



WHATCOM COUNTY

WASHINGTON

Planning & Development Services

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October 10th, 2025

TO: The Honorable Whatcom County Council

FROM: Lucas Clark, Planner II

THROUGH: Mark Personius, Director

RE: 2025 Comp Plan Update – Chapter 5 (Utilities)

The last Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan update was completed in 2016. The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to review and revise its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations in 2025 ([RCW 36.70A.130](#)). The updated Comprehensive Plan will contain the following chapters:

1. Introduction and Growth Projections
2. Land Use
3. Housing
4. Capital Facilities
5. Utilities
6. Transportation
7. Economic Development
8. Resource Lands
9. Parks and Recreation
10. Environment
11. Shorelines¹
12. Climate Change and Resilience (new Chapter)

The County Planning Department will bring individual Comprehensive Plan chapters to the Planning Commission to conduct public hearings and hold work sessions to review and recommend modifications. After reviewing each individual chapter (and the appendices), the Planning Commission will hold a public hearing and make final recommendations to the County Council on the whole Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.

The Whatcom County Planning Commission issued preliminary recommendations on Chapter 5 on October 9th, 2025. It is anticipated that the

¹ The Shorelines Chapter was approved by the State Department of Ecology in 2025 after previous Planning Commission review and County Council approval. Therefore, it will not be reviewed again in this update cycle.

County Council's Committee of the Whole will discuss this Chapter on October 21st.

Chapter 5-Utilities was reviewed and proposed changes are shown from:

- Whatcom County Health and Community Services
- Water and sewer districts
- Major utility providers
- PUD No. 1 of Whatcom County
- WRIA 1 Planning Unit
- Whatcom County Planning Commission

Chapter 5 generally includes:

- Background information, including GMA goals ([RCW 36.70A.070](#)), utilities providers regionally, and locally;
- A goal and related policies relating to a straightforward process for determining appropriate locations for future needed utility facilities;
- Trends in Utility Technology;
- Electric Power, Natural Gas, Petroleum, and Telecommunications;
- Permitting Process Efficiency;
- Impediments to the Provision of Utilities;
- Regulatory Controls Encouraging Energy Conservation;
- Utility Corridors;
- Natural Gas and Hazardous Liquid Transmission Pipelines;
- Water Supply;
- WRIA 1 Watershed Management Board (proposed);
- Sewage Treatment; and
- Solid Waste Management.

Proposed changes to Chapter 5 include:

- New Policy 5A-7 encouraging Whatcom County to work with the PUD to implement goals and policies of the utility chapter.
- Goal 5C - Broadband – New narrative text for new policies that address Council Resolution 2022-036, Support Universal Broadband Access
 - o Three new policies related to universal broadband access.
 - o The Planning Commission unanimously consolidated and amended the three new policies into two new policies for clarity.
- New Policy 5C-12 added by Planning Commission to encourage wireless carriers to expand coverage to all areas of Whatcom County.
- Goal 5H - Updating policies to reflect changes required by the new Climate goals required by HB 1181 and Council Resolution 2024-036.
- Goal 5K – Removing EMF references.
- Goal 5M – Rewritten for clarity and relevance.
 - o Policies edited for clarity. New policies 5M-14 & 15 have been added to clarify the relationship with pipeline operators further.
- Water Supply
 - o New text referencing preliminary CWSP update.
 - o 1985 Instream Flow Rule text added.
 - o Adjudication section added.

- o WRIA 1 Watershed section added.
- New Policy 5P-7 added by Planning Commission to encourage water use efficiency.
- New Policy 5R-3 & Policy 5R-4 updating with language from Preliminary 2025 Consolidated Water System Plan (CWSP).
- New Goal 5S and associated policies proposed by the WRIA 1 Planning Unit in support of accurately assessing and quantifying water usage.
- New Policies 5S-5 through 5S-7 added by Planning Commission regarding redirecting surplus fresh water from the mouth of the Nooksack for AG, urban growth, and other uses.
- New Policy 5T-4 updating for compliance with RCWs.
- New Policy 5U-5 addressing aging infrastructure and climate change.
- Updated Policy 5V-1 and new Policy 5V-2 addressing Whatcom County solid waste goals.
- New Goal 5W – and associated policies addressing reducing GHG emissions associated with organic materials disposed of in landfills.
- Other Changes – Miscellaneous modifications, updating, correcting, or improving language.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to discussing it with you.