

**WHATCOM COUNTY
PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT**



NATURAL RESOURCES

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ELIZABETH KOSA
DIRECTOR

TO: The Honorable Satpal Singh Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive, and The Honorable Members of the Whatcom County Council

THROUGH: Elizabeth Kosa, Public Works Director *ek*

FROM: Gary Stoyka, Natural Resources Manager *GS*
Lauren Clemens, Climate Action Manager *LC*

DATE: January 26th, 2026

RE: **Whatcom County Climate Action Plan Update - 2026 Preliminary Schedule**

Requested Action

Informational briefing to the Whatcom County Council Climate Action and Natural Resource Committee and Whatcom County Executive's Office regarding the proposed tasks and preliminary schedule for the Whatcom County Climate Action Plan Update (Approved by the Climate Impact Advisory Committee on 1-15-2026)

Background

The [Whatcom County Climate Action Plan](#) (CAP) was adopted by the Whatcom County Council on November 9, 2021 through [Resolution 2021-049](#). The CAP is a Whatcom County advisory document informed by technical reports and community engagement efforts, including the [2019 Community Research Project](#). To meet emissions targets set by the Washington State Legislature, the Plan's goals are to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts. The Plan's emissions targets include reducing countywide emissions 45% from 1990 levels by 2030, achieving net zero emissions by 2050, and reducing County government emissions 85% from 2000 levels by 2030. Resolution 2021-049: *Adopting the Climate Action Plan*, committed Whatcom County leadership to act with urgency and intention to address the climate change emergency and build climate resilience. As directed by [Whatcom County Code 2.126.030](#), the Climate Impact Advisory Committee (CIAC) is in the process of reviewing and evaluating of the existing CAP. Committee members will work with staff to review the existing plan's commitments to provide recommendations for Council and Executive's Office consideration regarding actions to reduce emissions and adapt to climate impacts.

Climate action planning and implementation is dynamic as conditions change. Whatcom County's capacity to deliver services, operate, and build public infrastructure is increasingly challenged by climate-exacerbated hazards. Communities, ecosystems, and infrastructure throughout the County are facing increasing strain due to more frequent and severe coastal and riverine flooding, smoke, heat, drought, and extreme weather impacts due to climate change. Reducing emissions and adapting to climate impacts requires multi-sectoral partnerships and support across County departments, financing for projects through local, state, federal, private and philanthropic funds, and regional and statewide coordination. Since the first Climate Action Plan drafted by CIAC was adopted in 2021, there have been a myriad of statewide regulatory, revenue, and rulemaking changes that will inform how the County leads, supports, and advocates for municipal and communitywide action. Given constrained near-term local and state budgetary resources, staff will continue working cross-departmentally to formalize a 2026 climate action agenda for County departments, draft an interlocal agreement for public agencies, and begin the Climate Action Plan update with the Climate Impact Advisory Committee.

Climate Action Plan Update - Next Steps

In 2025, staff and CIAC members began evaluating the 2021 Climate Action Plan (CAP) to remove items that are no longer relevant or feasible for implementation. At the December 11th meeting, committee members voted to remove 34 of 210 actions in the currently adopted advisory document as part of a preliminary review of the Plan's commitments. The CAP update will focus on annualized, prioritized actions through a multi-phased update. The following are proposed 2026 tasks as part of the Plan update:

1. Climate Action Plan Progress Report - 2023-2025 – 3-year progress report with descriptions of outcomes for completed actions and interim progress updates for actions in progress.

- Completed - Action in 2021 Plan is completed and description of outcome
- In Progress - Action is on track and expected to be completed by end of 2026

2. 2026 Whatcom County Action Agenda - Annual project list across Whatcom County departments for actions that have committed local, state, or federal revenue for implementation. Actions not funded that require additional revenue will be noted as gaps and reassessed following passage of the state supplemental capital budget by the Washington State Legislature for potential Climate Commitment Act funding.

3. 2026 Whatcom Climate Action Partnership Interlocal Agreement - An interlocal agreement to formalize existing staff coordination for implementation of climate action initiatives across public agencies will commence in 2026. Actions identified for joint implementation will be prioritized in conjunction with other public agencies based on mutual benefit and ability to advance implementation of Climate or Sustainability Action Plans. Adoption of the interlocal agreement will be subject to legal review and legislative approval.

4. Whatcom Climate Action Plan Update - To reduce reporting duplication, the updated Climate Action Plan may also meet any requirements for the County's Growth Management Act Climate Element Implementation Progress Report, which will also be due in 2029. State guidance for the implementation progress report is not available yet. The final organization, content, and structure of the updated Plan is subject to change based on further technical review, outreach and engagement, and plan evaluation. The following represent some areas of focus for the update:

- 1 - *Annualized and prioritized municipal actions to reduce emissions and build resilience for implementation by Whatcom County government between 2027-2030.* Actions will include an order of magnitude estimate of local funds necessary to implement the municipal action and any external funding identified to leverage for implementation. Whatcom County would act as the lead implementing agency for actions where Whatcom County owns the asset or infrastructure, has operational control over the emissions source, has the statutory authority to enact regulatory requirements or incentives and enforcement authority, and/or the County exercises budgetary authority or has monetary influence over the community activity.

Actions may include existing or revised actions from the 2021 Plan or new actions in the following categories:

- Infrastructure Improvements and Projects
 - Operations
 - Planning, Policy Development, and Regulatory Updates
 - Education, Outreach and Coordination
 - Evaluation
 - Programs
- 2 - *Prioritized actions to reduce emissions and build resilience in partnership with public agencies in Whatcom County with adopted sustainability and climate action plans.* These are actions that require joint coordination and cooperation with public agencies that may be funded by local revenue and state Climate Commitment Act funds or other federal or philanthropic revenue.

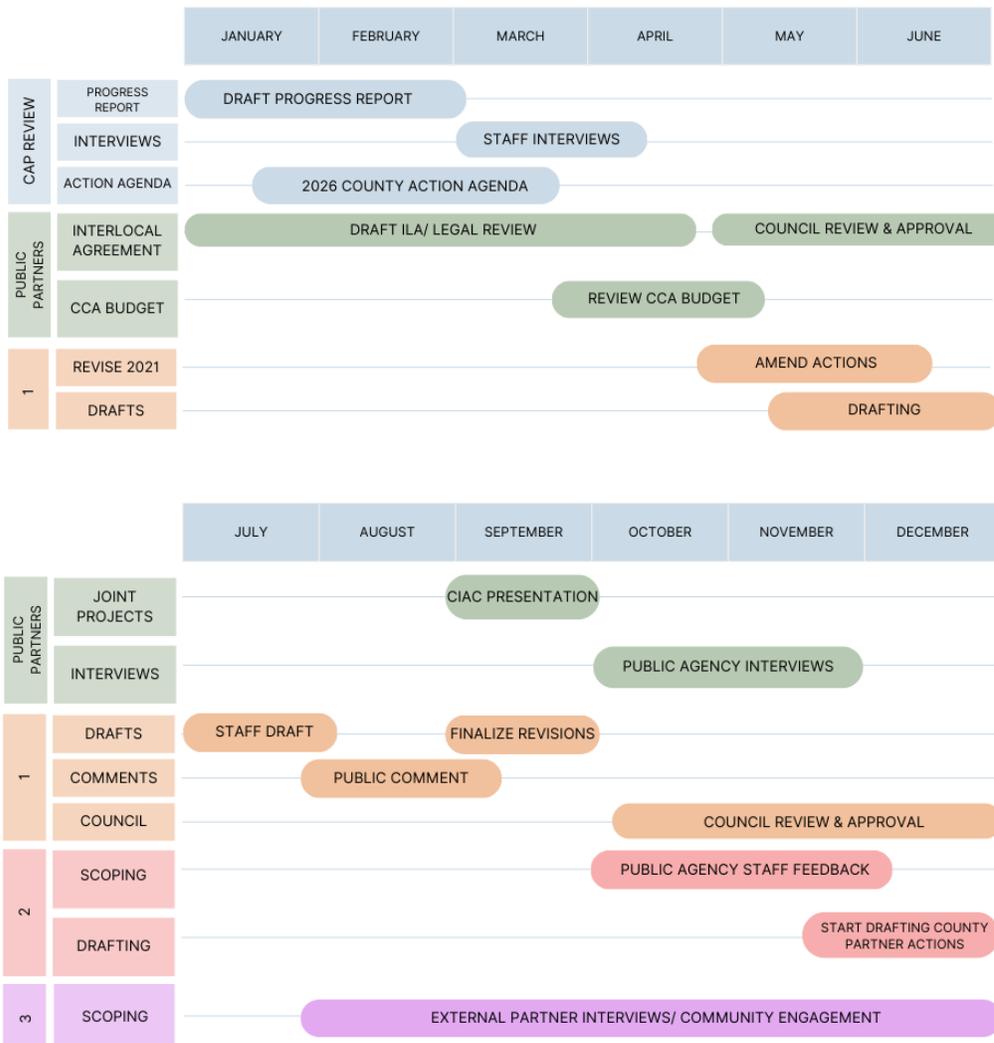
- **3 - Communitywide climate solutions for implementation across Whatcom County.** Additional outreach and engagement with community-based organizations, businesses, community organizations, community groups and associations, and individuals across Whatcom County will be required.

Whatcom County Climate Impact Advisory Committee Meetings

The Whatcom County Climate Impact Advisory Committee will meet on the third Thursday of the month in person and virtually. Additional meetings may be publicly noticed as needed throughout 2026. Meetings are open to the public and community members who attend are invited to provide public comment. Please contact Lauren Clemens, Whatcom County Climate Action Manager at LClemens@co.whatcom.wa.us with any questions regarding the Climate Impact Advisory Committee or Climate Action Plan update.

The proposed 2026 schedule for the Climate Action Plan update (task sequencing and timing is subject to change):

2026 CLIMATE ACTION PLAN UPDATE



2026 Quarter 1 - Review and Evaluation of 2021 Climate Action Plan Progress

- January 2026 - CIAC Discussion of Memo to Climate Action and Natural Resources Committee and Executive's Office
- February 2026 - CIAC Discussion of Preliminary Draft 2023-2025 Climate Action Plan Progress Report for Council Committee and Executive's Office & Draft Questions for County Staff
- March 2026 - CIAC Discussion of Whatcom County 2026 Action Agenda & Start Interviews with Whatcom County Staff and Committee Leads

2026 Quarter 2 - County Government Actions (1) & Public Partners Interlocal Agreement (2)

- April 2026 - CIAC Discussion of Legislative Session Outcomes and Draft Interlocal Agreement
- May 2026 - Revisions to County Government Actions and Council Introduction of Interlocal Agreement
- June 2026 - Revisions to County Government Actions and Council Approval of Interlocal Agreement

2026 Quarter 3 - County Government Actions (1) Public Comment & Public Partners Joint Actions (2)

- July 2026- Finalize CIAC Recommended County Government Actions & Public Comment
- August 2026- Public Comment Period & Stakeholder Engagement Interviews
- September 2026- Interviews with County Public and Community Partners & Start Drafting Joint Actions

2026 Quarter 4 - County Government Actions (1) Council Review and Finalize Public Partner Actions (2) and Continued Stakeholder Engagement with Community Partners (3)

- October 2026 - Council Climate Action and Natural Resources Presentation* & Council Revisions
- November 2026 - Completion of Stakeholder Engagement Interviews (3): community-based organizations, businesses, community organizations, community groups and associations, and individuals
- December 2026- Finalize Climate Impact Advisory Committee 2027 Workplan

* Note: To provide adequate technical review and stakeholder engagement prior to adoption, the Climate Action Plan update 2026 schedule may change.