



## Memorandum

September 28, 2020

TO: The Honorable Satpal Sidhu, Whatcom County Executive  
The Honorable Whatcom County Council

FROM: Matt Aamot, Senior Planner

THROUGH: Mark Personius, Director

RE: Draft Public Participation Plan

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The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires counties to develop public participation programs for comprehensive plan and development regulation amendments. The Whatcom County Council approved the 2019 Public Participation Plan last May, after review by the Planning Commission. The County is updating the Plan a little later this year because of the COVID-19 meeting restrictions earlier in the year.

The Public Participation Plan identifies statutory requirements (GMA provisions) and lists docketed comprehensive plan and development regulation amendments that have been initiated for further review by the County Council.

The Plan classifies proposed comprehensive plan and development regulation amendments as level 1, 2 or 3 projects for determining the public participation approach. The process for each level is summarized below:

**Level 1** – Requires a staff report, notice in the newspaper, posting the proposal on the website, and sending it to the County’s e-mail list. It also requires two public hearings, one before the Planning Commission and one before the County Council, prior to final Council action.

**Level 2** – Requires all Level 1 processes, plus developing alternatives (when appropriate) and review by and advisory committee, department, city, or agency.

**Level 3** – Requires all Level 2 processes, plus a town hall meeting.

Proposed changes from last year's Public Participation Plan include:

1. Inserting New Docketed Amendments - Inserting the new comprehensive plan and development regulation amendments that the County Council initiated for review in 2020 (Resolution 2020-027).
2. Inserting the Cherry Point-Ferndale Subarea Plan Repeal – This project was docketed and placed on the Public Participation Plan in 2018. However, Council removed it from the Public Participation Plan in 2019. This project is included on the 2020 Docket, so we are proposing to insert it in the Public Participation Plan.
3. Removing Amendments - Deleting amendments that were previously initiated but have completed the review process or were withdrawn.

Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was published in the Bellingham Herald on September 11, 2020. The draft Public Participation Plan was posted on the County website on September 14, 2020. Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was sent to the people and agencies on the County's e-mail list on September 14, 2020.

The Planning Commission held a public hearing and issued their recommendations on September 24, 2020. The Commission recommended approval of the Public Participation Plan (8-0), with the following additions to the staff draft:

- *Remote Participation* - New Section 1.2 in Chapter 1 (p. 1-3): "Planning and Development staff should identify methods for remote public participation for all public hearings (for example, on-line or telephonic participation)." We are currently using these methods because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Planning Commission wanted to provide the option for the public to participate remotely once in-person meetings are resumed (so people would have the option of either coming to the meeting or making comments from a remote location). Since the Council holds hearings under the Public Participation Plan, staff would suggest modifying this new section as follows:

~~Planning and Development staff~~ The County should identify methods for remote public participation for all public hearings (for example, on-line or telephonic participation).

- *Comprehensive Plan and Development Regulation Appeals* – Modify Section 2.3 in Chapter 2 (p. 2-6) as follows: "Publishing notice of the hearing in the newspaper and on the County website and, if urban growth areas are being modified, e-mailing notice to cities at least 10 days prior to the public hearing."

Thank you for your review and consideration of the proposal. We look forward to discussing it with you.