

November 5th, 2025

CHAPTER 12- DRAFT CLIMATE ELEMENT

COUNTY COUNCIL COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE



Whatcom County Public Works

11/5 Whatcom County Council Committee of the Whole

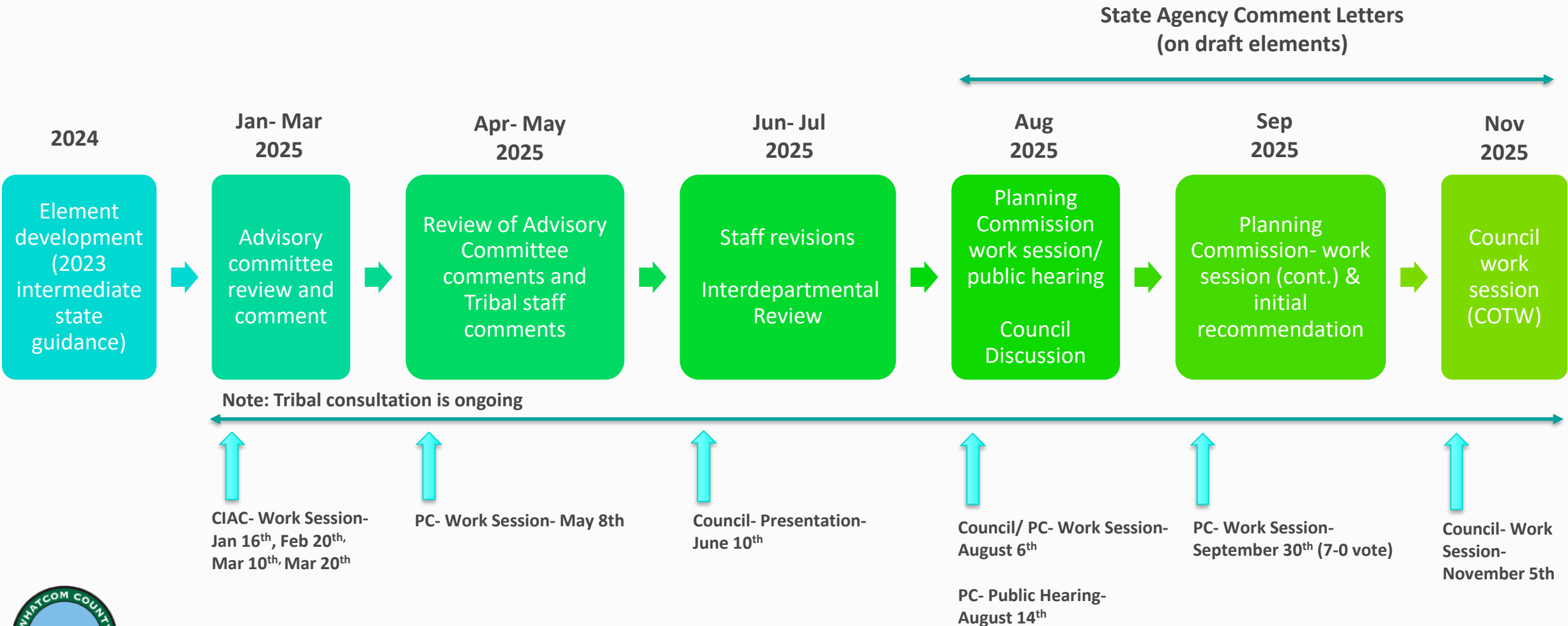
Goals:

Deliberation and discussion regarding the draft Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan Climate Element (Chapter 12), see Nov. 5th staff memo for draft Chapter 12

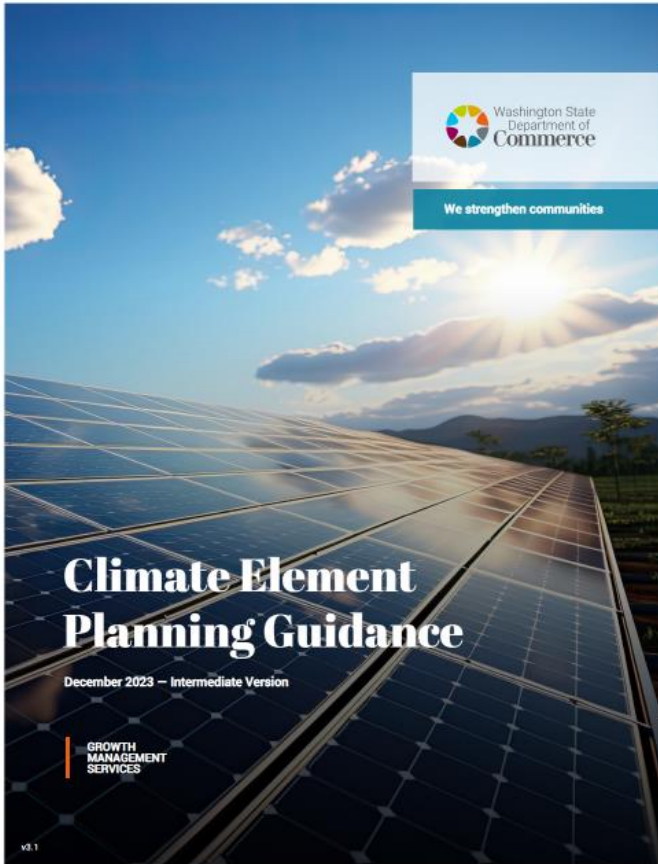
- Review of Planning Commission Amendments
 - Introduction/ Executive Summary- Amend
 - GHG Reduction- Section Summary & Policy- Amend, Remove, Add
 - Resilience- Section Summary/ Policy/ Maps- Amend
- Climate Element- Best Available Science- Overview
- Council Questions- Chapter 12
- Additional Council Discussion and Amendments



Climate Element- Comprehensive Plan (2025)



Climate Planning & Comprehensive Plan



- Cities and counties planning under Growth Management Act must add a new climate element (chapter) to their Comprehensive Plan (HB 1181)
- 2025 jurisdictions are the first group subject to new state guidance issued by Washington Department of Commerce
- Climate element must have two “sub-elements” that include policies that to reduce greenhouse gas emissions reductions and increase resilience

Department of Commerce Intermediate Guidance



Whatcom County Public Works

Minimum GMA Requirements- Climate Element

GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS SUB-ELEMENT

1. Reduce emissions from transportation and land use within Whatcom County
2. Reduce per capita vehicle miles travelled
3. Prioritize overburdened communities

RESILIENCE SUB-ELEMENT

1. Address hazards created or aggravated by climate change (sea level rise, landslides, flooding, drought, heat, smoke, wildfire, and changes in temperature and precipitation)
2. Identify, protect, and enhance natural areas and habitat
3. Identify, protect and enhance community resilience to climate impacts (social, economic, and built environment)



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments (18)

Planning Commission Introductory Text Amendments- 2 Amendments

Amendment Type	Section	Page, PC Amendment #	Topic
Section Summary	Consistency with the Whatcom County Climate Action Plan	12-2, #1, #2	Emissions Targets

Planning Commission Introductory Text Amendments- 2 Amendments

Consistency with the Whatcom County Climate Action Plan

In 2021, the County adopted the Whatcom County Climate Action Plan (CAP) through Resolution 2021-049. The CAP established a goal to reduce countywide emissions by 45% from 1990 levels by 2030 and achieve net zero emissions by 2050. The Climate Action Plan also established an emissions reduction goal of 85% from 2000 levels by 2030 for County government operations. The total emissions countywide in Whatcom County in 2017 were 11,095,275 MTCO₂e and 8,377,187¹ MTCO₂e in 2022, a 24.5% reduction predominantly associated with a 66% reduction in industrial processing emissions. The CAP adopts sector-specific emissions goals and provides foundational actions to establish a trajectory towards achieving those goals. Much discussion has occurred, how to reduce emissions, but our ability to achieve this is uncertain. The Climate Element has been reviewed for consistency

¹ The Whatcom County 2022 Greenhouse Gas Inventory produced by Washington Department of Commerce does not include some data sources, including wood burning, ferry operations, solid waste processing, and closed landfills which accounts for the difference in 255,453 MTCO₂e between the state inventory and planning inventory.

LC Lauren Clemens
See: Amendment #1 (Commissioner Browne)- passed 8-0-0. Discussion on page 8 of September 30th PC staff memo.

LC Lauren Clemens
See: Amendment #2 (Commissioner Browne)- passed 5-2-1. Discussion on page 10 of September 30th PC staff memo.



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments

Planning Commission GHG Reduction Subelement Amendments- 13 Amendments

Amendment Type	Section	Page, PC Amendment #	Policy Number (Topic)
Section Summary	Introduction	12-3, #4, 7	Policy Implementation (Global Emissions)
	Background Summary		

Planning Commission GHG Reduction Subelement- Introduction/ Background Summary

Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Sub-Element Introduction This sub-element provides an overview of greenhouse gas emissions sources in Whatcom County and includes a comprehensive set of goals and policies for exploration to reduce emissions associated with those sectors.	LC Lauren Clemens See: Amendment #7 (Commissioner Greif)-passed 5-2-1. Discussion on page 11 of September 30th PC staff memo.
Background Summary The 2022 Whatcom County Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory quantified emissions produced by activities across Whatcom County, including emissions from the built environment, industrial processes, transportation, solid waste and wastewater treatment, refrigerant usage, and land use. In 2022, Whatcom County produced an estimated 8,121,734 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO₂e), which equates to approximately 35.1 MTCO₂e per capita. Globally, in 2022, the estimated emissions total was 57.4 gigatons of CO₂e. For a more detailed discussion of greenhouse gas emissions and emissions trends and projections, see the Appendix.	LC Lauren Clemens See: Amendment #4 (Commissioner Dunne)-passed 8-0-0. Discussion on page 11 of September 30th PC staff memo.



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments

Planning Commission GHG Reduction Subelement Amendments- 8 Amendments

Amendment Type	Section	Page, PC Amendment #	Policy Number (Topic)
Policy Amendment	Agriculture and Food Systems	12-4, #6	12.1.5 (Hydrofluorocarbons)
	Buildings and Energy	12-5, #5, #15	12.2.1 (State Energy Code) 12.2.4 (Renewable Energy)
	Cultural Resources	12-6, #18	12.3.1 (Climate Commitment Act Tribal Consultation)
	Economic Development	12-8, #9	12.4.5 (C-PACER)
	Transportation	12-11, #11	12.8.7 (Countywide Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Development)
	Waste Management	12-12, #12, #14	12.9.3 (Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan) 12.9.5 (Construction and Demolition Debris Recycling)



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments

Planning Commission GHG Reduction Subelement Amendments- 8 Amendments

Policy 12.1.5- Provide financial incentives and technical support for the replacement of conventional refrigeration systems with appliances that use alternative refrigerants, reducing pollutants emissions from leaking cooling systems.

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #6 (Commissioner Dunne)- passed 7-1-0. Discussion on page 11 of September 30th PC staff memo.

Policy 12.2.1- Continue to iImplement the Washington State Building Code's requirements for residential and commercial construction, including space and water heating guidelines for eligible new commercial construction and energy efficiency targets for residential construction.

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #15 (Commissioner Dunne)- passed 9-0-0. Discussion on page 13 of September 30th PC staff memo.

Policy 12.2.4- Promote the development of wind, hydroelectric, biomass, nuclear, tidal, wave, solar, and geothermal energy projects, including small-scale and community-owned renewable energy installations.

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #5 (Commissioner Greif)- passed 8-0-0. Discussion on page 11 of September 30th PC staff memo.

Policy 12.3.1- At the earliest possible date prior to submittal of an application to receive funds from Climate Commitment Act accounts, Whatcom County will consult with the Department of Archaeology and Historic Preservation, Department of Fish and Wildlife and all interested federally recognized Tribes with treaty rights or interests in the project area, in accordance with RCW 70A.65.305.

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment#18 (Commissioner Browne)- passed 9-0-0. Discussion on page 14 of September 30th PC staff memo.



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments

Planning Commission GHG Reduction Subelement Amendments- 8 Amendments (cont.)

Policy 12.4.5- ~~Encourage Increase~~ participation of qualified commercial, industrial, and multifamily properties in Whatcom County's C-PACER (Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy and Resilience Program) to finance energy efficiency, renewable energy, water conservation, and resilience projects. |

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #9 (Commissioner Browne)- passed 8-0-0. Discussion on page 12 of September 30th PC staff memo.

Policy 12.8.7- Collaborate with regional partners to facilitate the expansion of electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure across Whatcom County, ~~prioritizing underserved and disadvantaged communities to ensure equitable access.~~

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #11 (Commissioner Browne)- passed 8-0-0. Discussion on page 12 of September 30th PC staff memo.

Policy 12.9.3- ~~Encourage Oversee~~ the alignment of private waste haulers with the Whatcom County Comprehensive Solid and Hazardous Waste Management Plan to minimize waste generation and disposal emissions. |

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #12 (Commissioner Browne)- passed 8-0-0. Discussion on page 12 of September 30th PC staff memo.

Policy 12.9.5- ~~Consider revising~~ ~~Revise~~ Whatcom County's Flow Control Ordinance (No. 91-041) to include the recycling of construction and demolition debris, promoting the reuse and recovery of building materials to reduce waste and associated emissions.

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #14 (Commissioner Mocerri)- passed 8-0-1. Discussion on pages 6 and 13 of September 30th PC staff memo.



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments

Planning Commission GHG Reduction Subelement Amendments- 2 Policy Deletions

Amendment Type	Section	Page, PC Amendment #	Policy Number (Topic)
Policy Deletion	Buildings and Energy	12-5, #16	12.2.9 (State Energy Code Updates)
	Transportation	12-10, #10	12.8.6 (County-owned Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure)

~~Policy 12.2.9 – Advocate for updates to the Washington State Building Code to increase the energy efficiency of homes and buildings consistent with the 2009 SB 5854, “Energy First Bill.”~~

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #16 (Commissioner Dunne)- passed 6-2-1. Discussion on page 13 of September 30th PC staff memo.

~~Policy 12.8.6– Invest in the development and installation of a countywide electric vehicle charging network, prioritizing underserved and disadvantaged communities to ensure equitable access.~~

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #10 (Commissioner Browne)- passed 6-0-2. Discussion on page 12 of September 30th PC staff memo.



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments

Planning Commission GHG Reduction Subelement Amendments- 1 Policy Addition

Amendment Type	Section	Page, PC Amendment #	Policy Number (Topic)
Policy Addition	Zoning and Development	12-13, #17	12.11.7 (Wetland Mitigation Banks)

Policy 12.11.7- Support the creation of Whatcom County wetland mitigation banks that can be used by public and private development.

LC

Lauren Clemens
See: Amendment #17 (Commissioner Dunne)-
passed 8-0-1. Discussion on pages 14 of
September 30th PC staff memo.



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments

Planning Commission Resilience Subelement Amendments- 3 Amendments

Amendment Type	Section	Page, PC Amendment #	Policy Number (Topic)
Policy Amendment	Buildings and Energy	12-18, #13	12.13.5 (Floodplain Development)
Section Summary	Zoning and Development	12-29, #8	Terminology
Section Summary-Maps	Countywide Forecasted Near-Term Climate Impacts	12-30, #3	Sea Level Rise

Policy 12.13.5- Update flood code to reflect climate exacerbated flooding and evaluate development regulations that restrict and regulate the design and location of buildings and infrastructure in flood-prone areas, and to the extent they are allowed, require new buildings and encourage and incentivize ~~ensure~~ buildings are adapted to withstand flooding, through standards related to elevation, floodproofing, improved drainage systems, and the protection of life and property.



Lauren Clemens
See: Amendment #13 (Commissioner Browne)-
passed 6-2-0. See: Amendment #12 Discussion
on page 12 of September 30th PC staff memo.



Climate Element- Planning Commission Amendments

Planning Commission Resilience Subelement Amendments- 3 Amendments (cont.)

Zoning & Development

Zoning and development changes can build resilience to climate impacts by limiting new development in areas at risk of flooding, wildfire, sea level rise, and other climate-related hazards. Development regulations and zoning also affect the availability and permitted uses of developable land in hazard zones, reduce risk to shoreline properties, and reduce infrastructure damage and displacement. Coastal and riverine infrastructure is particularly at risk to sea level rise and flooding, which can be mitigated through natural and built infrastructure solutions. Infrastructure in the wildland-urban interface and even in areas of dense development area increasingly at risk from wildfire as fire seasons become hotter and drier. These risks can be mitigated with development regulations and zoning.

COUNTYWIDE FORECASTED NEAR-TERM CLIMATE IMPACTS

Consistent with the requirement that a resilience sub-element utilize the best available science and scientifically credible climate projections and impact scenarios that moderate or avoid harm, the following maps summarize countywide forecasted risks to buildings, critical infrastructure, and roads across Whatcom County due to flooding, erosion, groundwater, and sea level rise impacts.

The following maps illustrate projected exposure by 2040 due to 0.8 feet of sea level rise and 20-year coastal storm and a 20 percent increase in peak river flows (1.2x the current 100-year flood event). Initial analysis forecasts 6,652 buildings, 63 critical facilities, and 150 miles of road at risk across Whatcom County due to riverine and sea level rise impacts. Areas at highest risk are those that may be subject to deep or fast-flowing water, daily tidal flooding, or served by exposed critical infrastructure. NOAA provides tidal surge data and relative sea level trend from a gauge at Cherry Point.

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #8 (Commissioner Hansen)-
passed 5-3-0. Discussion on page 11 of
September 30th PC staff memo.

LC

Lauren Clemens

See: Amendment #3 (Commissioner Barton)-
passed 8-0-0. Discussion on page 10 of
September 30th PC staff memo.



Resilience Subelement- Technical Approach (see Nov. 5th Staff Memo)

- 1) **Drought**- Coordinated Water Systems Plan (climate section), requirement for Class A water system to develop resilience subelement as part of next update.
- 2) **Wildfire**- DNR developing a new wildfire hazard map and a base-level wildfire risk map for each county of the state, per RCW 43.30.580. Will not be complete by periodic due date.
- 3) **Sea Level Rise and Flooding**- Forecasted sea level rise and flood risks in floodplains and coastal areas were mapped in the climate element resilience subelement on page 12-30 to 12-34.
- 4) **Overburdened Communities and Vulnerable Populations**- Climate Hazard and Impact Assessment serves as a technical supporting document for the climate element- discussed on June 10th, in Council packet for August 6th

