



**SKAGIT COUNTY 2025**  
Comprehensive Plan Update

# Climate Open House Engagement Summary

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December 2024

## Open House Overview

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<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	Tuesday October 1, 2024 5:30-7:00 PM
<b>Location</b>	Jefferson Elementary School 1801 E Blackburn Rd, Mount Vernon, WA 98274
<b># of Participants</b>	35
<b>County and Consulting Attendees</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Skagit County<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Robby Eckroth</li><li>○ Tara Satushek</li><li>○ Betsy Stevenson</li><li>○ Andy Wargo</li><li>○ Caitie Sheban</li></ul></li><li>• Cascadia Consulting<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Maddie Seibert</li><li>○ Sarah Farbstein</li></ul></li><li>• Kimley Horn<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Erin O’Kelley</li><li>○ Heidi Rous</li><li>○ Joel Farias</li></ul></li><li>• Facet<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Dan Nickel</li></ul></li></ul>

## Open House Posters

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- Poster 1: Comprehensive Plan Overview
- Poster 2: Climate Element Overview
- Poster 3: What Causes Climate Change?
- Poster 4: Prioritizing GHG Emission Reduction Policies\*
- Poster 5: How Will Climate Change Impact Skagit County?
- Poster 6: How are you affected?\*
- Poster 7: Where do you see climate impacts?\*
- Poster 8: Prioritizing Climate Resilience Policies\*

\*See Appendix A for images of the open house poster activities and the written responses.

## Key Takeaways

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- Most attendees who attended the open house were supportive of the Climate Element. Many individuals who attended the open house are actively involved with environmental and conservation groups in Skagit County.

- Several attendees voiced concerns about using credible and consistent science to the project team.
- Many attendees were concerned about the impacts of sea level rise and were worried it would not be adequately addressed in the Climate Element.
- Of the six shared greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions reduction policy categories, renewable energy sources received the most support and electric vehicles received the least.
- Of the eight shared climate resilience policy categories, natural ecosystem protection and restoration received the most support and building weatherization received the least.
- There were a few policy ideas that were common among attendees' suggestions:
  - Supporting agricultural practices that reduce GHG emissions and sequester carbon
  - Increasing bike and pedestrian infrastructure
  - Creating a Climate or Environmental Advisory Committee
  - Reducing lawns and planting native flora and trees
  - Supporting farm worker working in extreme heat and poor air quality.
  - Ensuring sea-level rise is adequately addressed in resilience policies.

## Climate Change Impacts in Skagit County

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Participants were asked, “How have climate impacts, such as warmer temperatures, flooding, wildfires, or smoky days, personally affected you or your household? How have they affected others in your community?”. Below are the common themes from responses.

### Air Quality and Smoke:

- Wildfire smoke prevents outdoor activities, triggers asthma, and forces windows to remain closed. Poor air quality means fewer days spent outside.
- Smoke from wildfires affects entire communities, including children and those with respiratory issues. Farmworkers face unsafe working conditions due to smoke and extreme heat.

### Flooding and Sea Level Rise:

- Development continues around shorelines and floodplains despite rising sea levels, putting homes at risk. Flooding and epic weather events are now regular, affecting homes in flood-prone areas.
- Coastal communities are already experiencing flooding and sewage treatment issues due to sea level rise. Infrastructure is not prepared for the increasing frequency of storms and extreme river events, and dikes need repair.

### Extreme Heat and Temperature Variations:

- Warmer days affect garden growth and cause erosion. Extreme heat makes outdoor activities, such as walking, difficult due to lack of tree cover. Heatwaves limit day-to-day activities for households with vulnerable members (e.g., elderly, asthma sufferers).

- As temperatures rise, more people (especially the elderly and underprivileged) are experiencing heat-related deaths. Schoolchildren and farmworkers are also affected, with concerns about safety in extreme heat.

**Environmental Degradation and Loss of Biodiversity:**

- There is frustration over pavement sprawl and biologically empty lawns replacing diverse, natural landscapes. Concerns about the regression of recycling efforts are also growing.
- The loss of wildlife and plant diversity is seen as reducing the overall quality of life. Climate anxiety is rising as people feel their communities are not prepared for these changes.

**Public Transportation and Infrastructure:**

- Households want to use public transportation more, but the lack of bus routes, frequency, and bike paths make these difficult, especially outside major cities.
- Communities are grappling with outdated infrastructure that is not prepared for climate impacts like higher tides and more frequent storms. There's also a lack of updated mapping and data to guide responsible development.

## Policy Areas Feedback

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### GHG Emissions Reduction

Participants were asked to place a star by the GHG emissions reduction policies they support and would like to see prioritized. Of the 6 GHG emissions reduction policy categories, renewable energy sources received the most votes with 12, followed by alternative transportation options (11), energy efficient buildings (10), land conservation & sprawl reduction (10), waste reduction (7), and electric vehicles with the fewest votes at 6.

Participants were also asked to share what else the County should consider, beyond the listed policy categories. The following are the policy recommendations shared:

Sector	Recommendation	Instances
Agriculture & Food Systems	Incentivize farmers to use practices that reduce GHG emissions and sequester carbon, such as reducing tillage and increasing organic matter	3
Buildings & Energy	Create incentives for community solar on commercial buildings and parking lots.	1
Buildings & Energy	Develop a map of where it would be possible to site commercial scale solar, wind, and battery storage facilities.	2
Buildings & Energy	Encourage the reduction of energy use through educational campaigns	2

Ecosystems	Sequester carbon through marshland restoration.	1
Ecosystems	Sequester carbon by protecting and restoring forests.	1
Ecosystems	Evaluate and conserve areas that contribute to “blue carbon”	1
Transportation	Increase bike and pedestrian infrastructure to reduce vehicle miles traveled. Add ‘green connectors’ in cities to support travel by walking, biking, and other forms of active transportation.	4
Transportation	Increase EV charging stations, especially east of I-5.	1
Transportation	Convert all buses to electric and increase bus services.	2
Transportation	Install EV charging infrastructure for public transportation and private vehicles in all developed areas of Skagit County.	1
Transportation	Develop a program to incentivize alternative modes of transportation by offering rebates on e-bike.	1
Waste Management	Sequester carbon through the production of biochar	1
Waste Management	Support recycling of waste materials, particularly glass.	1
Waste Management	Develop community food waste reduction plans and compost facilities	1
Waste Management	Develop incentives for businesses and residents to pay for food/yard waste pick up.	1
Zoning & Development	Reduce sprawl and encourage growth in cities. Increase urban density.	1
Zoning & Development	Require EV charging stations in new apartment buildings.	1

**Climate Resilience**

Participants were asked to place a star by the climate resilience policies they support and would like to see prioritized. Of the 8 climate resilience policy categories, natural ecosystem protection and restoration received the most votes with 17, followed by community education and outreach (11), infrastructure resilience (10), water protection and conservation (10), environmental justice and social equity (8), agriculture and food systems (8), community preparedness and response (7), and building weatherization with the fewest votes at 6.

Participants were also asked to share what else the County should consider, beyond the listed policy categories. The following are the policy recommendations shared:

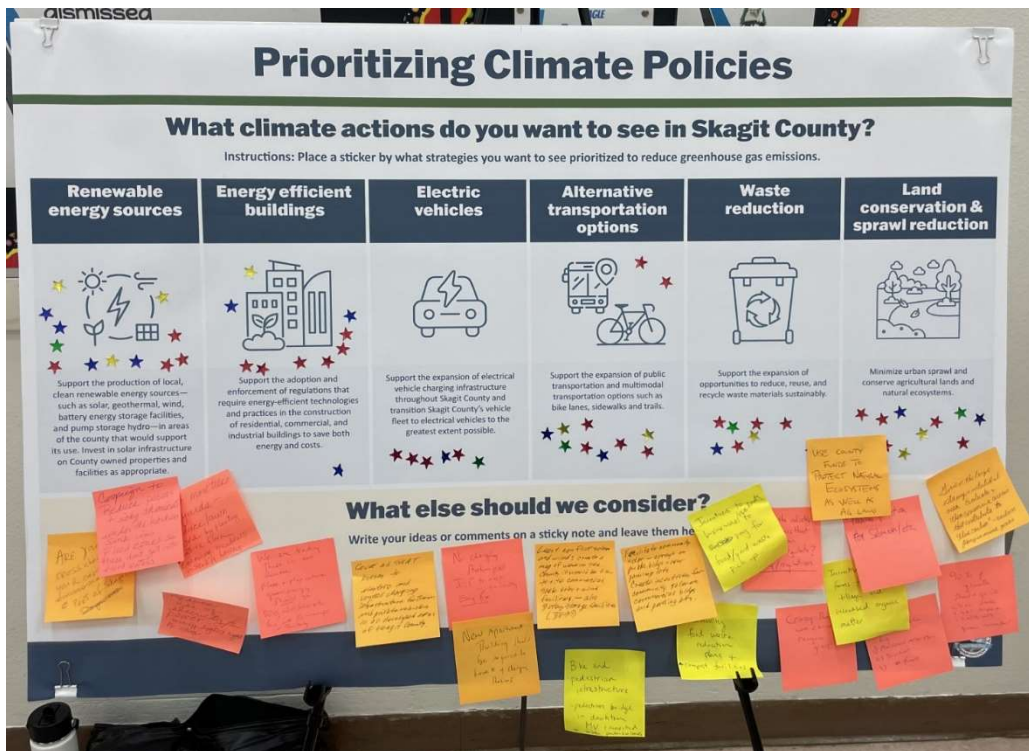
Sector	Recommendation	Instances
General	Create a Climate or Environmental Advisory Committee	3
Agriculture & Food Systems	Support the agricultural industry to decrease water use, fertilizers that	1

	pollute, green gas emissions, and crops that need enormous resource support.	
Agriculture & Food Systems	Support regional farms providing community food system resilience	1
Buildings & Energy	Plan for moving critical energy facilities out of the floodplain (e.g. electric substations) and do not permit any more (e.g. battery storage) in the floodplain.	1
Ecosystems	Protect salmon habitat, natural ecosystems, and agricultural land.	2
Ecosystems	Create incentives for planting trees, such as providing free trees.	3
Ecosystems	Transform parking lots into natural spaces and parks.	1
Ecosystems	Widen sidewalk strips and bury powerlines in residential neighborhoods to plant big conifers to mitigate heat, store carbon, and restore native landscape.	1
Ecosystems	Protect salt marshes to mitigate sea level rise and protect wildlife habitat.	1
Emergency Management	Conduct citizen training by emergency management services for emergency hazard response.	1
Emergency Management	Move dikes back to mitigate sea level rise.	2
Emergency Management	Ensure sea-level rise is adequately addressed in resilience policies.	3
Emergency Management	Create a TDR program to incentivize shoreline, riparian, and floodplain homeowners to move out of harms way	1
Emergency Management	Update geohazard mapping with a multi-decade horizon considering sea level rise, heavier rain episodes, and bigger floods.	1
Emergency Management	Plan for 80-100 years of infrastructure and setbacks to absorb climate impacts such as sea level rise.	1
Health & Well-being	Create a campaign to reduce poisons and chemicals under the kitchen sink in flood zones.	1
Health & Well-being	Increase tree canopy on playgrounds and at schools for heat control.	2
Health & Well-being	Support farm worker with protections against working in extreme heat and poor air quality.	3
Water Resources	Encourage homeowners to reduce lawns and plant native flora and trees in	6

	yards to conserve water resources and increase tree canopy.	
Water Resources	Develop an integrated plan for all watersheds in the region.	1
Zoning & Development	Strictly enforce regulations against building in geohazard zones.	1

## Appendix A: Climate Element Open House Poster Activities

### Poster 4: Prioritizing GHG Emission Reduction Climate Policies



Renewable energy sources – 12 votes

Energy efficient buildings – 10 votes

Electric vehicles – 6 votes

Alternative transportation options – 11 votes

Waste reduction – 7 votes

Land conservation & sprawl reduction – 10 votes

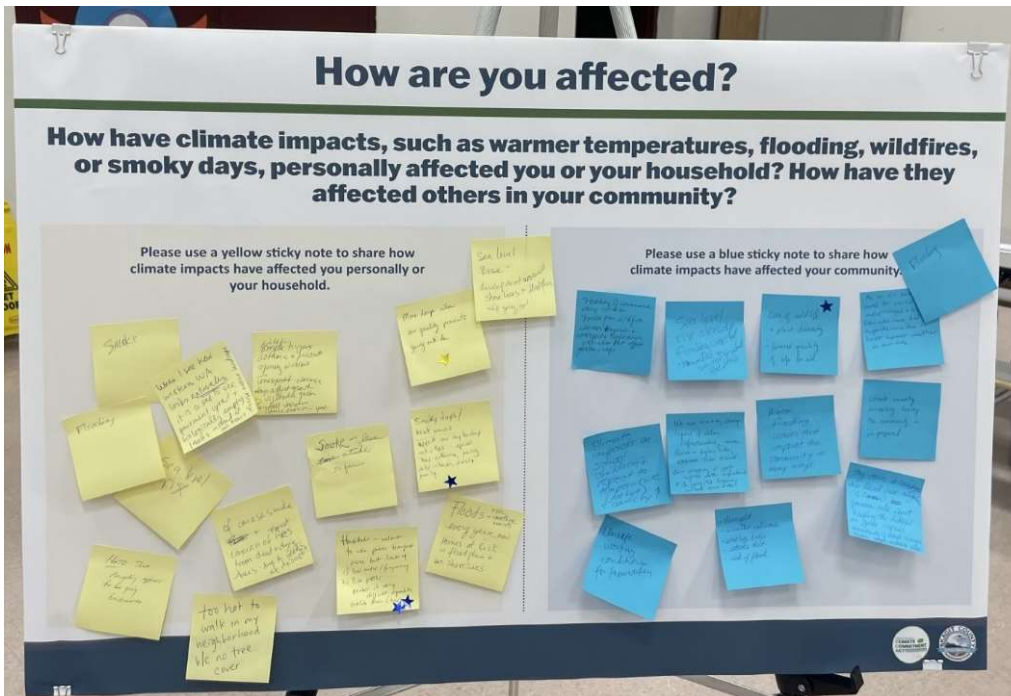
What else should we consider?

- 90% of growth should go in cities. Make cities dense and livable with green connectors.
- Carbon sequestration by 1) marshland restoration 2) biochar 3) forests
- Crazy that we can't recycle glass!

- Incentives to farms for reduced tillage and increased organic matter
- What are the industry related actions that the County can action or regulate?
- Community food waste reduction plans and compost facilities
- Bike and pedestrian infrastructure – pedestrian bridge in downtown Mount Vernon connected to bike paths and lanes.
- Facilitate community solar – arrays on public buildings and over parking lots. Create incentives for community solar on commercial buildings and parking lots.
- Least conflict solar and wind: create a map of where in County it would be okay to site commercial scale solar and wind facilities – also battery storage facilities (BESS)
- New apartment buildings should be required to have EV charging stations
- No charging stations past I-5 to east currently, easy fix
- Convert all buses to electric and install charging infrastructure for them and private vehicles in all developed areas of Skagit County.
- We are treating these 1:1 and reactive. Make map where green energy should go BESS, wind, solar, etc. Go out 50-100 year in thinking
- Incentives to businesses/ residents to pay for food/yard waste pick up
- Habitat protection for salmon – resilience policy
- Given the large estuary and intertidal area, evaluate and then conserve areas that contribute to “blue carbon”
- Use county funds to protect natural ecosystems as well as ag land - resilience policy
- Plant more trees in yards, reduce lawns by planting native flora, encourage meadows instead of lawns - resilience
- Reduce use of electricity power/or other, turn off lights at night for instance
- Campaign to reduce poisons and icky chemicals under the kitchen sink in flood zones so these don't get into flood waters – resilience
- Are you cross checking your carbon numbers emissions data with Port of Skagit?



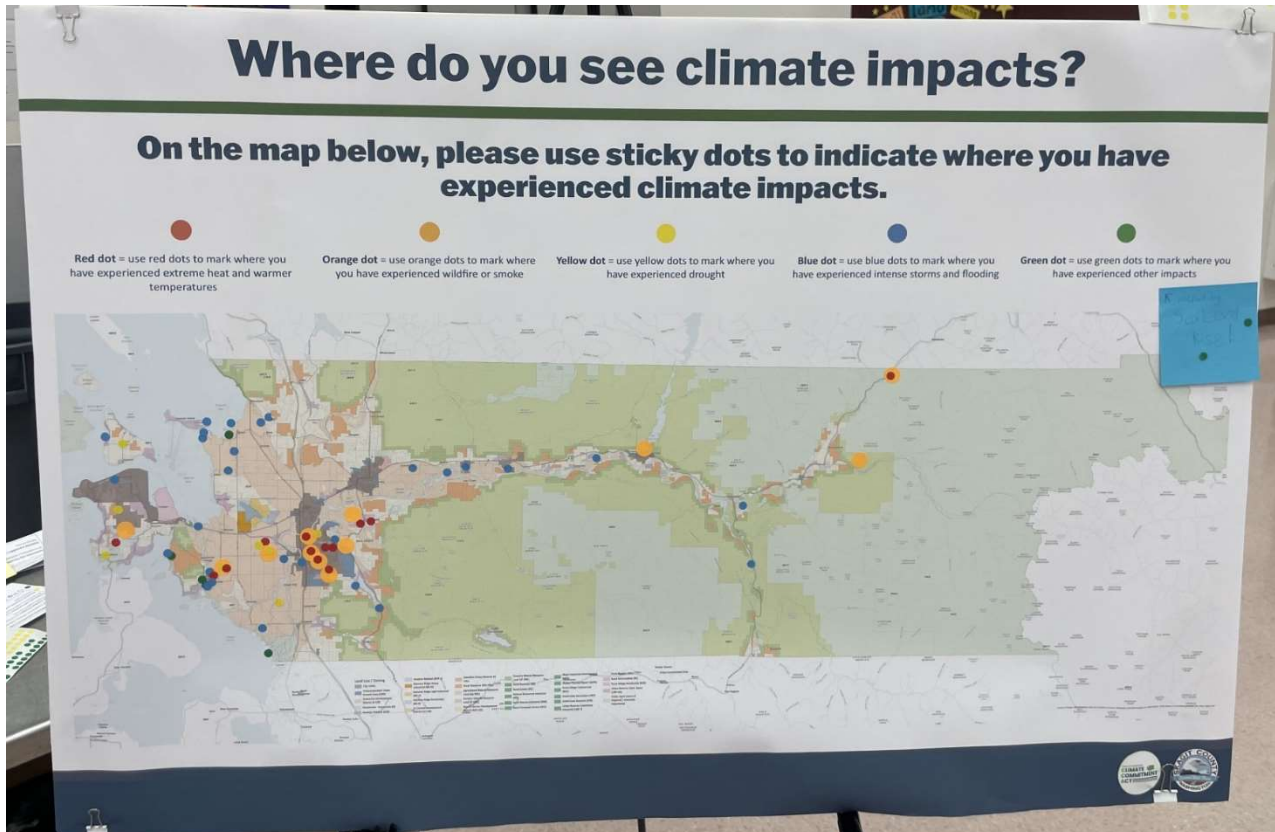
## Poster 6: How are you affected?



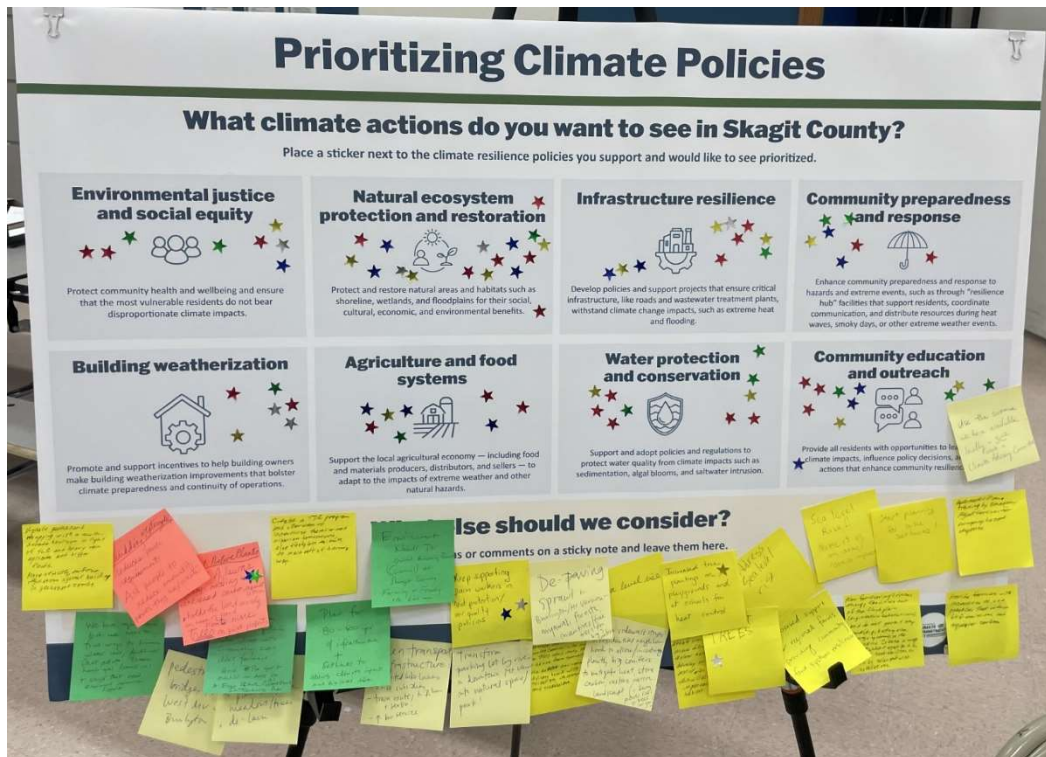
How climate impacts have affected you personally or your household	How climate impacts have affected your community
Sea level rise – development around shorelines and floodplains still going on!	Flooding
More days when air quality prevents going outside. +1	As an ICU nurse, I've cared for multiple underprivileged and elderly folks who have died of hyperthermia due to hotter summer weather in our area.
Flooding	Climate anxiety increasing. Feeling the community is unprepared.
When I see how Western WA looks <u>naturally</u> , it is so sad to see pavement sprawl and biologically empty lawns instead of tall trees and diverse nature landscape	My town is considering sea level rise mitigation (La Conner), farmers talk about keeping the dikes in good repair. Uncertainty of actual changes keep people unable to make definitive decisions.
Smoke	Loss of wildlife and plant diversity = lowered quality of life for all +1
Wildfire smoke triggers asthma and prevents opening windows	Sea level rise already flooding coastal communities and sewage treatment facilities
Unexpected warmer days affect growth in vegetable garden. Rainfall increases erosion in yard.	Flooding in communities along Salish Sea. Smoke from wildfires. Warmer and unexpected temperatures affect garden crop.
Sea level rise	Water, flooding issues that impact community in many ways
<u>Hate</u> that recycling appears to be going backwards	Drought, weather extreme, smoky days, extreme heat, risk of flood

Too hot to walk in neighborhood because no tree cover	We are already seeing impact of older infrastructure, more storms and higher tides, extreme river events. Our mapping is not up to date. Infrastructure and building still happening without good data.
Of course smoke and concern of forest fires from dead and dying trees due to years of drought	Climate impacts on school children with respect to temperature (too hot) and anxiety
Smoke – less time outside so far	Unsafe working conditions for farmworkers
Smoky days/heat waves affect our day to day activities – spouse has asthma, young children in house, elderly family. +1	
Household want to use public transport more but lack of 1)bus routes/frequency 2)bike paths - makes it very difficult especially outside main cities +2	
Floods – epic weather events every year now homes at risk in floodplain and on shorelines	

**Poster 7: Where do you see climate impacts?**



## Poster 8: Prioritizing Climate Resilience Policies



Environmental justice and social equity – 8 votes

Natural ecosystem protection and restoration – 17 votes

Infrastructure resilience – 10 votes

Community preparedness and response – 7 votes

Building weatherization – 6 votes

Agriculture and food systems – 8 votes

Water protection and conservation – 10 votes

Community education and outreach – 11 votes

What else should we consider?

- Use the science we have available locally – Skagit Climate Science Consortium. Create a Climate Advisory Committee
- Have more citizen training by emergency management services for emergency hazard response
- Start planning for dike setbacks!
- Provide farmers with incentives to use practices that reduce GHG emissions and sequester carbon – GHG policy
- Sea level rise!! Name it as an issue! Look at impacts

- Plan for moving critical energy facilities out of the floodplain (e.g. electric substations) and do not permit any more (e.g. battery storage) in the floodplain. Create a map of where it would be okay to site such facilities as well as solar and wind installations.
- Increased tree planting on playgrounds and at schools for heat control +1
- De-paving sprawl in Burlington/Mt. Vernon – Miyawaki forests, incentives/free trees for big 3 conifers
- Environment needs its own advisory board (Council) at Skagit County, farming and forestry have one
- Create a TDR program and other ways to incentivize shoreline and riparian homeowners, also floodplain residents to move out of harms way
- Update geohazard mapping with a multi-decade horizon in light of sea level rise and heavy rain episodes and bigger floods. More strictly enforce regulations against building in geohazard zones.
- Building weatherization – reduce power requirements, ask people to reduce amount of power they use/waste - GHG policy
- We love agriculture but we need to find ways to lower water use, fertilizers that pollute, green gas emissions, and crops that need enormous resource support
- Plant native plants; get rid of lawns (stop mowing and increase carbon sequestration); holds the land securely in case of flood; plant more trees on private property +2
- Get all the players together who work with conservation, rivers, dikes, farmland and the government entities and do a full scale / all watershed integrated plan
- Plan for 80-100 year of infrastructure and setbacks to absorb climate impacts and sea level rise
- Incentivize / support residents to plan wildflower meadows/trees and de-lawn
- Pedestrian bike bridge to West Mount Vernon and Burlington
- Green transportation infrastructure – protected bike lanes, e-bike subsidies, train routes to Bellingham and Seattle, increase bus service – GHG policy
- Keep supporting farm workers in heat protection/air quality policies +2
- Transform parking lot by river in downtown Mt. Vernon into natural space/ park!
- Widen sidewalk strips in residential neighborhood to allow/incentivize planting big conifers to mitigate heat, store carbon, restore native landscape, and bury powerlines so trees can grow
- Sea level rise
- To make well informed decisions, the Planning Commission and the BOCC need ready access to advice from something like environmental advisory board with scientists, resource management, and stakeholders
- More trees +1
- Address sea level rise
- Use salt marsh to help absorb wave energy, move dikes back to allow saltwater marsh to develop or continue to exist as sea level rises, this will also protect important wildlife habitat
- Increased support for regional farms providing community food system resilience