

## WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

### Countywide Planning Policy Amendments

#### FINDINGS OF FACT AND REASONS FOR ACTION

1. The Growth Management Act (GMA) was originally adopted by the State Legislature in 1990. The Legislature amended the GMA in 1991 to require counties to adopt county wide planning policies in cooperation with cities.
2. The GMA states that “. . . a ‘countywide planning policy’ is a written policy statement or statements used solely for establishing a countywide framework from which county and city comprehensive plans are developed and adopted. . . .” (RCW 36.70A.210).
3. The Countywide Planning Policies reside in Appendix C of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.
4. Whatcom County’s Countywide Planning Policies were originally adopted by the County Council in 1993 and last amended in 2021.
5. The County Council adopted the original Countywide Planning Policies in April 1993 (Resolution 93-024).
6. The County Council amended the Countywide Planning Policies in March 1997 (Resolution 97-011).
7. The County Council amended the Countywide Planning Policies in January 2005 (Ordinance 2005-022).
8. The County Council amended the Countywide Planning Policies in February 2021 by adding provisions relating to the Review and Evaluation Program (Buildable Lands) and Dispute Resolution Procedures (Ordinance 2021-003).
9. The City/County Planner Group formulated the subject Countywide Planning Policy amendments (with assistance from the consultant, the County’s Climate Action Manager, and agencies on certain topics).
10. The City/County Planner Group formulated Countywide Planning Policy M.1 relating to Intergovernmental Coordination after receiving a request from the County Executive relating to this topic.

11. The subject amendments would modify the following sections of the Countywide Planning Policies: Citizen Involvement, Urban Verses Rural Distinctions, Urban Growth Areas, City Urban Growth Areas, Non-City Urban Growth Areas, Contiguous Orderly Development and Planning in Urban Growth Areas, Affordable Housing, Open Space/Greenbelt Corridors, Economic Development and Employment, Countywide Transportation Facilities and Strategies, Siting of Public Facilities, Impact Fees, Intergovernmental Cooperation, Water Quality and Quantity, Fiscal Impact, Private Property Rights, and the Review and Evaluation Program (Buildable Lands). The subject amendments would add new sections to the Countywide Planning Policies relating to: Tribal Cultural Resources and Climate Change/Community Resilience.
12. Whatcom County and the seven cities entered into an Interlocal Agreement concerning procedures for amending the Countywide Planning Policies, which became effective in March 2023 (Whatcom County Contract No. 202301033).
13. The County Executive initiated the Countywide Planning Policy amendments for review on October 29, 2024 and December 19, 2024 pursuant to the Interlocal Agreement.
14. The County sent correspondence to the Lummi Nation, Nooksack Tribe, and Federal agencies on December 20, 2024 inviting them to participate in and cooperate with the Countywide Planning Policy adoption process.
15. WAC 197-11-800(19) categorically exempts procedural actions from State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) review. The SEPA Official determined that the subject amendments are exempt as a procedural action on December 11, 2025.
16. The subject Countywide Planning Policy amendments were posted on the County website on December 20, 2025.
17. Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was posted on the County website on January 7, 2025.
18. Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was published in the Bellingham Herald on January 8, 2025.
19. Notice of the Planning Commission hearing was sent to citizens, media, cities, and other groups on the County's e-mail list as of January 10, 2025.
20. The Planning Commission held a public hearing on the subject amendments on January 23, 2025. The Planning Commission held a work session on the subject amendments on February 27, 2025.

21. The GMA was amended by the State Legislature in 2022 (House Bill 1717) to require that Countywide Planning Policies must include “Policies that address the protection of tribal cultural resources in collaboration with federally recognized Indian tribes that are invited pursuant to subsection (4) of this section, provided that a tribe, or more than one tribe, chooses to participate in the process” (RCW 36.70A.210(3)(i)).
22. The Countywide Planning Policies include new Section S “Tribal Cultural Resources.” This Section addresses identification and protection of cultural resources in accordance with the GMA.
23. The GMA was amended by the State Legislature in 2023 (House Bill 1181) to adopt a new GMA Planning Goal relating to climate change and resiliency. This goal is to:

Ensure that comprehensive plans, development regulations, and regional policies, plans, and strategies under RCW 36.70A.210 and chapter 47.80 RCW adapt to and mitigate the effects of a changing climate; support reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and per capita vehicle miles traveled; prepare for climate impact scenarios; foster resiliency to climate impacts and natural hazards; protect and enhance environmental, economic, and human health and safety; and advance environmental justice (RCW 36.70A.020(14)).
24. The Countywide Planning Policies include new Section T “Climate Change/Community Resilience.” This Section addresses changing climate in accordance with the GMA.

## **CONCLUSION**

The subject Countywide Planning Policy amendments are consistent with applicable provisions of GMA.

**RECOMMENDATION**

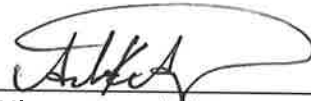
Based upon the above findings and conclusions, the Whatcom County Planning Commission recommends approval of the Countywide Planning Policy amendments shown on Exhibit A.

WHATCOM COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION



Kelvin Barton, Chair

2-27-2025  
Date



Aileen Kogut-Aquon, Secretary

2-28-2025  
Date

Commissioners voted to recommend approval on February 27, 2025 (vote was 8-0, with 1 member abstaining and 0 members absent). Members present at the meeting when the vote was taken: Kelvin Barton, Rud Browne, Dan Dunne, Suneeta Eisenberg, Julie Jefferson, Nicholas Greif, Jim Hansen, Dominic Mocerri, and Scott Van Dalen.