

To: Whatcom County Council; Whatcom County Council Finance and Administrative Services Committee

From: Tyler Schroeder, Director of Economic Development, Port of Bellingham; Jennifer Noveck, Port of Bellingham

RE: CEDS Project List Updates for 2026

Date: March 13, 2026

As a part of the conditions put forth by the [Economic Development Administration \(EDA\)](#), which is the federal bureau for economic development in the United States, every year Whatcom County must update the [Whatcom County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\) 2022-2026](#) Project List.

The Port of Bellingham has been responsible for updating and maintaining the CEDS and the associated Project List since 2019. The 2022-2026 report update was led by the Port's economic development staff, overseen by the CEDS External Review Committee, and informed by broad stakeholder engagement within the community throughout the entire process. In Fall 2021, Whatcom County Council unanimously approved the Whatcom County CEDS 2022-2026. The Project List has been updated by amendment annually since approval. The last CEDS Project List update was approved by Council in March 2025.

For Council's convenience, we have provided the following information and documents:

1. A Change Log that details changes to the CEDS Project List for 2026
2. A clean copy with track changes accepted of the CEDS Project List updates for 2026 for approval by resolution (Attachment A)
3. An updated resolution for your consideration
4. The answers to some of the most Frequently Asked Questions about the CEDS and associated Project List (next page)

Thank you for your time and all the Council's effort in making Whatcom County a great place to live and do business!

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a CEDS?

According to the EDA (2026), the CEDS is a strategy-driven plan for regional economic development. A CEDS is the result of a regionally owned planning process designed to build capacity and guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region. The CEDS is updated every five years. The CEDS Project List is updated every year.

What are the benefits of having a CEDS?

Having an up-to-date CEDS on file is beneficial to Whatcom County for many reasons. First, it leverages existing local funds, strategies, and planning documents, while also increasing alignment between them. This makes economic development more programmatic and less ad hoc and enables more efficient usage of resources. Second, it increased the likelihood of obtaining state and federal funding. Third, it makes public agencies in Whatcom County eligible for EDA funding opportunities related to infrastructure, workforce development and disaster recovery.

How is a CEDS different from a Comprehensive Plan?

The CEDS document is governed and overseen by the EDA, whereas the Comprehensive Plan is governed by Washington State law, or the Growth Management Act (GMA). A CEDS has several required components, including a statistical background summary, a strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, goals, sub-goals, an action plan, and an evaluation plan. The purposes of the documents are also different. While the Comprehensive Plan intends to guide day to day actions of Council and County staff, the CEDS serves as an action plan and roadmap for economic development in Whatcom County.

It is important to note that the Economic element of the Comprehensive Plan remains optional due to lack of funding by the Washington State Legislature. Additionally, the Comprehensive Plan cannot be substituted for a CEDS because the GMA does not require an evaluation framework, annual updates, or an annual progress report.

Who participates in the CEDS Project List?

Only public agencies and jurisdictions can add projects to the CEDS Project List. That is because most of the funding sources, such as EDI, or other local, state, and federal funds, can only be administered to public agencies for publicly owned projects.

Projects with private and nonprofit partners (P3 partnerships) can only be added at the discretion of a jurisdiction or agency who would be fiscally responsible for the project and who would own and maintain the piece of public infrastructure or equipment long-term.

What types of projects are on the CEDS Project List?

Projects on the project list are a subset of a jurisdiction's capital projects. We encourage jurisdictions and public agencies to include projects that are: 1) focused on economic development, 2) that are a priority in the next five years, 3) that they will be applying to EDI, or other county, state, federal funding for, and 4) EDA projects. Projects that are discouraged include projects that are essentially fulfilling basic responsibilities and maintenance to constituents, one off projects with no regional benefit, or entire capital improvements project lists.

How does the Port gather project information for the CEDS Project List?

The Port solicits public agencies to update their public list annually. Every jurisdiction in the Project List has sole responsibility for adding, editing, or deleting their projects. The Port does not make substantive edits to any jurisdiction's list but its own.