

RESOLUTION NO. \_\_\_\_\_

ESTABLISHING PRIORITIES FOR WHATCOM COUNTY'S 2025  
COMPREHENSIVE PLAN UPDATE

**WHEREAS**, the Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires Whatcom County to develop a Comprehensive Plan for managing population growth and development, which was adopted in May of 1997; and

**WHEREAS**, the GMA requires Whatcom County to review urban growth areas (UGAs) under RCW 36.70A.130(3) to be able to accommodate population and employment growth projected for the 20-year planning period; and

**WHEREAS**, the GMA requires Whatcom County to periodically review and revise its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations under RCW 36.70A.130(1); and

**WHEREAS**, on August 9, 2016, Whatcom County adopted Ordinance 2016-034 updating the Comprehensive Plan; and

**WHEREAS**, the GMA requires Whatcom County to review, and if needed, revise its Comprehensive Plan and development regulations on or before June 30, 2025, and every ten years thereafter; and

**WHEREAS**, the current Comprehensive Plan contains chapters on many intersectional issues impacted by climate change, equity, and economic security including Land Use, Housing, Capital Facilities, Utilities, Transportation, Economics, Resource Lands, Recreation, and Environment; and

**WHEREAS**, on November 9, 2021, the Whatcom County Council passed Resolution 2021-049, adopting the 2021 Whatcom County Climate Action Plan, which develops goals, strategies, and actions to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build climate resilience related to buildings, energy, industry, transportation, waste, land use, water, fisheries, agriculture, forestry and ecosystems; and

**WHEREAS**, Whatcom County has experienced increasingly severe effects of phenomena related to climate change including wildfires, smoke, heat dome, drought, and floods; and

**WHEREAS**, recent scientific reports from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change point out that time is running short for communities everywhere to mitigate the worst effects of climate change; and

**WHEREAS**, the current Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan needs to more clearly establish a nexus between climate change, equity, and economic security; and

**WHEREAS**, over the last several years, the Washington State Legislature considered several bills that address GMA and comprehensive planning including, but not limited to, HB 1099 (2021-22) and HB 1117 (2021-22); and

**WHEREAS,** legislation failing to pass during previous legislative sessions does not preclude Whatcom County from proactively and voluntarily incorporating these policy proposals into the updated Comprehensive Plan; and

**WHEREAS,** the Whatcom County Council believes the updated Comprehensive Plan should reflect our shared values and address the current and future needs of Whatcom County; and

**WHEREAS,** the Whatcom County Council looks forward to working collaboratively with the Executive, county staff, relevant Whatcom County boards, commissions, and advisory committees, Tribes, and other jurisdictions to adopt an updated Comprehensive Plan;

**NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** by the Whatcom County Council that the following priorities be considered for incorporation into the updated Comprehensive Plan due on or before June 30, 2025:

1. Develop and use a climate resilience and equity lens to inform all chapters of the Comprehensive Plan and associated planning and regulatory documents.
2. Incorporate equity and environmental justice considerations throughout the entire Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, including but not limited to:
  - Strengthening the "Diverse Cultural Composition" section of the Land Use chapter to include both equity and sovereignty.
  - Considering SB 5141 (2021-22) the Healthy Environment for all (HEAL) Act and the Washington Environmental Health Disparities Map for additional guidance.
  - Incorporating the Whatcom County "Healthy Planning" approach established by resolution number 2015-038.
  - Consulting with the Whatcom County Health Department, Racial Equity Commission, Child and Family-Wellbeing Taskforce, and with organizations representing farm workers, farmers, low-income families and children, and other groups disproportionately impacted by climate change and environmental injustices.
3. Follow the framework established in HB 1717 (2021-22), concerning tribal participation in planning under the growth management act. HB 1717 provides an opportunity for tribes to pass a resolution notifying the County of their desire to participate. The notification by the tribe to the County obligates the County to negotiate in good faith with the tribe to develop a memorandum of agreement that describes the procedures for including the tribe in the planning process. Therefore, Whatcom County should:
  - In good faith, fully engage government-to-government with Lummi Nation and Nooksack Indian Tribe in the development and implementation of the comprehensive plan when such planning or implementation has the potential to have substantial direct effect on tribal governments and treaty rights.
  - Work to ensure tribal treaty rights and sovereignty are considered and upheld in all aspects of the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan.

4. Incorporate climate change considerations throughout the Comprehensive Plan, including but not limited to:
- Mitigating and adapting to climate change, reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and building climate resilience by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Climate Action Plan.
  - Changing the title of the Environment chapter to "Environment and Climate Resilience".
  - Adding goals of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and including measures to mitigate the adverse impacts of climate change on people, property, infrastructure, and ecological systems.
  - Adding language to encourage a natural climate solutions approach to climate mitigation and resilience.
  - In the Transportation chapter, reducing transportation related emissions by:
    - Incorporating a goal to reduce vehicle miles traveled (VMT) to be accomplished by goals, policies, objectives or strategies which may include but are not limited to:
      - improving bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan including the Regional Trails Plan and Route Map proposed by the Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee;
      - encouraging the use of public transportation; and
      - improving coordination between development and transportation systems; and
      - deploying affordable high-speed broadband.
    - Expanding use of electric transportation (bicycles, cars, trucks, buses, and ferry) and associated infrastructure.
    - Developing a plan to transition the county fleet, including vehicles, ferry, and other equipment, to electric, hydrogen, biofuels or other non-emitting technologies as soon as feasible.
  - In the Housing chapter, ensuring housing development meets current and future housing, equity, climate, and environmental needs by:
    - Updating and strengthening land use codes and housing regulations that further encourage, and where appropriate, require affordable, dense, sustainable, low impact, and energy efficient development. Strategies could include:
      - transit-oriented development;
      - infill development;
      - density bonuses;
      - inclusionary zoning;
      - clustering subdivisions to preserve green spaces;
      - urban villages;
      - farmland trusts;
      - home size restrictions;
      - mixed and middle housing;
      - County acquisition of land for permanently affordable housing development; and
      - considering availability and development of housing near employment opportunities to reduce travel needs.
    - Supporting building codes that incentivize all-electric buildings for new construction, including wiring and panels to support on-site solar arrays, battery storage, electric vehicle charging, and other additional electrical appliances.

- Encouraging electrification, retrofitting, and weatherization of existing buildings.
  - Considering the connection between climate change and housing, and the disproportionate impacts to vulnerable and rural communities.
  - In the Capital Facilities chapter, considering climate change impacts to critical infrastructure and Whatcom County facilities, including but not limited to:
    - Evaluating the climate vulnerability and risk of existing infrastructure in Whatcom County.
    - Updating energy efficiency and installing electric heat pumps.
    - Increasing renewable energy generation and energy storage.
    - Installing electric vehicle infrastructure.
    - Designing and building new county facilities in a sustainable way including:
      - net zero energy use;
      - increasing energy resilience;
      - utilizing local, sustainably sourced building materials;
      - enhancing microgrid capabilities; and
      - developing at locations that reduce employee commute time and increase accessibility to public and alternative transportation modes, reducing transportation related emissions.
  - In the Economic chapter, promote a more diverse, equitable, sustainable, and climate resilient future economy, including but not limited to:
    - Supporting living wage job creation in green industry, commerce, forestry, and agriculture.
    - Supporting a just clean energy transition for workers and communities.
    - Investing in robust economic and workforce development at all levels, including in climate-resilient and green energy related fields.
    - Increasing access to quality and affordable childcare by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Child and Family Well-Being Action Plan.
    - Increasing access to quality and affordable high-speed broadband.
5. Incorporate sustainable aquatic and marine environments for salmon and other species throughout the Comprehensive Plan, including but not limited to:
- Adding a salmon recovery goal.
  - Implementing the actions outlined in the Water Resource Inventory Area (WRIA) 1 Salmonid Recovery Plan.
  - Incorporating WRIA 1 Watershed Management Board Plans and strategies.
  - In the Land Use chapter, consider a framework and strategy for achieving net ecological gain of salmon and other aquatic species habitat for all public projects and a voluntary incentive driven framework and strategy for private projects.
  - In the Capital Facilities or Transportation chapter, include a prioritized list and proposed schedule for the elimination of identified fish passage barriers in coordination with the Tribes, State, Cities, and private landowners.
  - Protecting critical areas by strengthening mitigation requirements in development regulations including requiring net gain in pervious surface area.
6. Support a thriving local agriculture and food system economy and food security in the Resource Lands Chapter of the Comprehensive Plan by:
- Considering the impacts of climate change on agriculture and agricultural

workers such as rising temperatures, more severe and unpredictable weather events, air quality, water quality and quantity, and soil health.

- Working to provide secure and legal access to water for farmers employing water conservation and water use efficiency principles.
  - Integrate water supply planning and land use planning to support Whatcom County's goal of maintaining a minimum of 100,000 acres of agricultural land.
  - Promoting opportunities to increase sustainability and climate resilience in agriculture and processing.
  - Enhancing local food security and food sovereignty by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Food System Plan.
  - Improving wages, housing, and working conditions for food chain workers.
  - Ensure safe and affordable on-farm housing for farmers and farmworkers.
  - Increasing demand for local food products and expanding support networks for local agriculture product development.
  - Encouraging research and development of drought- and heat- tolerant crops, and agriculture technologies that will reduce emissions, improve soil health, and increase efficient use of water.
  - Encouraging farming practices that protect and regenerate soil, water, land, and carbon sequestration.
  - Preserving productive agricultural lands across Whatcom County by implementing the recommendations of the Whatcom County Agricultural Strategic Plan and the 2019 Rural Land Study, considering rezoning (such as R5 to Ag 20 or similar), and increasing funding and staff capacity for the Conservation Easement Program.
  - Expanding allowable agricultural land uses to include non-traditional farming models.
7. Build resilience to climate change in forests that enables both a thriving timber economy and healthy sustainable forest ecosystems for wildlife, carbon sequestration and storage, and recreation. Management practices that enhance forest and watershed health and sustainability include, but are not limited to:
- Using the best available science and climate projections when planning timber harvests to evaluate the potential adverse impacts to peak flows, summer stream flows, water quality, wildlife, slope stability, and wildfire risk.
  - Encouraging uneven-aged forest management practices through selective harvest and variable density thinning to enhance structural complexity, biodiversity, drought-tolerance, fire resilience, hydrologic function, and protection of fish-bearing and non-fish-bearing streams.
  - Expanding carbon market opportunities that reward landowners who actively manage their forests to increase carbon storage.
  - Evaluating the net loss or gain in carbon emissions and ecological function when rezoning forest lands for other uses.
  - Encouraging reforestation, or afforestation, of previously cleared riparian and upland areas.
  - Promoting development of Whatcom Grown timber products that meet climate resilience standards, support the local timber economy, and reduce transportation related emissions.
  - Supporting transition of forest industries and employees to climate resilient forest harvest techniques.
  - Identifying, designating, and updating regulations to protect wildlife corridors and climate migration corridors.

8. More thoroughly consider impacts of climate change, equity, and economic security in relation to natural hazards mitigation and emergency response, including but not limited to:
- Incorporating climate change impact assessments and vulnerability and risk assessments to inform future development and preservation efforts.
  - Considering the impacts of flooding, increasing temperatures, heat domes, droughts, wildfire, and smoke to human health, the environment, natural resources, resource lands, and economic security.
  - In the Land Use and Environment chapters, enhancing flood sections to help mitigate against increased intensity and frequency of flood events by:
    - Restoring, where possible, the environmental functions of our rivers and streams.
    - Improving flood plain water storage and infiltration capacities.
    - Considering dike setbacks where appropriate.
    - Better preparing for floods and considering the disproportionate impacts of flooding on rural and vulnerable communities.
    - Considering buy backs in designated floodways.
    - Considering water storage options that do not include dams.
  - In the Environment and/or Shoreline chapters, as well as in the Critical Areas Ordinance and the Shoreline Master Program, more thoroughly incorporate coastal resilience to plan, prepare, build resilience to climate impacts, and reduce vulnerabilities and risks.
    - Planning for sea level rise, changing ocean conditions, storm surges, and floods, and its impacts on coastal residential communities, declining marine fisheries, shellfish beds, coastal infrastructure, and recreation areas.
    - Reducing development in current and projected future shoreline areas.
  - In the Capital Facilities chapter, consider establishing and maintaining County Resilience Centers during emergencies or disasters. These facilities could:
    - Provide controlled temperature shelter as well as food, water, and cots for disasters or power outages.
    - Prioritize under-served communities more vulnerable to disasters such as floods, wildfires, and prolonged heat/cold spells.

**BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED**, in order to achieve the aforementioned priorities, the Whatcom County Council encourages significant coordination and collaboration between:

- Whatcom County departments including the Planning & Development Services, Public Works, Parks & Recreation, Health Department, and the Emergency Management Division of the Sheriff's Office.
- Whatcom County boards, commissions, and advisory committees including, but not limited to, the Planning Commission, Climate Impact Advisory Committee, Bicycle/Pedestrian Advisory Committee, Racial Equity Commission, Forest Advisory Committee, Agricultural Advisory Committee, Food System Committee, Child and Family Wellbeing Taskforce, Business and Commerce Advisory Committee, Housing Advisory Committee, and WRIA 1 Planning Unit.
- Tribes including Lummi Nation and the Nooksack Indian Tribe.
- The seven incorporated cities of Whatcom County including Bellingham, Blaine, Ferndale, Lynden, Sumas, Everson, and Nooksack.
- The Port of Bellingham.
- The Public Utility District No. 1 of Whatcom County.

- State Agencies including the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Ecology, Department of Fish and Wildlife, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Commerce.
- Non-governmental organizations, businesses, and members of the community with lived experiences.

APPROVED this \_\_\_\_ day of \_\_\_\_\_, 2022.

ATTEST:

WHATCOM COUNTY COUNCIL  
WHATCOM COUNTY, WASHINGTON

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dana Brown-Davis, Clerk of the Council

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Todd Donovan, Council Chair

APPROVED AS TO FORM:

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Karen Frakes, Civil Deputy Prosecutor

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