

CHAPTER 12 – Climate

#	Page	Section/Policy	Proposed Amendment	Sponsor	Meeting
1	12-1	Purpose	The Climate Element is required under RCW 36.70A.020, which RCW 36.70A.020 requires cities and counties to use their comprehensive plan to build resilience and reduce greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to climate change.	Galloway	APPROVED TO SEND TO PC 10/7/25 COTW APPROVED via “CONSENT” SCOTW 4.7.26
2	12-1/2	Conformity with State Laws and Regulations	The Climate Element conforms with the 2023 Department of Commerce Climate Element Intermediate Planning Guidance for local governments planning under the Growth Management Act. In 2025, Whatcom County will also review the Element for conformity with the full guidance that reflects the results of a rulemaking process for HB 1181.	PUBLIC WORKS	APPROVED via “CONSENT” SCOTW 4.7.26
3	12-2	Footnote	¹ The Whatcom County 2022 Greenhouse Gas Inventory produced by Washington Department of Commerce does not include some data sources, including wood burning, ferry operations, solid waste processing, and closed landfills which accounts for the difference in 255,453,162,062 MTCO ₂ e between the state inventory and planning inventory.	PUBLIC WORKS	APPROVED via “CONSENT” SCOTW 4.7.26
4	12-3	Background Summary	The 2022 Whatcom County Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory quantified emissions produced by activities across Whatcom County, including emissions from the built environment, industrial processes, transportation, solid waste and wastewater treatment, refrigerant usage, and land use. In 2022, Whatcom County produced an estimated 8,121,7348,377,187 metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent (MTCO ₂ e), which equates to approximately 35.1 MTCO ₂ e per capita. Globally, in 2022, the estimated emissions total was 57.4 gigatons of CO ₂ e. For a more detailed discussion of greenhouse gas emissions and emissions trends and projections, see the Appendix. <i>Note: See the 2025 Whatcom County Emissions Trends and Projections Reports, as well as the 2026 Washington Department of Commerce-Whatcom County Greenhouse Gas Inventory for more information regarding methodology and forecasting.</i>	PUBLIC WORKS	APPROVED via “CONSENT” SCOTW 4.7.26
5	12-3	Background Summary	<u>Consistent with the 2050 statewide net zero greenhouse gas emissions target set by the Washington State Legislature in RCW 70A.45.020 and adopted in Whatcom County Countywide Planning Policy T3, Whatcom County sets the following interim performance indicators to monitor our progress towards the 2030 Climate Element implementation progress report:</u>	PUBLIC WORKS	APPROVED AS AMENDED via MOTION SCOTW 4.7.26

			• <u>By 2030, all electric utilities serving retail customers in Whatcom County meet interim targets for greenhouse gas neutrality under WAC 194-40-040.</u> • <u>By 2030, natural gas utilities serving retail customers in Whatcom County meet each two-year therm conservation target, consistent with RCW 80.28.380.</u> • <u>By 2030, target 45,174 registered battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and plug-in hybrid electric passenger vehicles (PHEVs) registered in Whatcom County, consistent with the Washington State Electric Vehicle Coordinating Council forecast, in partnership with the private sector and developers and subject to consumer demand and economic conditions.</u> • <u>By 2030, reduce annual vehicle miles traveled per capita across incorporated and unincorporated Whatcom County by 3% to 5,731 VMT per capita.</u> <i>Note: See: April 7th Whatcom County Council of the Whole staff memo for discussion.</i>		
6	12-6	NEW Policy 12.2.9	<u>Policy 12.2.9: Review bidding and procurement policies to prioritize lower-carbon building processes, sustainable and/or reclaimed building materials, energy efficiency, renewable energy, and alternative and active transportation infrastructure (such as EV charging and bicycle storage) in County funded capital projects.</u> <i>Note: similar to Policy 12.8.15, which focuses on transportation</i>	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
7	12-8	Policy 12.4.1	Assist property owners regulated under the Clean Buildings Performance Standard <u>in</u> <u>accessing</u> incentives to reduce building energy use and meet early compliance deadlines for Tier 1 and 2 buildings.	Galloway	APPROVED TO SEND TO PC 10/7/25 COTW APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
8	12-9	Policy 12.4.8	Partner with Western Washington University, Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College, Northwest Indian College, <u>K-12 schools and skills centers</u> , Northwest Workforce Council, the Port of Bellingham, the Whatcom Working Waterfront Coalition, cities, <u>unions and apprenticeship programs</u> , and local businesses to address workforce skill gaps in emerging sectors that support climate action.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
9	12-9	Ecosystems	Ecosystems play a vital role in mitigating climate change by capturing and storing carbon. Protecting, enhancing, and restoring forests, wetlands, aquatic ecosystems, and green space contributes to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions through carbon sequestration. These nature-based solutions to greenhouse gas reduction can also <u>build resilience by mitigating against</u>	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26

			<u>natural hazards and climate impacts</u> , protect <u>ing</u> biodiversity and <u>fish and wildlife habitat, and improv<u>ing</u></u> water and air quality.		
10	12-10	Policy 12.5.5	Discourage the conversion of forests, <u>agricultural land</u> , grasslands, <u>wetlands, critical areas, riparian areas, estuaries</u> , and other high carbon storage areas for uses that are incompatible with habitat preservation and carbon sequestration goals.	Galloway	APPROVED via MOTION SCOTW 4.7.26
11	12-10	Policy 12.7.2	Prioritize investments to reduce vehicle emissions <u>and miles travelled</u> in neighborhoods disproportionately affected by air <u>and water</u> pollution. <i>Note: 6PPD-q is a highly toxic byproduct from tires that contaminate waterways through stormwater runoff.</i>	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
12	12-11	Policy 12.7.4	Support <u>Coordinate with existing utility-run or state administered</u> programs that provide financial assistance or subsidies for low-income households and landlords to improve energy efficiency, reduce utility costs, and access renewable energy. <i>Note: See comment letter from Cascade Natural Gas</i>	PUBLIC WORKS	APPROVED via MOTION SCOTW 4.7.26
13	12-11	Transportation	Greenhouse gas emission reduction strategies for the transportation sector include electrification, switching to lower carbon fuels, and reducing travel demand, <u>and promoting alternative multimodal transportation and infrastructure</u> . To lower transportation emissions, Whatcom County is evaluating land use planning practices to lower per capita VMT, promote taking fewer trips and assessing regional investments in public transit and multimodal transportation. Improving <u>active</u> transportation options and multimodal connectivity for all residents reduces emissions, <u>improves public health</u> , and advances equity.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
14	12-12	Policy 12.8.3	Coordinate with WSDOT, Whatcom Council of Governments, <u>tribes</u> , and cities to update the regional transportation plan to estimate and track transportation related greenhouse gas emissions by jurisdiction in Whatcom County.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
15	12-12	Policy 12.8.6	Collaborate with regional partners to facilitate <u>and invest in the development and installation of a countywide</u> electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure across Whatcom County <u>charging network, including</u> prioritizing underserved and disadvantaged communities to ensure equitable access.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
16	12-13	Policy 12.8.14	Review bidding and procurement policies to prioritize lower-carbon materials and processes in County funded transportation <u>and infrastructure</u> projects.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26

17	12-15	Policy 12.11.3	Review Whatcom County code for opportunities to discourage conversion of forestland for non-forestry uses <u>and agriculture land for non-agriculture uses</u> .	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
18	12-16	NEW Policy 12.11.7 (relocated to Policy 12.16.9)	<u>Policy 12.16.9: Work with the State, tribes, and other stakeholders to evaluate a voluntary, incentive driven framework and strategy for achieving restoration and enhancement of salmon and other aquatic species habitat for public and private projects.</u> <i>Note: consistent with RES2022-036</i> <i>Note: this policy was relocated to Policy 12.16.9 on 4.7.26</i>	Galloway	APPROVED AS AMENDED via MOTION SCOTW 4.7.26
19	12-17	Agriculture and Food Systems	Higher air temperatures, more days with extreme heat, flooding, and drought are expected to disrupt water availability and intensify stress on crops and livestock, undermining sustainability and reducing yields. More extreme precipitation and shifts in snowpack and stream flows will alter seasonal water availability for irrigation and drive changes to agricultural practices. As <u>weather becomes less predictable, and</u> suitable seasonal windows for planting and cultivation shift, producers may need to adopt climate-adaptive agricultural practices, including regenerative agriculture, modified crop and livestock selection, soil carbon enhancement, and water conservation.	Galloway	FAILED SCOTW 4.7.26
20	12-20	Policy 12.13.4	Evaluate <u>Require</u> the installation of distributed generation systems, such as solar with energy storage and microgrids, <u>or thermal energy networks, in new County-owned</u> critical facilities (e.g., emergency management centers, essential public infrastructure, and County facilities) to ensure energy availability during power outages for County-owned critical facilities. <i>Note: See comment letter from Cascade Natural Gas</i>	PUBLIC WORKS	APPROVED via MOTION SCOTW 4.7.26
21	12-20	Policy 12.13.8	Prioritize <u>relocation</u> or retrofitting of essential infrastructure, including undergrounding <u>utilities such as</u> electrical lines, <u>communication cables, water pipelines,</u> and gas pipelines, in high-risk wildfire zones to enhance safety and recovery capabilities.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
22	12-21	NEW Policy 12.13.16	<u>Policy 12.13.16: Coordinate with utility providers and franchisees to identify safe, feasible adaptation measures (e.g. elevated piping, reinforced casing, floodproofing) in floodplains, consistent with state pipeline safety standards.</u> <i>Note: See comment letter from Cascade Natural Gas</i>	PUBLIC WORKS	APPROVED AS AMENDED via MOTION SCOTW 4.7.26

23	12-22	Policy 12.14.4	Evaluate the vulnerability and sensitivity of culturally significant roads, trails, and landscape features <u>prone</u> to damage or alteration from climate change.	Galloway	APPROVED TO SEND TO PC 10/7/25 COTW APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
24	12-22	Economic Development	Due to climate change, the regional economy risks employment disruption, <u>supply chain challenges</u> , and decreased productivity in key sectors such as the <u>manufacturing, construction, transportation, energy</u> , maritime, tourism, agriculture, and forestry sectors, and reduced recreation opportunities. Whatcom County is expected to experience increasing costs related to relocation and damage to property and infrastructure due to coastal and riverine flooding, in addition to <u>production</u> losses due to extreme heat, drought, wildfire, and ocean acidification. There is expected to be increasing price volatility for business inputs, loss of operational continuity, <u>shifts in resource availability</u> , <u>shipping-transportation</u> disruptions, and increased unavailability of insurance in some areas.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
25	12-23	Policy 12.15.7	Develop economic innovation strategies to minimize workforce displacement <u>and supply chain disruptions</u> caused by climate-related impacts on key industries.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
26	12-24	Policy 12.16.8	Promote ecosystem restoration and protection projects that prioritize the recovery of habitats for critical endangered, threatened, and priority <u>fish and wildlife</u> species.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
27	12-24	Emergency Management	Climate hazards such as drought, extreme <u>weather events</u> temperature fluctuations , wildfire, and flooding are expected to increase costs and demands for emergency preparedness, response, and recovery services, and could strain or overwhelm local emergency response capacity. These climate risks include increased demand for shelter, <u>damaged buildings and infrastructure</u> , additional pressure on energy grids <u>and communications systems</u> , and disruption to emergency management facilities, medical services, and critical <u>equipment and</u> supplies due to impossible or unsafe travel conditions and the potential magnitude of emergency events.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
28	12-25	Policy 12.17.7	Increase community awareness and preparedness for climate-related emergencies by conducting regular tests of evacuation and other emergency alerts and providing accessible public information, <u>including in multiple languages</u> .	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
29	12-26	NEW Policy 12.17.14	<u>Policy 12.17.14: Assess potential ferry service disruptions and create plans to maintain ferry reliability during extreme weather events.</u>	Galloway	FAILED SCOTW 4.7.26

30	12-26	NEW Policy 12.17.15 (renumbered to Policy 12.17.14)	<u>Policy 12.17.15: Coordinate with Fire Departments, Fire Districts, Search and Rescue, Law Enforcement, and other first responders to ensure timely and unified emergency response, minimize disruption of services, and support workplace safety and volunteer and professional workforce protection.</u> <i>Note: Policy has been renumbered to 12.17.14.</i>	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
31	12-27	Policy 12.18.6	Establish contingency plans and train to execute them with community partners for maintaining critical health services, including mobile health units, and telemedicine, <u>and Fire/EMS response and transport</u> , during extreme weather events and infrastructure failures.	Galloway	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
32	12-28	Transportation	Climate change is expected to adversely impact transportation infrastructure, including increased road surface damage from higher temperatures, <u>and</u> additional maintenance requirements for roadside vegetation and infrastructure damage from rain, freeze, and thaw cycles. Increasing temperatures and flooding may cause road closures, delays in ferry, transit, and air travel delays , and risks to routes, roads, bridges, sidewalks, trails, rail, and airport infrastructure.	Galloway	APPROVED TO SEND TO PC 10/7/25 COTW APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 4.7.26
33	12-3	Background Summary Add after first paragraph	<u>Per WAC 365-196-443 (2026) Whatcom County is required to provide WA Department of Commerce an implementation progress report detailing the progress Whatcom County has achieved in implementing the comprehensive plan five years after the latest required periodic review and revision of the comprehensive plan has been completed. The WA Department of Commerce is also required to adopt guidelines for indicators, measures, milestones, and criteria for counties to utilize in their five-year implementation progress reports that must cover, in part, "[p]rogress toward implementing any actions required to achieve reductions to meet greenhouse gas and vehicle miles traveled requirements provided for in any element of the comprehensive plan under RCW 36.70A.070."</u> <u>Until such time as Commerce adopts such guidelines for periodic reporting and Climate Element Implementation Progress Reports, Whatcom County will quantify countywide progress on greenhouse gas emissions and vehicle miles traveled reductions per capita for the Five-Year Climate Element implementation progress report required in RCW 36.70A.130(9) based on the following interim performance indicators:</u>	PDS/PW Staff	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 5.19.26
34	12-3	Background Summary	Consistent with the 2050 statewide net zero greenhouse gas emissions target set by the Washington State Legislature in RCW 70A.45.020 and adopted in Whatcom County Countywide	PDS/PW Staff	APPROVED via "CONSENT" SCOTW 5.19.26

			Planning Policy T3: Whatcom County sets the following interim performance indicators to monitor our progress towards the 2030 Climate Element implementation progress report): • By 2030, All electric utilities serving retail customers in Whatcom County meet interim targets for greenhouse gas neutrality under WAC 194-40-040. • By 2030, Natural gas utilities serving retail customers in Whatcom County meet each two-year therm conservation target, consistent with RCW 80.28.380. • By 2030, target 45,174 registered Battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and plug-in hybrid electric passenger vehicles (PHEVs) registered in Whatcom County, consistent with the Washington State Electric Vehicle Coordinating Council forecast, <u>increase by at least 20% towards the goal of 13,810 electric vehicles</u>, in partnership with the private sector and developers, and subject to consumer demand and economic conditions. • By 2030, Reduce annual vehicle miles traveled (VMT) per capita across incorporated and unincorporated Whatcom County by <u>at least 3%, as measured by annual certified mileage reporting by the Washington Department of Transportation.</u> to 5,731 VMT per capita.		
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ADDITIONAL AMENDMENTS PASSED 6/16					
N/A	12-4	NEW Section (after Background Summary)	<u>Relationship to Federal, State and Regional Regulations</u> <u>Greenhouse gas emissions generated within Whatcom County’s geographic boundary are also the subject of federal, state and regional regulations. For the purposes of the climate element review and evaluation program and implementation progress reporting requirements under RCW 36.70A.130 (2025), any legislatively approved incremental greenhouse gas emissions target adopted by Whatcom County, five-year required progress reporting for the climate element, and identified regulations, zoning, land use changes, or other legislative or administrative action to implement the climate element will consider express or implied preemption, where consistent with state and federal regulations.</u> <u>This principle is consistent with RCW 70A.65.080(8) (2025), the Washington State Climate Commitment Act which designates that Washington State Department of Ecology cannot require that multiple covered entities, including refineries, fuel suppliers, facilities using natural gas, and natural gas utilities, have compliance obligations for the same greenhouse gas emissions. The state operating budget, ESSB 5092 (2021), which funded the WA State Department of Commerce's initial development of the climate intermediate planning guidance also stipulated that the set of actions cities and counties may take, as recommended by Washington State Department of Commerce, must be within a jurisdiction’s existing statutory authority and implemented through updates to comprehensive plans and development regulations.</u>	Public Works	APPROVED via MOTION SCOTW 6.16.26