



MEMORANDUM

TO: Whatcom County Council
FROM: Kiana Oos, Council Staff
RE: Comprehensive Plan Proposed Process
DATE: June 2, 2025

Comprehensive Plan Process

The Comprehensive Plan is developed through a series of reviews that includes Planning and Development Services (PDS) staff, advisory groups, the Planning Commission, and Council. To date, advisory groups have submitted their recommendations and PDS is currently reviewing those recommendations for potential inclusion in the draft chapters of the Plan. Next, the Planning Commission will receive the plan chapter by chapter. Once the Planning Commission has reviewed the whole plan, they will hold a final public hearing on all the chapters and vote to approve recommendations to Council. It will then be Council's responsibility to review the final draft Comprehensive Plan, propose edits, and act on the ordinance adopting the plan. The Planning Commission began reviewing Chapter 1: Introduction and Growth Projections on May 29.

Council expressed interest in greater involvement in the Comprehensive Plan review process, beyond their approval role at the end of the process. Based on Council conversations at Committee of the Whole (COTW) on 5/13 and input from PDS staff, Council staff have drafted a proposed process for Council review of the Comprehensive Plan as outlined below.

Proposed Process

1. Each individual Comprehensive Plan chapter will go to the Planning Commission for review and a public hearing. (Council will also receive Planning Commission packets with draft chapter language via email).
2. Planning Commission will issue *preliminary* recommendations on the chapter under consideration.
3. PDS will present each individual chapter with Planning Commission's preliminary recommendations to Council in COTW for discussion and potential amendments.
4. Council can make proposed amendments (or, alternatively, suggestions or guidance) for consideration by the Planning Commission at their final public hearing on all the chapters (see step 6).
5. Further conversation/suggestions/guidance between the Council and Planning Commission could occur at their joint meetings allowing time for both bodies to share their thoughts/concerns/priorities, etc. without having to make formal amendments at that time.

6. The Planning Commission will hold a public hearing on the full Comprehensive Plan (after they review each chapter individually) and issue final recommendations to Council. The Planning Commission would consider COTW input at that time.
7. Council will hold a public hearing on the Comprehensive Plan, move to include any additional amendments, and ultimately act on the ordinance adopting the Plan.

Joint Council/Planning Commission Meetings

The Council and the Planning Commission have expressed interest in holding joint Council/Planning Commission meetings. The proposed plan to accommodate this is outlined below.

- **July COTW meeting** with a non-quorum of Planning Commissioners
 - target date: 7/22
 - topic: presentation and discussion of preliminary Final EIS preferred alternative(s).
- **August Joint Council and Planning Commission meeting**
 - potential dates: regular council meeting 8/6; special meetings 8/5, 8/12, or 8/14
 - topic: prioritized chapter discussion
- **October Joint Council and Planning Commission meeting**
 - potential dates: special meetings 10/14, 10/16, or 10/28 after Health Board meeting
 - topic: Chapters 2 and 3: Land use and Housing

Summary

This draft proposed process will be discussed, revised as needed, and confirmed at Council's Special COTW meeting on June 3. As always, please reach out to me with any questions or concerns at koos@co.whatcom.wa.us or (360) 778-5013.