



Memorandum

TO: The Whatcom County Council
FROM: Maddie Schacht, Senior Planner
THROUGH: Mark Personius, Director
DATE: May 28, 2026
SUBJECT: Periodic Update Related Zoning Map Amendments

Background:

Whatcom County Planning and Development Services (PDS) is presenting proposed amendments to the official Whatcom County Zoning Map, as part of the 2025-2026 periodic update of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, pursuant to RCW [36.70A.130](#) of the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA). Zoning maps are an official control method and development regulation under the GMA, and must be consistent with and implement the Comprehensive Plan pursuant to WAC [365-196-800](#).

The proposed amendments concern zoning districts within Urban Growth Areas (UGAs), UGA Reserves, Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development (LAMIRDs), Lummi Island, and Rural lands. The proposed rezones align with the County Council's preliminary approvals of UGA boundaries and Comprehensive Plan designations, as considered under Chapter 2 (Land Use).

PDS collaborated with the applicable Cities on the proposed amendments in UGAs and UGA Reserves to meet the requirements of RCW [36.70A.115](#) and to provide sufficient land capacity for allocated uses.

In addition, the Whatcom County Planning Commission held three (3) properly noticed open public hearings and work sessions regarding the proposed amendments on [February 26, 2026](#), [April 23, 2026](#), and [May 14, 2026](#). Please click the links to view the full staff reports, which include Charter Section 9.70 analysis, for each proposed amendment.

All proposed amendments, as shown in Exhibits 1 through 11, are recommended for approval by the Whatcom County Planning Commission (PC), except for the Bellingham UGA related zoning map amendments, for which the Planning Commission had no consensus; see the PC Findings for more information.

Please note that, for each proposed urban residential zoning district, without access to public water and sewer, the effective density is 1 dwelling unit per 10 acres, in compliance with existing Goal 2T and proposed Policy 2S-3 under Chapter 2 (Land Use); [see page 2-27](#) of the Preliminary Council Draft, as amended 5.19.2026.

Amendment Summary:

1. City of Blaine

a. De-Annexation

Size:

- Approx. 573 acres

Zoning Proposal:

- Designation as "Residential 1 dwelling unit/10-acres" (R-10A) after return to County land base.

Background:

- Blaine voters approved [Proposition Number 2025-07](#) to de-annex the subject area, located in the easternmost portion of the northeastern "panhandle" area of the city in the November 4, 2025, General Election.
- As noted in the PC Findings for February 26, 2026, the Planning Commission supports this rezone proposal.

b. "Dakota Creek" UGA

Size:

- Approx. 24.5 acres

Zoning Proposal:

- Designation as "Residential 1 dwelling unit/5-acres" (R-5A).

Background:

- As noted in the PC Findings for February 26, 2026, the Planning Commission did not support the original PDS recommendation to rezone the entire area from "Urban Residential-4" (UR-4) to R-10A, if removal of the UGA designation is approved by the County Council.
- Instead, the PC recommended, *"County Council consider maintaining the Dakota Creek UGA designation, or if they do not, adopt the highest potential density available in the rural designation"*.
- The County Council discussed the Blaine UGA's proposal under the periodic update, and on 5/19/26, approved a motion to amend boundaries of the "Dakota Creek" UGA, matching the boundaries as depicted in Exhibit 1; [see pg. 2 Motion 3 of Council Special Committee of the Whole Action Summary](#).

2. Bellingham UGA

a. Area 1 & Area 2 - NW UGA

Size:

- Approx. 796 total acres (520 acres West of I-5 & 276 acres East).

Zoning Proposal:

- Light Impact Industrial (LII) to Rural-10A (R-10A).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: UGA to Urban Growth Area Reserve (UGAR).
- The proposed zoning map amendment is to align with the Comprehensive Plan density policy for UGARs, which states, *"Properties in these areas should generally have land use designations of no more than one unit per ten acres..."*; [see page 2-106](#).
- The subject area is known to contain extensive critical areas (wetlands and streams) and large tracts of land in State, Tribal, or Port ownership. The City of Bellingham has indicated they have no intention of annexing this area within the planning period.

- The rezoning proposal would result in some businesses, related to light industrial uses or similar commercial uses, becoming nonconforming, a.k.a. “grandfathered uses”.
- Nonconforming uses can continue to operate, and can be rebuilt in the event of damage or destruction by any means, and may even expand the use or change to another nonconforming use pursuant to the standards of WCC [20.83](#).
- Lastly, an existing commercial use that is currently permitted in the Light Impact Industrial zoning district and is also permitted in the Rural zoning district is not considered a nonconforming use. Because the use is allowed under the Rural zoning designation, a permitting pathway remains available for the continued operation or expansion of the use.

b. Area 3 - NE UGAR – Caitac

Size:

- Approx. 301 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- Rural-10A ([R-10A](#)) to Urban Residential Mixed ([URMX](#)) (10-24).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: UGAR to UGA.
- The majority of this area is under the control of a single owner who has expressed a strong interest in developing a significant amount of housing during the planning period, including a mix of “middle” and multifamily housing forms.

c. Area 4 - NW UGAR – Guide Meridian

Size:

- Approx. 37 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [R-5A](#) to [URMX](#) (10-24).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: UGAR to UGA.
- A part of the proposal to redesignate North Bellingham UGAR to UGA.

d. Area 5 - Rural Lands - W Larson Road

Size:

- Approx. 19.5 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [R-5A](#) to [URMX](#) (6-10).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: Rural to UGA.
- A part of the proposal to redesignate North Bellingham UGAR to UGA.

e. Area 6 & 7 - SE UGA – Hillsdale & Geneva

Size:

- Approx. 867 total acres (Hillsdale 320 acres & Geneva 547 acres).

Zoning Proposal:

- [UR](#) to [R-5A](#).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: UGA to Rural.

- Removal of UGA areas within the Lake Whatcom Watershed, for protection of Bellingham's municipal water source.

3. Birch Bay UGA

a. Area 1 – NE UGA

Size:

- Approx. 13 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- Urban Residential Medium-6 ([URM-6](#)) to General Commercial ([GC](#)).

Background:

- Existing UGA, no proposed change in Comprehensive Plan designation.
- The subject area includes the entirety of 4650 Birch Bay Lynden Road ("Station 49" Amusement Center) and a portion of Assessor Parcel Number 4001193001800000, which is undeveloped and already split-zoned between R-5A, URM-6, and GC districts.
- The proposal is to recognize the existing land use and establish a logical boundary between the URM-6 and GC zones.

b. Area 2 – SE UGAR

Size:

- Approx. 100 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [R-5A](#) to [R-10A](#).

Background:

- Existing UGA Reserve, no proposed change in Comprehensive Plan designation.
- The proposal is to align with the Comprehensive Plan density policy for UGARs, which states, "*Properties in these areas should generally have land use designations of no more than one unit per ten acres...*" [see page 2-106](#).

c. Area 3 - Birch Bay State Park

Size:

- Approx. 187 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [URM-6](#) to Recreation Open Space ([ROS](#)).

Background:

- Existing UGA, no proposed change in Comprehensive Plan designation.
- The proposal is to align with the long-standing recreational use of the subject area and protect its continued value as a public park.

4. Cherry Point UGA

a. Area 1 – Portion of N UGA

Size:

- Approx. 385 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [LII](#) to [R-10A](#).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: UGA to Rural.
- Redesignation is being proposed due to numerous existing conservation easements and protective covenants within the area, which prevent future industrial development.

5. Columbia Valley UGA

a. Area 1 – De-designation of UGAR

Size:

- Approx. 40 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [R-10A](#) to Rural Forestry ([RF](#)).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: UGAR to Rural Forestry.
- De-designation of UGAR due to the presence of steep slopes, landslide hazard areas, and alluvial fans, making the area unsuitable for future potential urban development.

b. Area 2 & 3 – Upzone-West and East of SR 547

Size:

- Approx. 169 total acres (85 acres W of SR 547 & 84 acres E).

Zoning Proposal:

- [UR-4](#) to [URM-6](#).

Background:

- Existing UGA, no proposed change in Comprehensive Plan designation.
- To align with assigned housing growth allocations for the Columbia Valley UGA over the planning period, and meet requirements of HB 1220/RCW 36.70A.030(2) to promote development of lower and moderate-income housing types.

c. Area 4 – Split Zoned Area

Size:

- Approx. 5.5 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [UR-4](#) to General Commercial ([GC](#)).

Background:

- Existing UGA, no proposed change in Comprehensive Plan designation.
- Rezone of a portion of two parcels to resolve split zoning between UR-4 and GC zones.

d. Area 5 – N Industrial Area

Size:

- Approx. 40 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [RF](#) to [LII](#).

Background:

- Existing UGA, no proposed change in Comprehensive Plan designation.
- Rezone to match designation as “Planned Light Impact Industrial” in the Foothills Subarea Plan.

6. Everson UGA

a. Study Area 3 – SW Rural

Size:

- Approx. 20 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [R-5A](#) to [UR-4](#).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: Rural to UGA.
- This location aligns with the city's vision to move west, outside of existing and future floodplains. The subject area is one of the few locations surrounding the city that is not zoned for agriculture. The proposed future zoning for this area is residential.

7. Nooksack UGA

a. Study Area 4 – SE Rural

Size:

- Approx. 20 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [R-5A](#) to [UR-4](#).

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: Rural to UGA.
- The area is located outside of designated floodplains, contains existing residential developments, and has been identified by the City as an appropriate location for residential infill development because of its proximity to Nooksack Elementary School.

8. Custer LAMIRD

Area 1 – Upzone

Size:

- Approx. 90 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [RR-2](#) to [RR-3](#).

Background:

- Existing "Rural Community" Comp. Plan designation, no change proposed.
- To promote increased density as recommended by the Planning Commission.

9. Hinote's Corner LAMIRD

a. Area 1 – Upzone – West

Size:

- Approx. 71 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [R-2A](#) to [RR-2](#).

Background:

- Existing Rural Community Comp. Plan designation, no change proposed.
- To promote increased density as recommended by the Planning Commission.

Area 2 – Upzone – East

Size:

- Approx. 95 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- [RR-2](#) to [RR-3](#).

Background:

- Existing "Rural Community" Comp. Plan designation, no change proposed.
- To promote increased density as recommended by the Planning Commission.

10. Pole & Guide Meridian LAMIRD

a. Area 1 & 2 – Upzone

Size:

- Approx. 104 total acres (86 acres W & 18 acres E).

Zoning Proposal:

- [RR-2](#) to [RR-3](#).

Background:

- Existing “Rural Community” Comp. Plan designation, no change proposed.
- To promote increased density as recommended by the Planning Commission.

11. Lummi Island

Size:

- Approx. 25 acres.

Zoning Proposal:

- Removal of “Mineral Special District Overlay Zone”.

Background:

- Comp Plan Proposal: MRL to Rural Forestry
- The underlying area was purchased by Lummi Island Heritage Trust in 2015 as part of the “[Aiston Preserve](#)” with the intent of preserving the area for recreational use and protecting it from further development. Therefore, the area has already effectively been removed from the mineral resource land supply area for commercial use.

Recommendation:

PDS recommends that the County Council make a motion to preliminarily approve the proposed Zoning Map Amendments, as part of the 2025-2026 periodic update, as depicted in Exhibits 1-11, including the associated Ordinance with Findings of Fact and Conclusions of Law.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to discussing it with you.