

CHAPTER 7 – Economic Development

#	Page	Section/Policy	Proposed Amendment	Sponsor	Meeting
1	1	Purpose	<p>Economic vitality depends on job retention, job creation, job training programs, public and private capital investment, and business and community capacity-building to allow businesses or community groups to do the job themselves, as well as the conditions that allow workers and families to participate fully in the workforce, including access to housing, childcare, and education.</p> <p>The purpose of the economic element is to set goals and establish policies which that promote economic vitality for the future of Whatcom County. This chapter provides policies that directly affect other elements of this plan. There are also policies that can be utilized to help direct future planning actions or to review private requests for plan amendments, rezones, or specific projects.</p>	Boyle	
2	7-1	GMA Goals...	<p>Scrivener in nature</p> <p>Replace “citizen” with “resident”</p>	Galloway	APPROVED TO SEND TO PC 10/7/25 COTW
3	7-1	GMA Goals...	<p>Scrivener in nature</p> <p>Introduce the acronym “BR&E” then don’t consistently use it. Would recommend removing the acronym and spelling out “business retention and expansion” throughout the chapter.</p>	Galloway	APPROVED TO SEND TO PC 10/7/25 COTW
4	7-5	Background Summary	<p>Question –</p> <p>re construction job growth: do we have data for county funding leveraged to support construction jobs?</p>	Galloway	
5	7-10	Current County Economic Development Activities	<p>Scrivener in nature</p> <p>Whatcom County delegated job creation activities to the Port of Bellingham, which serves as the County’s “Associate Development Organization” (ADO). The Port of Bellingham was designated as the Associate Development Organization (ADO) in Whatcom County by the County Executive in 2012. An ADO is intended to serve as a point of contact for local economic development activities by supporting business retention, expansion of existing businesses, and new business development. ADOs are also the local arm of the Washington State Department of Commerce and are supported by a small financial contract with quarterly and annual deliverable requirements related but not limited to: BR&E<u>Business retention and expansion, recruitment</u>, startup assistance, and export assistance.</p>	Galloway	APPROVED TO SEND TO PC 10/7/25 COTW

6	7-10	Issues, Goals, and Policies	<p>Scrivener in nature</p> <p>Established domestic businesses that offer living wages (or better), recruit skilled graduates from local educational institutions (such as cyber security and CNC <u>(spell this out)</u> technicians). However, due to limited affordable workforce housing and a shortage of developable industrial land, these businesses typically relocate these new hires to other counties where such resources are more accessible.</p> <p>Traditionally, as skilled professionals advance in their careers, some choose to establish startup enterprises, with a portion achieving success as living-wage employers for future generations. Similarly, certain graduates from our <u>(clarify who)</u> programs go on to serve as educational mentors, instructors, or venture capital investors.</p>	Galloway	APPROVED TO SEND TO PC 10/7/25 COTW
7	7-11/12	Policy 7A-2	<p>Policy 7A-2: Together with the cities, provide an ample, developable land supply for commercial and industrial uses to provide opportunities for <u>business retention, expansion and recruitment and expanding firms wishing to locate or remain</u> in Whatcom County. <u>Where applicable, retain existing light and heavy industrial zoning and identify additional industrial sites as recommended by the July 2025 Whatcom County Industrial Lands Study to ensure the county can meet future demand.</u></p>	Galloway	
8	7-12	Policy 7A-3	<p>Policy 7A-3: Foster a diverse, private-sector job base <u>including those that contract with government, as well as facilitate public sector jobs</u>—defined as jobs that offer compensation at or above the state median income, <u>and include essential benefits such as health insurance and employer retirement contributions—to ensure long-term economic stability for workers and their families</u>, and facilitate the retention and expansion of existing businesses.</p>	Galloway	
9	7-12	Policy 7A-5	<p>Policy 7A-5: In addition to stimulating living wage employment and jobs in diverse sectors including <u>renewable energy and green industry and</u> infrastructure, ensure we retain entry level and service-related jobs such as those necessary to support tourism, recreation, <u>manufacturing</u>, and other industries.</p>	Galloway	
10	7-12	Policy 7A-6	<p>Policy 7A-6: Support public-private partnerships to develop training and technology solutions relevant to current industry needs with local education resource providers to develop an educated and skilled work force as a key factor for economic success. Such partnerships should include Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College, Northwest Indian College, Northwest Workforce Council, <u>Northwest Career and Technical Academy, career and technical education programs in K-12 schools, apprenticeship programs</u>, and businesses and industries.</p>	Galloway	

11	7-12	Policy 7A-7	Policy 7A-7: <u>Partner with the Western Washington University Small Business Development Center, Port of Bellingham, Chambers of Commerce, and other stakeholders to support business start-up operations and entrepreneurship to facilitate growth of businesses.</u>	Galloway	
12	7-13	Policy 7A-11 OR	Policy 7A-11: Establish a competitiveness review of <u>county policies, regulations, taxes/fees, and other processes, to help promote affordable housing that is affordable, child care, high-speed internet, modern infrastructure,</u> and other influences that impact county businesses.	Galloway	
13	7-13	Policy 7A-11	<u>Review county policies, regulations, taxes/fees, and other processes to help promote affordable housing, child care that supports workforce participation, high-speed internet, modern infrastructure, and other influences that impact county businesses, and identify opportunities to improve efficiency, streamline processes, and reduce unnecessary barriers to economic development.</u>	Boyle	
14	7-13	Policy 7A-13	Policy 7A-13: Encourage Bellingham Technical College, Whatcom Community College, <u>Northwest Indian College,</u> and Western Washington University to develop and design training programs in rapidly growing industries such as alternative home construction technologies and renewable energy.	Galloway	
15	7-14	Add policy to Goal 7A	<u>Policy 7A-15: Long term prosperity in Whatcom County depends on reliable access to water and fiscally responsible management of local resources. While adjudication may ultimately clarify legal rights, experience from other basins demonstrates that multi decade litigation creates uncertainty and imposes significant costs not only on water users but also on County government. A proactive, negotiated settlement approach can achieve water certainty faster, protect the economy, and relieve unnecessary strain on the County's justice system and taxpayers.</u>	Elenbaas	
16	7-14	Add policy to Goal 7A	<u>Policy 7A-16: Whatcom County shall actively pursue and support a negotiated or mediated settlement process among all major water use sectors - agricultural, municipal, industrial, tribal, and environmental - as an alternative to a protracted adjudication. The County should provide leadership, facilitation, and technical support to help all parties reach consensus on allocation, mitigation, and conservation measures that sustain the county's economic base while protecting ecological resources.</u>	Elenbaas	
17	7-14	Add policy to Goal 7A	<u>Policy 7A-17: The County shall evaluate both the economic and fiscal costs of adjudication, including impacts on agricultural production, housing investment, and County government operations. Analyses should compare the long term financial obligations of supporting additional courtroom facilities, staffing, and judicial appointments against the potential savings achieved through a negotiated settlement process.</u>	Elenbaas	

18	7-14	Add policy to Goal 7A	<u>Policy 7A-18: Recognizing that the State initiated the adjudication but does not fully fund its implementation, the County shall advocate for state reimbursement of adjudication-related costs. Including courtroom expansion, judicial staffing, and administrative expenses - while simultaneously pursuing settlement strategies that can reduce or eliminate the need for these ongoing expenditures.</u>	Elenbaas	
19	7-14	Add policy to Goal 7A	<u>Policy 7A-19: A negotiated settlement should be used as a vehicle to invest in local economic infrastructure such as water storage, conveyance efficiency, and mitigation banking that benefits multiple sectors and offsets the costs of prolonged litigation. The County shall seek state and federal partnership funding to implement such projects as part of any basin-wide agreement.</u>	Elenbaas	
20	7-14/15	Add policy to Goal 7A	<u>Policy 7A-20: Ensure that settlement frameworks explicitly address the water needs of both agriculture and housing, acknowledging that stable water supply supports job creation, food security, and housing affordability. The County's facilitative efforts should aim to preserve the viability of existing farms while ensuring sufficient water resources for urban and rural housing consistent with Comprehensive Plan goals.</u>	Elenbaas	
21	7-15/16	Public/Private Partnerships	<p>Current Planning Commission Proposed language:</p> <p>The ability of Whatcom County to bring living wage jobs to the community depends on leveraging the significant expertise of our business community and our willingness to eliminate the significant barriers we have created to building affordable new homes and establishing "shovel ready" industrial land which are preventing our other economic development initiatives from having a meaningful impact.</p> <p><u>Collaboration between public and private entities can help promote and prioritize responsible industry that balances both the need for living wage jobs and protection of our environment and natural resources. Whatcom County should craft policy and allocate resources that support local economic and workforce development initiatives, an adequate industrial lands base, and the sustainable development of affordable housing in the Cities and UGAs.</u></p> <p><i>The Planning Commission language would be stricken and replaced with Galloway's proposed language.</i></p>	Galloway	
22	7-16	Policy 7B-1	Policy 7B-1: The Port of Bellingham, serving as the ADO, will work with the cities, the County, Chambers of Commerce, educational institutions, and other groups to assist retention and expansion of existing local businesses <u>across multiple demographics</u> and to attract appropriate businesses to Whatcom County. In accordance with the Whatcom County CEDS, the ADO and partners will evaluate their progress on economic development goals annually in the form of a CEDS Progress Report.	Galloway	

23	7-17	Add policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-7: Facilitate opportunities for government entities to stimulate the local economy including leveraging public funding to create local, living wage jobs for local workers and workforce development opportunities such as apprenticeship utilization in public work.</u>	Galloway	
24	7-17	Add policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-8: Preserving farmland alone is not sufficient to sustain Whatcom County’s agricultural economy. County policy shall ensure that agricultural lands remain not only physically preserved but also economically productive, infrastructure-ready, and supplied with the water necessary for continued production. Agriculture must be treated as the highest and best use of designated agricultural lands.</u>	Elenbaas	
25	7-17	Add policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-9: Land-use regulations, conservation easements, and preservation tools shall be implemented in a manner that supports active agricultural production and farm business viability. The County shall evaluate existing agricultural zoning, easement terms, and critical area provisions to ensure they do not unnecessarily restrict agricultural infrastructure or operational flexibility.</u>	Elenbaas	
26	7-17/18	Add policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-10: A viable agricultural economy cannot exist without reliable access to water. The County shall ensure that agricultural water use is prioritized and protected in all aspects of land-use, resource management, and economic planning. Water management policies shall explicitly support ongoing and future agricultural operations as a critical component of Whatcom County’s economy.</u>	Elenbaas	
27	7-18	Add policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-11: The County shall recognize agricultural production as a cornerstone of the local economy and shall integrate farm viability into its economic development strategies. Planning efforts shall emphasize infrastructure investments, workforce development, and financing mechanisms that enable continued agricultural production.</u>	Elenbaas	
28	7-18	Add policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-12: To sustain a viable agricultural economy, the County shall support the development of processing, storage, distribution, and marketing facilities as permitted or accessory uses in the Agriculture Zone. The County shall review zoning and permitting processes to remove unnecessary barriers to small and medium scale “value added” operations, including processing, storage, and on farm retail.</u>	Elenbaas	
29	7-18	Add policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-13: Conservation easements and Transfer of Development Rights programs shall be designed to protect both the land base and the ability to farm it. Easement terms shall permit necessary agricultural buildings, farmworker housing, and resource improvements essential for modern and sustainable farming.</u>	Elenbaas	
30	7-18	Add policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-14: The County shall review Title 20.40 (Agriculture District) to ensure that the regulations reflect current agricultural practices and market realities. This review should evaluate</u>	Elenbaas	

			<u>minimum lot sizes, accessory use definitions, and conditional use procedures to promote economically viable farm operations while maintaining environmental protections.</u>		
31	7-18	Add new policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-15: All future amendments to agricultural land policy shall consider data on farm income, product diversification, infrastructure capacity, and generational land transfer trends to ensure that preservation measures enhance rather than constrain long-term viability.</u>	Elenbaas	
32	7-18	Add new policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-16: The County should continue to support apprenticeship utilization requirements on the construction of all public work in accordance with WCC 3.72. The County should collect apprentice registration numbers or similar documentation for each individual apprentice from contractors entering into a contract with the county to construct an applicable public work and validate that utilization reports are accurate and verifiable.</u>	Galloway	
33	7-19	Add new policy to Goal 7B	<u>Policy 7B-17: The County should strive to include pre-apprenticeship graduates in the County's economic development strategy and equity efforts. Pre-apprenticeship programs play a key role in preparing local residents—especially those from underrepresented communities—for entry into registered apprenticeships and living-wage careers, strengthening long-term local workforce.</u>	Galloway	
34	7-20	Policy 7C-4	<u>To retain and attract living wage jobs, encourage location of additional industrial areas, especially where sewer and water service and all weather access can be readily provided, when necessary near highway interchanges and freight corridors, as recommended by the July 2025 Whatcom County Industrial Lands Study to ensure the county can meet future demand.</u>		
35	7-21	Policy 7C-12	<u>Recognize that access to affordable child care supports workforce participation and economic vitality in Whatcom County. Support local efforts to expand the availability of affordable, quality child care as part of workforce development. Consider the recommendations of the Child and Well-Being Task Force relating to child care issues. Recognize the importance of available and affordable child care for workers. Increase access to quality and affordable child care by supporting local efforts to expand child care availability as a foundational element of workforce development. Consider the recommendations of the Child and Family Well-Being Task Force relating to child care issues.</u>	Boyle	
36	7-22	Policy 7D-1	Policy 7D-1: Work with state, and federal, <u>and tribal</u> agencies to coordinate and streamline environmental review.	Galloway	
37	7-22	Policy 7D-2	Policy 7D-2: Consider conducting in-depth environmental analysis for comprehensive plans and subarea plans to limit the need for future analysis by the private sector to a few issues that are unique to a specific project and cannot be reasonably analyzed at a subarea level.	Galloway	

38	7-22	Policy 7D-3/ Policy 7D-4	<p>Policy 7D-3: Integrate, streamline, and simplify regulations to make them more understandable and user-friendly and facilitate planned development.”</p> <p>Policy 7D-4: Utilize graphic illustrations to explain choices that cannot be clearly conveyed in a few words.</p> <p><i>Consider combining policies 7D-3 and 7D-4 and clarifying intent</i></p> <p>Integrate, streamline, and simplify regulations to make them more understandable and user-friendly and in an effort to facilitate planned development. Utilize <u>accessible language and</u> graphic illustrations to explain choices-land-use and development codes and regulations which that cannot be clearly conveyed in a few words.</p>	Galloway	
39	7-23	Add new policy to Goal 7D	<p><u>Policy 7D-12: Collaborate with the cities to clarify industrial and commercial land uses in zoning districts designated for industrial development to ensure greater consistency among the codes and to ensure nonindustrial uses or uses not contributing to living wage jobs should remain an allowed use, as recommended by the July 2025 Whatcom County Industrial Lands Study.</u></p>	Galloway	
40	7-24	Business Retention and Expansion	<p>Businesses create jobs, supply needed goods and services, and enhance economic opportunities for the residents of the County. Businesses <u>support the local community and economy by paying taxes (property, sales, and B&O), often reinvesting profits into business and infrastructure improvements and expansion, investing in philanthropic endeavors, and paying wages enabling workers to live, learn, work and play in Whatcom County</u>the local community. A local company with national or international interests, or a national firm with major local investment, can provide substantial support to local causes, educational and cultural activities, and the tax base. Local businesses use local banks and other support services, which help keep dollars cycling through the local economy. Therefore, business retention and expansion are important elements that support the economic well-being of the community. Business retention and expansion for existing businesses in Whatcom County has been identified as a top priority in the Whatcom County CEDS 2022-2026.</p>	Galloway	
41	7-25	Policy 7F-3	<p>Policy 7F-3: Encourage firms to contribute financially as partners with the public <u>and non-profit sectors</u> in sharing costs for civic, and cultural, <u>and philanthropic</u> needs of the community-at-large.</p>	Galloway	
42	7-25	Policy 7F-4	<p>Policy 7F-4: Enhance opportunities for <u>increased-sustainable</u> resource-based (agricultural, forest, fisheries, and mining products) value added industries.</p>	Galloway	
43	7-25	Economic Growth and Environmental Quality	<p>Often economic development and environmental protection are viewed as opposing interests because growth can increase pressure on critical areas and resource lands. However, both economic vitality and environmental quality are interrelated and are extremely important to the community. Economic development requires adequate water supply as a fundamental need. The</p>	Galloway	

			<p>fishing and shell fishing industries are particularly dependent on water quantity, good water quality, and habitat. The tourism industry relies on these same attributes, as well as having naturally beautiful vistas, <u>trails</u>, and shorelines for recreation. Quality of life and the amazing natural environment are also reasons that businesses <u>and employees</u> are attracted to Whatcom County in the first place. Thus, a commitment to preserving and enhancing the natural environment is actually an economic development strategy for Whatcom County. Additionally, a strong economy that provides living wage jobs allows the leisure time and additional resources to focus on environmental stewardship and protection.</p>		
44	7-26	Policy 7G-3	<p>Policy 7G-3: Provide support to Whatcom County's tourism industry to maintain, <u>promote</u>, and enhance <u>responsible tourism and recreation, which should a-balance between</u> the economic benefits of tourism and <u>protection of</u> the local <u>environment, natural resources, and</u> quality of life.</p>	Galloway	
45	7-26	Policy 7G-5	<p>Question: Should we clarify who is coordinating? Proposed Amendment: Policy 7G-5: Coordinate environmental and economic planning efforts <u>with Port of Bellingham, cities, county, state, federal, and tribal governments and business, industry, and tourism stakeholders.</u></p>	Galloway	
46	7-26	Policy 7G-7	<p>Policy 7G-7: Support <u>living wage</u> job opportunities <u>that are sustainable, responsible, and meet the future needs of the community and economy. This could include the clean-renewable energy and renewable</u>-industries (<u>including such as</u> manufacturing hardware <u>(such as for</u> solar panels, batteries, and heat pumps, <u>biofuels, and hydrogen</u>), professional services, <u>and biofuels, technology, alternative transportation, green infrastructure, and affordable housing, childcare, and health care. by e</u>nsuring there is adequate <u>affordable workforce housing and “shovel ready” retail, commercial, and</u> industrial land to support investment in <u>local business and workforcethese industries to be located within Whatcom County.</u></p>	Galloway	
47	7-28	Policy 7H-2	<p>Policy 7H-2: Work with state and federal agencies, Tribal governments, and other groups to improve the condition of <u>the-tribal treaty protected fishing rights and</u> fishery resources, including <u>water quality and quantity</u>, habitat maintenance, <u>restoration</u>, and enhancement, especially for <u>estuaries, riparian areas, and other</u> habitats utilized by threatened and endangered fish species, <u>and removal of fish passage barriers.</u></p>	Galloway	
48	7-28	Policy 7H-3	<p>Policy 7H-3: Maintain the commercial forestland base of Whatcom County to assure the industry's continued economic viability and sustainable harvest. <u>Whatcom County should continue to work with state and federal agencies, Tribes, private timber industry, and other relevant stakeholders to balance the economic interest with climate resilience and managing forestland for multiple benefits including jobs, wood products, recreation, carbon capture and sequestration, ecosystem</u></p>	Galloway	

			<u>services, and wildfire resilience. In an effort to protect Lake Whatcom, the drinking water source for nearly half of Whatcom County’s population, public and private management of forestland in the watershed should follow more stringent regulations, forest practice rules, and compliance monitoring to ensure consistency with the Lake Whatcom Management Program and compliance with the Landscape Plan, Clean Water Act, forest management plans, and other relevant state and federal laws.</u>		
49	7-28	Policy 7H-4	Policy 7H-4: As part of a broad-based economy, foster productive timber, agriculture, and fisheries industries in a sustainable manner that aligns with County Comprehensive Plan Climate chapter, <u>Climate Action Plan, Forest Resilience Plan, Lake Whatcom Management Program Work Plan, Comprehensive Parks, Recreation, and Open Space Plan, WRIA 1 Salmon Recovery Plan, forest management plans, and other relevant county plans.</u>	Galloway	
50	7-28	Policy 7H-5	Policy 7H-5: Support <u>sustainable mining operations</u> , which is compatible with other land use and environmental policies, including surface mining of sand, gravel, and rock and subsurface mining of other minerals found in Whatcom County, such as gold and silver.	Galloway	
51	7-31	Policy 7J-3	Policy 7J-3: Focus on absorbing and retraining displaced and discouraged workers and addressing the skills gap through grants, training by the Northwest Workforce Council, <u>Western Washington University</u> , Bellingham Technical College, Whatcom Community College, Northwest Indian College, <u>apprenticeship programs</u> , and other opportunities.	Galloway	
52	7-31	Geographic Diversity	<p>“A final issue with the local economy is the location of the majority of jobs in the westernmost portion of the lowlands area of Whatcom County. This is where the majority of the population lives and works, the infrastructure is available, and where most of the jobs should continue to be located. People from smaller communities located throughout the County generally have longer commutes, creating greater impacts on the road system and environment. It also creates additional need for more income for travel costs.</p> <p>These and other area-specific issues have spurred three communities to focus efforts on economic development: Point Roberts; Birch Bay; and East County. Each has successfully developed an area Economic Development Plan and has a subarea plan. The ongoing work of these groups is crucial to addressing the most urgent and long-range planning needs in these areas such as loss of living wage jobs and tax base revenues and increased demand for services by a growing residential population.”</p> <p>Question: Regarding economic development in East County, there elements of the East Whatcom Health Equity Zone work we should be including here?</p>	Galloway	