

Proposals to Increase Access to Housing for All Income Levels – Whatcom County

Dear County Executive Satpal Sidhu:

The Housing Subcommittee of the Whatcom Business Advisory Council had participation by a wide spectrum of community members - from funders to builders to sellers and suppliers of homes, both non-profit and for-profit. We came together as people who care about the present and future livability of our community. We did not find complete agreement on every point, but we all agree that many more permanently affordable homes are needed. Many of the following ideas support housing supply generally, based on the belief that availability of housing will ease housing affordability at many levels. We look forward to the opportunity to discuss these ideas with you and help implement them.

Affordable housing is defined as a household spending 30% or less of its income on housing costs. This includes costs such as principal and interest, rent, utilities, and insurance. We believe that everyone, at every income level, should have access to a full range of affordable housing types, from studios and apartments to detached single family homes.

Overall, the County should:

1. Reduce the complexity and the cost of compliance of code.
2. Prioritize density in existing city boundaries and urban growth areas while supporting limited annexations.
3. Provide incentives for permanently affordable home ownership and rentals for occupants whose incomes range from 50% to 150% of area median income.

We request that you:

Budget:

1. Add an FTE planner to focus on affordable housing in Whatcom County.
2. Adopt the Multifamily Tax Exemptions of 8, 12, and 20 years.
3. Use EDI funds as a long term, low interest loan to pay for onsite infrastructure for affordable housing.

Land Use/Building permits:

1. Approve land use permits within 4 months, and building permits within 3
2. Adopt voluntary inclusionary zoning, with incentives for permanently affordable homeownership and rentals.
3. Adopt as a pilot program, an ordinance similar to Spokane C36232 to allow ADU, duplexes, and up to 4-plexes in all single family zones within urban growth areas.
4. Allow building permits to be approved by 3rd party outside sources
5. Enact digital permitting for land use and building permits.
6. Allow single staircase in multifamily buildings
7. Extend all county land use permit timelines to a minimum of 5 years to align subdivisions, conditional use permits, stormwater permits, development agreements, and wetland permits.
8. Extend Critical Area Permits and Consultant reports with the Preliminary Plat or Land Use Permit.
9. Allow applicants to bond clearing, grading, and stormwater permits before Public Facilities Construction application approval.

10. Expedite permitting for permanently affordable housing (complete permit sets approved within 90 days).
11. Preserve existing mobile home parks.
12. Create a minimum 7-day notice for a Hearing Examiner date.
13. Increase the notice period for rent increases to 90 days.

Planning Department Staff

1. Schedule informal monthly meetings between Planning director, staff, land use consultants, tenants, and for-profit and non-profit developers for feedback in both directions.
2. Require phone calls and emails to be returned within two business days.
3. Tighten coordination between Public Works and Planning to avoid conflicts and confusion.

Comprehensive Plan/Consolidated Plan

1. Support the following annexations in the 2026 Comp Plan: South Caitac UGA Reserve, Yew St, and Alderwood.
2. Create a wetlands mitigation bank available to developers.
3. Expand the analysis of cost burdened households by income, to 200% of MFI.
4. Target an average rental vacancy of 3-5% for all income levels, and available housing supply of 4-6 months for all income levels.

We also request that you support the following items in your interactions with our State Legislators:

1. Legalize ADU's across the state
2. Change single family zoning to allow higher density and more housing types
3. Reform condo law to appropriately limit liability to condo developers and builders.
4. Increase flexibility for funding and incentives for workforce housing.

Thank you for your time, and we look forward to hearing your feedback on these proposals.

The following organizations support these proposals:

	Organization Name	Signed By	Title	Date
1.	Allsop, Inc		President	9/19/22
2.	Birch Lg		Chair	9/19/22
3.	Whitman Biz Council Comite		Chair	9/19/22
4.	Ted Miscaukou		CITIZEN	9/19/22
5.	Kaylee Galloway	Kaylee Galloway	Council member	9/21/22
6.				
7.				
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9.				
10.				



Dan Dunne <dan.dunne@cazconstruction.com>

Affordable housing letter

Soulliere, Sarah <Sarah.Soulliere@leg.wa.gov>
To: Dan Dunne <dan.dunne@cazconstruction.com>

Thu, Sep 22, 2022 at 10:57 AM

Good morning Dan,

Rep. Shewmake recommended I send her electronic signature to make this simpler. I've attached that to this email. Please let me know if a meeting is still necessary.

Thanks,

Sarah

[Quoted text hidden]

Shewmake Signature.jpg
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