



## Memorandum

October 25, 2022

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

FROM: Matt Aamot, Senior Planner

THROUGH: Steve Roberge, Assistant Director

RE: Draft Public Participation Plan (PLN2022-00007)

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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 Public Participation Plan in May 2021, after review by the Planning Commission.

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 current review 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. Planning Commission holds a public hearing and issues a recommendation. County Council holds a public hearing and makes final decision.

**Level 2** – Requires all Level 1 processes, plus developing alternatives (when appropriate) and review by an advisory committee, County 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 Statutory Requirements – Inserting new requirements passed by the State Legislature. The 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update and UGA Review has also been inserted. This is not a new requirement, but it is anticipated that the County and cities will commence the update process in 2023.
2. Inserting Docketed Amendments - Inserting the new comprehensive plan and development regulation amendments that the County Council initiated for review in 2022 (Resolution 2022-011).
3. Removing Amendments - Deleting amendments that were previously initiated but have completed the review process or were withdrawn.
4. Open Public Meetings Act – Adding a reference to the Washington State Open Public Meetings Act (RCW 42.30) and quoting new language that was added to the Act when the State Legislature passed Engrossed Substitute House Bill 1329 in 2022 (p. 4-1).
5. Electronic File Transfer – The existing Plan indicates that the public can comment to Planning Commission or Council by email or US mail. In response to public comment, the Planning Commission added text stating the public can also comment by “. . . other electronic file transfer protocols set up by the County. . .” (Chapter 4, pages 4-2, 4-4, and 4-5). Some electronic files are too large to transfer via email, so this change will provide other options for receiving public comments electronically.

Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was published in the Bellingham Herald, sent to the County's e-mail list, and posted on the County website on September 30, 2022. The Planning Commission held a hearing and recommended approval of the Public Participation Plan on October 13, 2022.

We look forward to discussing the Public Participation Plan at the Council's Planning and Development Committee on November 9. We request that Council consider a motion at the evening meeting on November 9 to approve the Plan.