align with community resources and preferences.
- e. Commit to establishing streamlined planning and permitting services resulting in predictable timelines and a user-friendly experience for applicants.



CEDS 2027-2031 DRAFT GOALS

GOAL 3: WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Coordinate and expand programs in workforce development, education, and training to address local employer needs.



WORKFORCE SUB-GOALS

- a. Strengthen Northwest Washington's talent pipeline.
- b. Support Northwest Washington's postsecondary and K-12 institutions as both major employers and strategic talent developers for the region.
- c. d. Fortify Northwest Washington's key employment sectors by enhancing sector-specific workforce development initiatives and business services.
- d. Develop the digital economy infrastructure and talent ecosystem needed to attract and retain remote workers and location-independent businesses.



CEDS 2027-2031 DRAFT GOALS

GOAL 4: AFFORDABILITY

Prioritize housing and childcare investments that support Whatcom County's workforce.



AFFORDABILITY SUB-GOALS

- a. Prioritize investments and policy that significantly increases the production and supply of housing at all price points, particularly near employment centers and transportation access points.
- b. Increase childcare capacity and utilization through innovative public-private partnerships.
- c. Support employer-driven and community-owned healthcare initiatives that reduce healthcare costs for Whatcom County businesses and workers and retain healthcare dollars locally.



CEDS 2027-2031 DRAFT GOALS

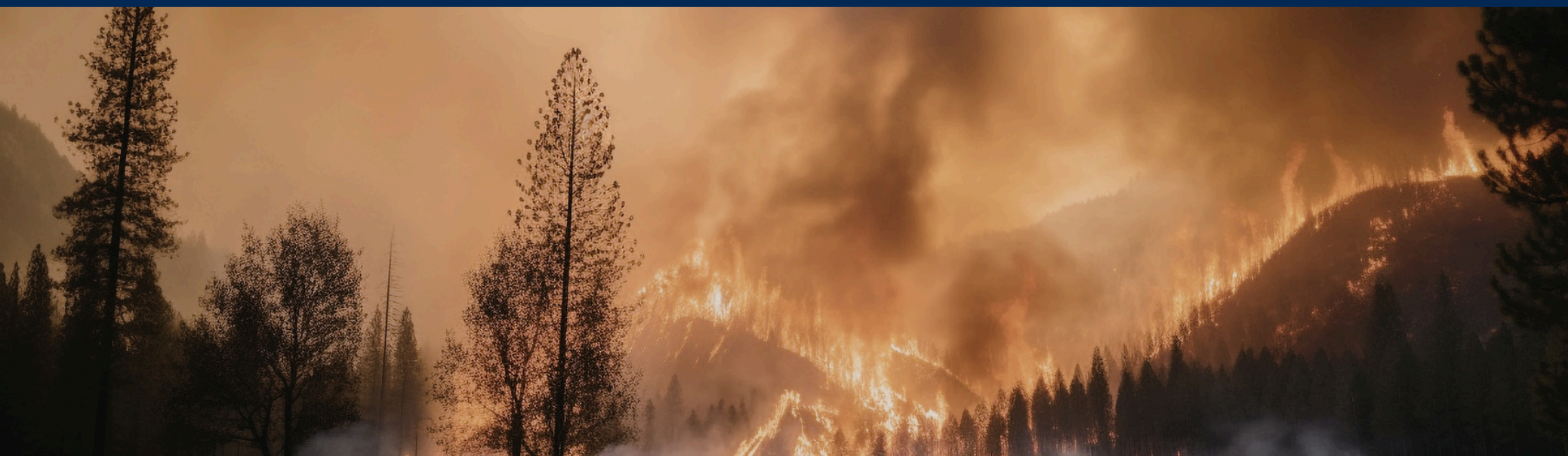
GOAL 5: RESILIENCY

Prepare the region and partners to mitigate against, respond to, and recover from natural and human-caused disasters.



RESILIENCY SUB-GOALS

- a. Deliver pre-disaster preparedness and succession planning assistance to small businesses, targeting measurable increases in business continuity plan adoption across the county.
- b. Advocate and support efforts for Nooksack River Flood Mitigation that benefits all partners, businesses, and communities.



CEDS 2027-2031 DRAFT GOALS

GOAL 5: RESILIENCY

Prepare the region and partners to mitigate against, respond to, and recover from natural and human-caused disasters and policy-driven economic shocks.



RESILIENCY SUB-GOALS

- c. Develop economic disruption preparedness plans that help businesses and communities adapt.
- d. Work with local businesses, non-profits, and government agencies to develop disaster recovery frameworks for businesses in coordination with whole community and infrastructure recovery.

