



2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

Public Participation Program

Adopted by Skagit County Resolution #R20240079
Prepared by Skagit County
Planning & Development Services Staff

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Executive Summary



SKAGIT COUNTY 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update

The State of Washington requires all counties, cities, and towns planning under the Growth Management Act to conduct a periodic review and update of its comprehensive plan and development regulations. The comprehensive plan is a set of overarching goals and vision statements to guide the physical growth and development in Skagit County while protecting natural resource lands, open space and rural areas.

The periodic update occurs every ten years to respond to changes in state law and to address new information about land use, community needs, and population and employment growth. As Skagit County continues to grow and change, the County's Comprehensive Plan is intended to change to reflect the current needs and vision of the County and into the future. Community Engagement will be broadly applicable to all elements of the Comprehensive Plan.

The next periodic update is required to be completed by June 30th, 2025.

This Public Participation Plan (PPP) outlines how the community will be engaged during the project and given specific opportunities for providing feedback on the plan. Throughout the engagement process, the County and consultant staff will seek to understand the vision, goals and priorities of the community. This feedback from the public will provide staff information necessary to shape policy and standards that reflect the character and values of Skagit County.

Comprehensive Plan Process



Introduction

The Comprehensive Plan guides the direction for the future of Skagit County and all local planning efforts. Residents of Skagit County choose to live here for many reasons: natural beauty, clean air, good jobs, and an ideal place to create a home and family. The Comprehensive Plan seeks to foster this high quality of life by providing for social, environmental, cultural, economic, resource, recreational, civic, transit, health, and safety needs. The purpose of the County’s Comprehensive Plan and Capital Facilities Plan is to guide policy, financing, and development regulation decisions over a 20-year period.

Public Participation Program Purpose

The Public Participation Program (PPP) is required by state law ([RCW 36.70A.140](#)), which states:

“Comprehensive plans – Ensure public participation. Each county and city that is required or chooses to plan under RCW 36.70A.040 shall establish and broadly disseminate to the public a public participation program identifying procedures providing for early and continuous public participation in the development and amendment of comprehensive land use plans and development regulations implementing such plans. The procedures shall provide for broad dissemination of proposals and alternatives, opportunity for written comments, public meetings after effective notice, provision for open discussion, communication programs, information services, and consideration of and response to public comments...”

The PPP outlines how the community will be engaged during the project and given specific opportunities for providing feedback on the plan. Throughout the engagement process, the County and consultant staff will seek to understand the vision, goals, and priorities of the community. This feedback from the public will provide staff information necessary to shape policy and standards that reflect the character and values of Skagit County. Feedback will be collected, reviewed and incorporated into the engagement summaries which will in turn be used for plan updates prior to its presentation before County decision makers for plan adoption. This plan will be used by County staff and consultants to guide engagement during the comprehensive plan update process. The plan is a living document and will expand as the comprehensive plan update process continues.

2025 Periodic Comprehensive Plan Update

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires counties planning under the GMA to periodically review and, if needed, revise its 20-year comprehensive plan, capital facility plan, and development regulations. The periodic update occurs every ten years to respond to changes in state law and to address new information about land use, community needs, and population

and employment growth. Specifically, the 2023 state law updates require a “Climate Change and Resiliency Element” be added which will be a new chapter to the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan. This chapter is often interchangeably called the “Climate Element”. As Skagit County continues to grow and change, the County's Comprehensive Plan is intended to change to reflect the current needs and vision of the County and into the future. It is important to note that community engagement will be broadly applicable to all elements of the Comprehensive Plan. Specific activities will be added to gather feedback on the climate element, as it represents a new area of focus that has not previously been the subject of public input.

The next periodic update is required to be completed by June 30th, 2025.

What is a Comprehensive Plan?

A Comprehensive Plan Update reviews and improves the County’s growth and development alongside current policies and regulations in effect. The update process will include gathering information, listening to the community’s input, identifying issues and opportunities, setting goals, and creating strategies to achieve them. The updated plan should reflect the community’s vision for the future, addressing key areas such as land use, housing, transportation, natural resource management and the environment.



Public Participation Goals

The goal of community engagement is to encourage input that produces diverse viewpoints for the County to consider. Cities, tribes, interested parties, and the public will have opportunities for involvement and are encouraged to participate. Throughout the engagement process, the

County staff and consultant team will seek to understand the vision, goals and priorities of the community. The community engagement strategy seeks to:

- Commit to early and continuous engagement.
- Broadly disseminate proposals and information in accessible formats.
- Provide equitable opportunities for public participation in all areas of Skagit County.
- Provide timely information at key milestones.
- Use concise, plain, and easy to understand language.
- Consult with local tribes.
- Consult with neighboring jurisdictions, and federal and state agencies.
- Provide multilingual engagement opportunities and materials.
- Update the project website with current information.
- Utilize a variety of outreach mediums including local media, print, web, social media, emails, community meetings, and open houses.

Engagement Commitments

The engagement tactics used for this effort will focus on informing, involving and collaborating with stakeholders. The extent to which each stakeholder participates will depend on the stakeholders themselves. The County will make the following commitments:

- **Commit to inform** – We will keep the community well informed from start to finish.
- **Commit to involve** – We will consult with specific stakeholders and make sure that their needs and concerns are reflected in the plan.
- **Commit to collaborate** – We will gather advice and innovative ideas from the community and incorporate them into the plan’s decisions to the maximum extent possible.
- **Commit to circle back** – We will share how feedback was used to demonstrate the importance of community engagement process.
- **We will summarize our activities** – We will acknowledge people’s time and participation after each activity (surveys, interviews, community meetings, etc). The County and consultant team will summarize feedback by creating a community engagement summary that will be available on the project website.
- **We will give adequate public notice** – We will inform the public of opportunities to participate in a timely manner, at least a week in advance of a meeting or activity where feedback is sought.

Skagit County 2025 Periodic Update Timeline

The County has established an outline for public involvement to help the public understand where engagement opportunities exist. Skagit County will schedule a series of public outreach opportunities to correspond with new available information throughout the update process. Below are the overall steps of the Public Participation Program.

Engagement

The Comprehensive Plan update is a multi-faceted project spanning multiple years. Detailed communication and engagement plans will be developed at key milestones throughout the process that consider audience, medium, and key messages.

Graphic: Process graphic to demonstrate how engagement tactics will line up with project phases or individual chapter development.

The County has been coordinating with the Planning Commission to begin this Comprehensive Plan Update. Planning Commission Workshops took place on the following dates:

- January 23, 2024
- February 13, 2024
- February 27, 2024

The County plans to conduct a more thorough engagement process from April 2024 – September 2024. These engagement tactics and tools used throughout this effort are outlined in this section.

Communication Tools

The communication tools used by Skagit County during the comprehensive plan update process will include:

- **Project Website** – Skagit County Planning and Development Services (PDS) will regularly update the [project website](#) with up-to-date comprehensive plan information. Relevant documents and schedules will be posted on the website along with announcements and notices concerning upcoming meetings, hearings, and public involvement opportunities. The webpage can be found under [Comprehensive Plan](#) on the PDS Services website. The Skagit County website uses Google Translate to make content available in multiple languages. All visuals will be checked in advance to ensure they meet ADA accessibility requirements.
- **Email List** – Interested parties can sign up for email notifications to be notified of public meetings, outreach events, and new materials for review.

- **Direct Mail** – Postcards or other informational materials may be directly mailed to residents to notify the public about opportunities to participate, key dates or deadlines, and/or public meetings and hearings.
- **News Releases** – For major topics and decisions, Skagit County will prepare press releases and distribute them to local media.
- **Social Media** – PDS staff will use Skagit County social media platforms to promote public meetings and opportunities to provide formal public comment during the comprehensive plan update process.
- **Posters and Flyers** – County staff and consultant team will provide posters and flyers about public events or opportunities to comment in common gathering places such as community centers, libraries, and food banks. These materials will be translated to Spanish.
- **Engagement Summaries** – Engagement summaries detailing the outcomes of public events, surveys or comment periods will be produced after each effort and be uploaded to the project website. Summaries will also include attendee/participation counts, geography and demographic information when available.

Outreach Methods

Outreach methods used by Skagit County during the comprehensive plan update process will include:

- **Focus Groups and Technical Advisory Groups** – In order to solicit guidance on specific or complex technical issues, planning staff may utilize Board of County Commissioners approved focus groups or technical advisory groups. These groups will include members with specific knowledge or interest in certain topics or can effectively represent a subset of the community.
- **Surveys** – Surveys may be utilized to better understand the community’s point of view on specific topics. The survey will be hosted online, with paper surveys available at in-person events and by request. Online and paper surveys will be available in Spanish.
- **Community Events / Fairs and Festivals** –County staff and consultant team will utilize already established community events to share information about the comprehensive plan process, such as farmers markets, local parades, and annual community events.
- **Open Houses / Workshops** – Open houses are informal public gatherings to solicit feedback on Skagit County’s planning efforts. These involve presentations by planning staff, question and answer sessions, and interactive activities.

- **Community Pop-ups** – Community pop-ups are tabling activities at specific community locations, (e.g., bus stops, grocery stores, family resource centers, shelters, food banks, houses of worship). Each pop-up tabling opportunity will provide project information in an informal setting with the aim of connecting with groups who may not otherwise participate.
 - **Public Hearings** – Public Hearings are a formal public process conducted and held before the Board of County Commissioners or the Planning Commission. All public hearings will be noticed at least 15 days in advance of the hearing in the Notice of Availability, posted in the local paper, and on the County website. Testimony will be recorded and made available to the public, the Planning Commission, and the Board.
 - **Stakeholder Interviews** – The purpose of stakeholder interviews is to gather input on certain planning issues from a variety of perspectives. Interview results can be published in aggregate with individuals’ input anonymized. County staff will help identify individuals or organizations to invite to interviews.
- Skagit Council of Governments (SCOG)** – Issues requiring a high level of intergovernmental coordination or decision-making may be forwarded to the Skagit Council of Governments for discussion. SCOG will be leading the coordination of the update to the Countywide Planning Policies. This will be the key forum the County will use to coordinate with cities.
- **Board of County Commissioners Work Sessions** – Planning staff will frequently attend work sessions and monthly briefings to brief Board members on the update process.
 - **Planning Commission Work Sessions** – Planning staff will frequently attend work sessions to brief Planning Commission members on the update process.

Key Audiences

Key audiences will be engaged by Skagit County during the comprehensive planning process. All Skagit County residents are invited to participate in the comprehensive plan update process, with an emphasis on vulnerable and historically underserved communities. The list below represents groups that have expressed interest in being involved or are required to be engaged by State law.

- Skagit County Residents
- Landowners
- Local Tribal Governments
- Cities and Towns
- Federal Government
- State Agencies
- Local Organizations
- Agricultural and Forestry Groups
- Environmental Groups
- Economic Groups
- Housing Groups
- Schools and colleges
- Large Employers
- Developers
- Advisory Boards
- Transportation Groups
- Utility Providers
- Veteran Groups
- Senior Service Groups
- Social Service Groups
- Youth Service Groups
- School Districts
- Fire Districts
- Drainage and Irrigation Districts
- Communities with limited English Proficiency
- Farm workers

This engagement approach aims to make project details accessible and relevant to the target communities. Through a variety of outreach methods, this public participation program will involve a broad cross-section of the community, to engage key groups and those who may not otherwise participate.

Skagit County Boards and Committees

Skagit County recognized that certain community groups may have a particular interest in participating in the public engagement process. These groups may include advisory boards, professional organizations or other influential advocacy groups. By engaging with these identified groups, Skagit County seek to bring together community representatives to inform decisions, foster a shared sense of responsibility by engaging trusted organizations and broaden the reach by leveraging the existing networks to share information.

Below is a selection of community advisory boards and groups Skagit will seek to engage with:

- Accessible Communities Advisory Committee
- Agricultural Advisory Board
- Catholic Community Services Farmworker Center
- Community Action of Skagit County – Latinx Advisory Committee
- Developmental Disabilities Board
- Economic Development Advisory Committee

- Emergency Management Advisory Board
- Forest Advisory Board
- Housing Authority of Skagit County Board of Commissioners
- Marine Resources Committee
- Mount Vernon Chamber of Commerce – Latin Business Leaders
- Northwest Agriculture Business Center
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Board
- Skagit Council on Aging
- Skagit Soil Conservation District
- Voluntary Stewardship Program Watershed Group
- Senior Services – Housing
- Skagit Valley College
- North Star – Housing Group
- Natural Resources Committee

Skagit County may use the follow tactics to engage with these groups throughout the Comprehensive Plan Update Process:

- Develop key messages to implement and share during meetings and interviews
- Prepare educational materials or for representatives to share with their networks
- One-on-one or group interviews
- Prepare presentations to share at regular meetings and materials to facilitate conversations and solicit feedback

Local Tribal Governments

Tribes within Skagit County that staff will coordinate with throughout the update process include:

- Samish Indian Nation
- Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe
- Swinomish Indian Tribal Community
- Upper Skagit Indian Tribe

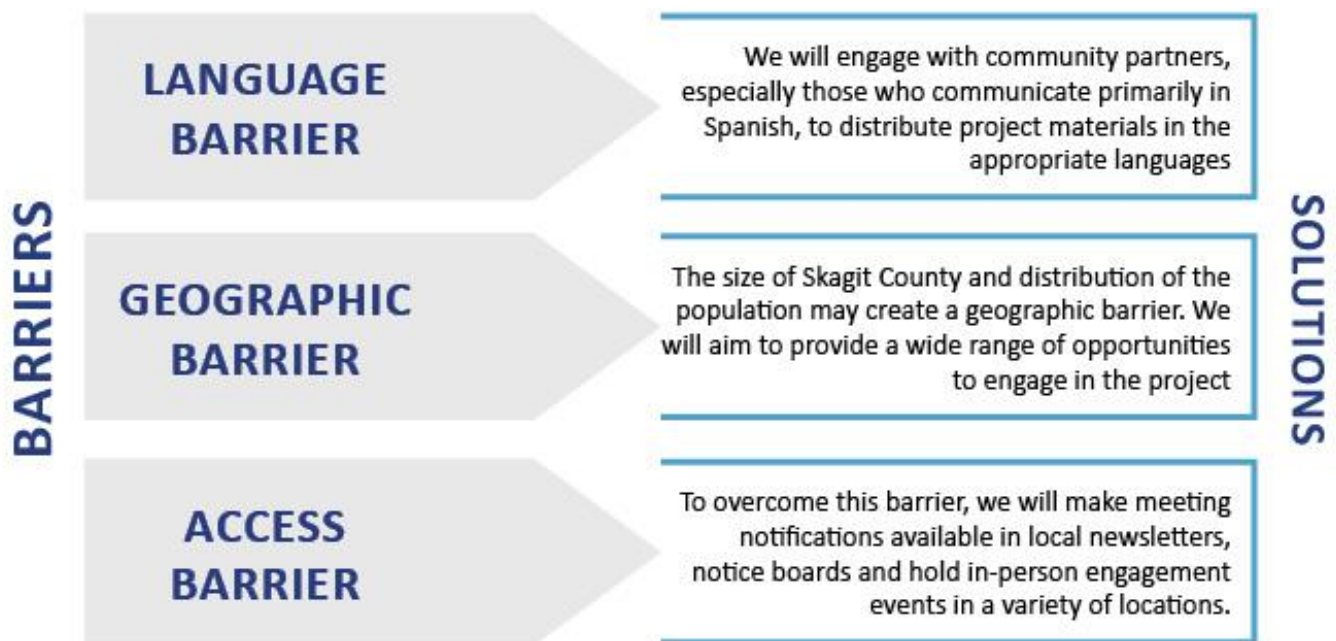
The County recognizes that Tribal Governments may be engaged at their discretion. The County will include interested Tribal Governments in the Comprehensive Plan Update process to the extent they are able and willing to do so. Mindful of HB 1717 (2022) requirements, Skagit County will:

- Invite Tribal Governments to voluntarily participate in the comprehensive planning process.
- Share process updates and continue to invite invite, regardless of their level of participation in the process.

- Share draft materials as they are available.
- Facilitate communication between tribes and the County, including support to resolve issues related to plan changes and regulations.
 Invite tribal governments to participate in the development of countywide policies, including policies that allow for the protection for cultural resources if desired.

Overcoming Obstacles to Engagement

The engagement tactics identified in the PPP are intended to offer community members a variety of opportunities to participate and share their feedback. Skagit County understands that there may be existing barriers to participation that may hinder the participation of community members who may be interested. This PPP identifies potential barriers to participation and strategies to overcome these. Engagement will be mindful of these barriers and strategies to maintain an accessible process.



Climate and Resilience Element

In 2023, the Washington State legislature amended the Growth Management Act (GMA) to add Climate Change and Resiliency as a planning goal (RCW 36.70A.020):

(14) Climate change and resiliency. 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.

This amendment requires Skagit County to add a climate element in the the Comprehensive Plan that includes a greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction and resilience sub-elements.

GHG Emissions Reduction Sub-element

The County will develop guidance to measure, reduce and eliminate GHG emissions. This element will be developed with an overall target of reaching net-zero emissions by 2050. These measures will include policies in transportation, zoning and development, and buildings & energy.

Resilience Sub-element:

This sub-element will help the County use climate data to identify and prepare for natural hazards made worse by climate change, including floods, droughts, wildfires and changing weather patterns. With guidance will help the County create policy to mitigate the effects of natural hazards, protect the environment and plan or health and safety.

The County aims to create a climate and resilience element that reflects the community priorities and values and increases the chance of community buy-in. Community engagement in support of this element will take place concurrently with other engagement efforts and identify specific opportunities to engage with members of the community who may be particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

Engagement goals

- Educate the community about climate resilience and hazard mitigation throughout the engagement process.
- Educate the community about their role in the planning effort and the importance of their input.
- Focus on communities most impacted by climate change for targeted interviews, focus groups, and community advisory committees.

- Integrate community feedback into the development of the climate and resilience element and clearly communicate how feedback is being used .

Key messages

- The community has an opportunity to shape the vision and direction of the County’s resiliency planning efforts.
- The climate and resilience elements will be integrated into the Comprehensive Plan to help the County create climate solutions.
- Feedback will help guide the development of the County’s climate resiliency strategies.

Engagement tactics

- Develop key messages to implement and share during community engagement events.
- Develop specific survey questions to aid in the development of climate and resilience section.
- Climate resilience focus groups/interviews.
- Engage with advisory boards or community groups who support populations deemed especially vulnerable to climate change.
- Prepare educational materials or presentations to share at schools and community colleges.

Legislative Process

Skagit County stakeholders are encouraged to attend and listen to discussions and make comments at Planning Commission and Board of County Commissioner hearings when scheduled. These legislative bodies hold meetings of record to gather information from County staff and community input on a variety of topics. Participants may also submit written comment by emailing pdscomments@co.skagit.wa.us.

Specifically, the Skagit County Planning Commission advises on comprehensive plan updates. The Planning Commission consists of nine members appointed by the Board of County Commissioners to make recommendations on planning related matters including growth and development. The Planning Commission will review and advise on comprehensive plan updates throughout the process.

Additionally, the Skagit County Board of Commissioners is the County’s legislative authority and holds the decision-making authority on the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update process. The

Board of County Commissioners includes three commissioners representing geographic districts based on [population](#). The Board of County Commissioners will review the comprehensive plan updates throughout the process and approve the final version at the end of the process.

Measuring Success

The project team will collect and report engagement metrics during each outreach opportunity. We will document engagement events, numbers, and demographics of participants (if possible), and provide quantitative and qualitative summaries of the engagement to assess if engagement objectives are achieved, the team will encourage communities to evaluate and give feedback about events, tools, and experiences.

For additional information, please contact the Skagit County Planning and Development Services Department.

Visit:

www.skagitcounty.net/2025CPA

Phone: (360) 416-1320

Email: PDS@co.skagit.wa.us