

**Skagit County Planning Commission  
Presentation: 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update  
August 20, 2024**

**Planning**

**Commissioners:** Kathy Mitchell, District 1  
Vince Henley, District 1 (absent)  
Angela Day, District 1  
Amy Hughes, District 2 (via Zoom)  
Tim Raschko, Chair, District 2  
Joe Woodmansee, District 2 (absent)  
Tammy Candler, Vice Chair, District 3  
Martha Rose, District 3  
Jen Hutchison, District 3

**PDS Staff:** Jack Moore, Director  
Robby Eckroth, Senior Planner  
Tara Satushek, Senior Planner

**Consultants:** Clay White, Kimley-Horn  
Lisa Grueter, BERK (via Zoom)

**Public Remarks**

**Commenters:** Chuck Messinger  
Shannon Bowman Sarkisian  
Jessica Nguyen  
Emily Mason  
Steven Simmons

Chair Tim Raschko: (gavel) Good evening. The August 20<sup>th</sup>, 2024, special meeting of the Skagit County Planning Commission is now in session. We are missing Commissioner Henley, Commissioner Woodmansee, and Commissioner Hughes should be Zooming. Is there any way to confirm that?

Vice Chair Tammy Candler: There she is.

Chair Raschko: There she is. Okay, great. Thank you. This evening we have Public Remarks. This time on the agenda is an opportunity for anyone to speak to the Planning Commission about any topic except items scheduled on the agenda for a public hearing the same day, which is not happening, or items that have had a public hearing and are still under Planning Commission deliberation. Public Remarks, which is not part of the formal public participation process for any development regulation or Comprehensive Plan amendment project, is limited to three minutes per speaker, up to 15 minutes total. And we'd ask that anybody who wishes to speak would please clearly state their name and their address. So is there anybody who wishes to address the Planning Commission? All right, how about the gentleman first?

Chuck Messinger: Good evening. Chuck Messinger. Address: 2336 Martin Road here in Mount Vernon. I am the Coordinated Entry Manager for the County now with Volunteers of America, and

I thought this might be a good opportunity for me to share some numbers as far as where we're at with the Coordinated Entry System, and hopefully provide some insights on how we can work towards some housing solutions.

In the Coordinated Entry System right now, as of about 20 minutes ago, we have 364 households and 584 individuals that are currently unhoused and seeking assistance. Now this is not a full reflection of homelessness for the county. It's only the ones that are utilizing our resource.

The Growth Management Act has necessitated, obviously, focusing development on permanent, affordable housing solutions for low income housing in urban areas. Permanent support of housing should most definitely be focused in urban areas as many need access – easy access – to services. Forty-six percent of the heads-of-household in the Coordinated Entry System self-report having mental health disorder; 30% report having chronic health conditions; and 67% report having disabilities. It's in the County's best interest to focus housing solutions where resources are readily available. But what about the rest? Only 24% of those that are in Coordinated Entry meet the definition of "chronic homelessness." Thirty-seven percent of those that are in the Coordinated Entry System are homeless for the first time. Forty-seven percent of those households lived in stable housing for over a year prior to their current homelessness. These are families that have been priced out of their housing; either they're experiencing the burden of inflation on a fixed income; or cannot find sufficient income to support their families in the current market.

I think as a county we're making great strides towards developing long-term solutions. Perhaps even within the next few years we'll see supply meet demand and we'll see a natural decrease in housing costs. Until then, we have a first step. One step is just a curb if we don't finish the staircase. If we don't focus our attention on providing safety and security to those that are in need right now, we are not providing them what they need to grow. Temporary housing solutions need to be created and will always be needed. I've dug deep into the expectations surrounding the Growth Management Act and there's no suggestion that temporary housing solutions are factored into growth predictions or obligations. Let the Cities focus on permanent support of housing solutions. There's a wealth of unincorporated land that could be utilized for developing small housing, short-term housing solutions. Rezoning could be done to accommodate those solutions. Good land –

(sound of timer)

Mr. Messinger: – designated as floodplains be used for temporary solutions. That's above my pay grade. You cut me off. Do you want me to finish?

Chair Raschko: How much further do you have?

Mr. Messinger: Another paragraph.

Discuss amongst yourselves. For the cost of developing one low income housing opportunity, we can create up to a hundred short-term housing solutions. As this is a crisis, I work for everyone in the Coordinated Entry System and it pains me to tell nearly 600 people that they have to wait a few years for a housing solution. Thank you for your time.

Chair Raschko: Thank you very much.

Mr. Messinger: You bet.

Chair Raschko: That's major.

Shannon Bowman-Sarkisian: Hi, my name is Shannon Bowman-Sarkisian. I live at 3120 \_\_\_ Street, Apartment 346, in Bellingham, but I am the Public Services Librarian at Mount Vernon City Library. And I would like to start by saying that I appreciate what is already in the plan because I would love to live in Skagit County but have been unable to find housing. But I also wanted to share what I see at the library.

When people are in crisis, they come to the library. And the people that I see coming in are – they have lost housing and it is often families with small children, or children, and it is people who have lost their housing quickly. They had stable housing. Sometimes it's they're fleeing domestic violence. Oftentimes it is financial. We see a lot of seniors as well – senior adults who have lost their housing and are unable to afford alternate housing accommodations.

So, again, while I appreciate what is already in the plan it affects the staff of the library. Three of us have had to move in the last year, including myself, due to rising rents or buildings being sold and simply having being told to leave. So while I welcome opportunities that are helpful to me and my staff, I also am thinking about the whole community and what I see every day, and the people who are in crisis or in crisis who I am unable to help because they have often already gone somewhere and have been told there's no housing. So thank you very much for your time. I appreciate it. And have a good night.

Chair Raschko: Thank you.

Jessica Nyugen: My name is Jessica Nyugen. I live at 19526 East Hickox Road in Mount Vernon. I am a senior mortgage lender serving Skagit County. And I wanted to talk about or give context to housing conditions in Skagit County currently.

The median household income for Skagit County's about 82,000 and that equates – in terms of buying power or how much house you can buy – that equates to 375,000. That's not a lot. The median house price right now this year is 590,000, so there's a little bit of a disconnect on affordability. To purchase the average sales priced house in Mount Vernon or the county, that's income over 125,000. It's pretty significant. And that's up 5% this year. And I think people are quick to point to things like mortgage rates, inflation, the cost to build. Mortgage rates are actually below the 50-year average. Inflation, while high, is coming down. Builders tend to put out a finished product. A lot of that markup's happening in the supply chain. They're getting it at the end. I specialize in construction lending. They're not gouging people. If you ask me what the average cost to build a single-family home right now, it's about 550, 600. It's right in line with the median sales price. It's very expensive to build right now. And I would strongly urge – I've heard a lot of conversation about, you know, the County absorbing numbers on single-family housing, but we really have to look at alternative housing. That's multi-family, that's tiny homes, that's manufactured homes. The plan to infill urban areas while great – I understand there's an infrastructure need there and a reasoning behind it. The problem is, in a lot of those communities there's HOAs and CC & Rs that prevent alternative housing that are already in place. The County's going to have a little more flexibility if the infrastructure part is examined to kind of find a balance there. So I would urge consideration around that.

The other thing that I would stress is the numbers we have on data, it's always historic. It's always looking backwards. But what we know is coming is the City of Arlington is the fastest growing city in the state of Washington. They've put on 10,000,000 square feet of commercial space. That's

10,000 jobs. We have not seen that yet on our demand. They're only building about 4 to 5,000 units.

(sound of timer)

Ms. Nguyen: So it's not enough. We're going to have a significant demand in the next three to five years here because of that. They don't have space there so it's going to push up.

Chair Raschko: Okay. May I ask a question, please? That cost to build a house – about 550 – have you any idea what percentage of that cost is permitting fees and impact fees?

Ms. Nguyen: It varies by area. It's not – the County is pretty modest, I would say. This is not the cost to get your septic design, your permit, or your design plans or some cost that goes into it before you get the actual permit. I tell people on average when you take into cost to those plus the permit for the County, it's about 10,000. Areas like the City of Anacortes are closer to 30 to 40,000. Most of the Cities are fairly modest, with the exception of Anacortes, but you have a lot of out-of-pocket costs before you even get to your permitting. Just your service providers.

Chair Raschko: Okay, thank you. Did you have something? Go ahead.

Vice Chair Candler: I just want to let people know who are here and who had important things to say about some upcoming topics we're going to be discussing, the Public Remarks aren't part of the public process. So I would just encourage everyone that wants to be heard on this stuff to go ahead and submit comments as well in the formal process.

Chair Raschko: Good point. Is there anybody else? Please go ahead.

Emily Mason: My name is Emily Mason and I don't have an address because I have been homeless since July 31st. I used to live at 336 Sterling Street in Sedro-Woolley. I lived there for eight years. I raised my two children from early elementary through high school there. And then a real estate agency developer took our home. They – it was sold out from underneath us by the conservator that took our landlord's estate when he passed away. And we were made homeless in six days. And I know there's rules and laws about that but we couldn't fight it. We couldn't get a lawyer fast enough. We couldn't – once an eviction is filed – just filed, even if it's fought – when you go to get a background check to rent another place, that comes up and you're denied automatically. So we had five days to vacate our home of eight years and move on to somewhere else.

I work for Consistent Care. I am a housing and employment case manager, so I help with the homeless and its legal population in helping to stabilize them with homes and jobs. I have a good job. I work fulltime. I work really, really hard. And I can't afford a two-bedroom apartment in Sedro-Woolley or Mount Vernon or Burlington. They start at about \$2200 a month. In order to make the income requirement for that, that's about \$66 to 7000 a month for me as a single mom with two kids. Even with a good job, I don't make anywhere near that. And so now my children – one of them is special needs and 18 and still in high school, and the other one's a junior. We're having to take shelter out in Samish Island in a garage someone's offered us for a little while. And I grew up in the – I mean, I spent eight years here serving the people of this county, helping the people of this county, and the lack of affordable housing has caused me to basically become one of my own clients. After eight years of working and working so hard to help get people off the street, to help all of our lives be better, I don't have an address. My children – we're still arguing amongst the school districts about who's going to pick them up to take them to school on September 3<sup>rd</sup>.

Is it Burlington? Is it Sedro-Woolley? They don't have this. They don't have drivers here. It's tough, guys. And it's easy to think of it as the other people, but I'll tell you that I work really hard for my money and I do a lot of good in the neighborhood and I'm not on substances and I'm not what you would consider a lot of people think of as a homeless person, but I live in a garage. And that super sucks. Honestly. Sorry. I hope I can say that on the recording. But I just wanted to show you guys that this affordability, this housing crisis –

(sound of timer)

Ms. Mason: – it affects everybody and in really super super, horrible horrible ways. And the greediness of some of these developers can decimate what this time last month was a stable life. Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Is there anybody else?

Steven Simmons: Hello. My name's Steven Simmons, 18206 West Big Lake Boulevard. I'm a social worker. I work at a street outreach department at Community Action. I just want to say that I do appreciate the focus on 50 to 80% AMI. That's where almost all of my staff fits. And, you know, I just see people really struggling with housing all the time; however, you know, I'm hearing, like, rumors that, like, that's at the exclusion of the zero to 50%. We're going to put that on Cities. And I just – for me, like, I tend to not want to think of, like, all one and none of the other. Like, we can create, like, some matching funds, something like that to help Cities with the zero to 50%. Say we have about 600 people on the housing interest pool. Our team worked with about 840 people this fiscal year so far. We're almost at the end. So, you know, the housing crisis is hitting all of our different income levels. We have – like, I have family in the building trades that needs to get to work, so, you know, I hope we can just, like, get it together and, you know, make some housing for everyone. Thanks.

Chair Raschko: Thank you. Anybody else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Is there anybody online?

(indistinct talking)

Chair Raschko: Well, thank you, everybody, for your comments. They're well heard and appreciated. We'll switch now to our main item tonight, the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update, the Preliminary Draft Policy Amendments for the Land Use, Housing, and Economic Development Elements. So we have tonight Mr. Clay White, if you'd kindly present.

Clay White: You can hear me okay? (unintelligible for about a minute due to audio problems)

Vice Chair Candler: I think we're getting some echo sound.

Mr. White: You know, I thought that the comments tonight were pretty moving. I mean, it really gave you the spectrum of the housing crisis that we're facing and puts an emphasis on how important it is that we think creatively to try to solve issues; how it takes the County working with all the Cities; how it takes the County working with nonprofits and other agencies like this is roll-up-your-sleeves time. And we're hoping that we're at the beginning of that process. And the

journey doesn't stop with getting the Comprehensive Plan adopted, but this is kind of laying, like, the foundation that that proverbial house is built on.

So one comment that I just wanted to make sure on the zero to 50% AMI housing, the reason is that the housing types that fit between zero to 50% AMI are typically multifamily housing and we can't build multifamily housing in rural areas generally, so it's not – so I just wanted to clarify it's not the *County* saying, We don't want to provide that housing at that area of median income. It's really state law that says that more urban growth has to be focused within Cities and Urban Growth Areas. So I just wanted to make sure – and I'm happy to talk with you after the meeting if you'd like.

So tonight we've got some pretty simple goals. We're going to provide just a little bit of a project overview. We'll do that every month. We want to make sure that people who are joining us online or in person could get a little bit of context about why we're here tonight, how it fits into this big project that we're working on. Talk a little bit about our policy approach: So how are we developing the draft policies? And so if you can understand how do we create change and movement as we plan for it tonight – housing, land use, and economic development. Discuss the policy approach for housing; and review and discuss preliminary draft policy amendments for all three of the Elements that are before you tonight.

We are going to talk a little bit about just kind of sideline a little bit and talk about some housing issues that the County's facing. And I think it really will put some of these – some of the items that we're facing – in context. So hopefully over the next year as we're working together that we can really get some solutions as we move forward to try to solve some of the issues that we got comments on tonight. And then, of course, any questions or feedback. Again, all of this will be coming back to the Planning Commission. We'll chat about that as well.

So just a little bit of a project overview and schedule. Every 10 years, the County is required to update its Comprehensive Plan. We're planning for the next 20 years of growth, so this is the 2025 Comprehensive Plan Update so we're planning out to 2045. We're planning for people and jobs, transportation, protection of the environment, now our natural resource lands – all those important things. And your Comprehensive Plan really provides that policy support. It sets the direction. Policies by themselves don't really do anything. They're intentional. They say the things that you want to accomplish and how you're going to accomplish them, so when you set your policies then you have your development regulations, like zoning, and you have programs, like working with nonprofit housing providers, or it could talk about policies about coordinating jurisdictions to solve common problems.

So the words in this document matter, and one of the things that we've talked about before is one of the things we want to make sure as we're drafting policy is that there's intention between the policies. Sometimes you can have very passive policies that you can't really drive how it's going to be implemented or when or how or who's going to be responsible. So as we get towards a draft of the Comprehensive Plan, you're going to see some of the policies pulled out into an implementation strategy so we could be thinking about kind of, What's the approach to taking these from words to action?

This is all a very long process, and one of the things I want to make sure, especially for those who are in the audience tonight or listening, is that we've broken up this process into two kind of pieces. This summer we've done a bunch of community engagement. We've drafted some preliminary draft policies and we're going through these elements kind of one at a time. And that's intentional, because we want to be able to have opportunity for someone that just cares about housing or

land use to be able to review some policies and provide feedback without having to go through a really large document. So this summer we're kind of releasing these elements by month, two or three at a time; we're taking public comment on them so people can submit comments. If you have housing policies, it'll be opened up for public comment. I'll go through a slide on that in just a moment.

And then this winter we'll pull everything together into a draft Comprehensive Plan, and then that draft is going to go through a public process and review before it gets finally to the Planning Commission for a public hearing and then to the Board of County Commissioners. We'll also be looking at development regulation changes that implement the policies in the Comprehensive Plan, so that'll be coming to the Planning Commission as well.

So this is a really early opportunity to get involved, but if you don't submit comments over the next month on this element, it's not your last opportunity to get involved. The deadline for completion is December of 2025, but we're hoping to get done by June of 2025. That's the original deadline that was set by the legislature – is extended by six months, but we're hoping to get done next summer, so we're still on schedule to meet that.

So last month we came to the Planning Commission. We talked about the Rural Element and the Natural Resource Lands Element. That comment period is just about to conclude, that 30-day comment period to take initial comments on the initial policies. We've gotten a number of comments that have come in and we've received some comments from the Planning Commission – thank you. We appreciate those that are listening online that provided comments as well. It gives us some early feedback, you know, so that we're not just putting a draft and then releasing big document again. Anything we hear right now is really helpful. It helps us have more time with the County team to think about the strategies and actions we can be using to solve problems. So that's kind of the net benefit of doing this month by month.

So this month we're going to be doing Land Use, Housing, and Economic Development. So after tonight, it'll be another month through September 19<sup>th</sup> for people to provide preliminary comments. Next month we'll be with you to talk about Transportation, Capital Facilities, and Utilities. These are also required elements of your Comprehensive Plan so we'll have draft policies for you to talk about there. Again another month and then Climate and Resiliency, which is a new element in the comprehensive plan, and we'll also be talking about the Environment as well. So that will run through November we'll have those comment periods. We may try to schedule a time with you maybe in December to talk about kind of an overview of possible development regulation changes as well, so you can kind of see that before they're drafted and come to you. And then we'll pull it all together into that draft Comprehensive Plan for the spring – or next spring. I'm sorry. You can see that we have a project website. You can also email comments so we really encourage that. The more community input we get, the better plan that we'll have.

So just kind of a summarizing: We went through this last month, but we've done a lot of early engagement, really focused on what are the things that are important to the community. And then we could work those into the early drafts of the policies. We had a community survey. We've done some pop-up events. We did stakeholder interviews with community groups. We've done three open houses. Now we're doing comment periods.

Kind of things to note that will be coming up this fall: The same month that we're going to be doing the Environment and the Climate Elements, we're also going to have that Climate open house and Environment. We'll also have – I'll be there and our team to talk about anything people want to talk about outside of those elements, but really focusing on that. We're also looking at having

a survey as well, just focused on the new Climate Resiliency Element. So that'll be happening. So more engagement this fall. And of course we're going to have a lot of public meetings and hearings this week and get the draft put together.

So the Growth Management Act is intended to be a bottoms-up planning process. So you have a framework. We have the Growth Management Act, our state law. We have state rules, which implement the law. We have guidance from the state that you're utilizing. And then we have other guidance documents, like our Countywide Planning Policies, which are shared policies between the City and the County, which kind of have some shared principles. And your Comprehensive Plan is required to be consistent with those Countywide Planning Policies. Those are policies the County works on with the City. They're approved by the Board of County Commissioners. But it's kind of nice. Like, if the Cities and the County all did their own thing and they never talked to each other, you probably wouldn't get all the plans to add up to 100%. So really that goal is there are a lot of things that, you know, in isolation things wouldn't work very well, but together they can accomplish a lot. So that's what the Countywide Planning Policies are. So you have some things that you're required to do and – but one of the things that's most important is just making sure that you're mixing all those state requirements with the community voice. So we've talked a little bit when we released the Rural Element, for example. We talked a lot about how could we get more affordable housing in our rural areas, keep rural areas rural, but how do we also provide options for people that may be a little bit further from cities to provide housing. You know, to find more affordable housing options than there are right now. So that's where you kind of get. We have to make sure that we follow Growth Management Act and not go too far in terms of what can be allowed within those Limited Areas of More Intense Rural Development that we've talked about. But also try to recognize you have a housing crisis in the county and you're trying to figure out ways to also provide affordable housing. These are really tough issues, but really trying to provide that balance as we provide policy. So the policies that you'll see that are in your packet, they're focused on addressing some of the state law changes, kind of getting some words – starting to do a little bit of wordsmithing – contain the voice from early community engagement as well. And then we're going to hear more and then we can continue to make changes as we go.

Is there any questions on that?

(silence)

Mr. White: Okay.

Chair Raschko: No.

Mr. White: Okay. So we're going to spend a few minutes and then I'm going to hand it over to Lisa to talk about the Housing and Land Use Elements. Before I do this, I want to kind of discuss with the Planning Commission a kind of a housing and jobs challenge that we've been working on with the Cities over the last few months, but it's just something that I think we need to work through. As you heard tonight, we have these housing issues. It's not just a county issue; it's a city issue, too, but just trying to work through, How's your Housing Element? No, your development regulations work so that you could take the challenges on.

So there's three elements that I'd like to talk about that kind of relate to housing: the Rural Element, the Land Use Element, and the Housing Element. So, you know, one of them – the Rural Element – we talked about last month. Two we'll discuss this evening. But I wanted to provide an overview to frame up kind of our policy approach to housing. So you're going to see policies in our Housing Element that talk about providing more affordable housing types, mixes of housing,

all the things that we're required to do under the state law. But there are some challenges, so I want to just kind of walk through this and then kind of just maybe we can have a little bit of a conversation.

First let's talk about the Rural Element. Those are those areas that are outside of our cities and our Urban Growth Areas. We talked about them last month. So the Rural Element shall provide a variety of rural densities but they're going to be at lower intensities that you find in rural areas. So you have one-acre lots – or five-acre lots and 10-acre lots and 20-acre lots. Some of the growth happens in our rural areas, but it's usually single-family. Could be manufactured housing but it's usually more spread-out growth. Because the goal is you can get creative so you can do things like provide for clustering or density transfers, like transfer of development right program. So you can find ways to get creative about your housing. You can use those innovative techniques, but you still have to keep rural areas rural. And in fact, when we've talked to the community, the community, while they're wanting to tackle housing and jobs issues, we've heard nothing else but wanting to keep our rural areas rural as well and preserve rural character, which is great. So you could provide for some housing in these areas but it's more of a challenge.

We do have these areas called Limited Areas of More Intense Rural Development – these little nodes where growth has historically happened. They're not cities and they're not going to turn into cities. There have been some changes to state laws that allow us to provide more housing types in these areas, but they're pretty small. They're surrounded by rural areas. And you can only kind of provide a *little* bit more density if you have the services to be able to support the development. So when you have these little growth nodes, I think what we've heard from the Planning Commission and from the public is we need to get creative about what kind of options we could provide in these areas. If it's, you know, density incentives or it could be providing for more types of housing that may be more affordable. Also keeping the character of those communities. But it's – we're going to have to kind of shimmy our way in to make sure that we can meet state laws and also kind of the community vision for this. But that's one place we can put housing. About 20% of the total growth that's being planned for the county is happening in rural areas, rural and resource land area. So 80% is really happening in cities.

So let's talk a little bit about the Land Use Element that we're going to talk about tonight. So the Land Use Element is focused on the general distribution and general location of *uses*, like housing, jobs, recreation, and open space. So, you know, when you think about the Land Use Element, you can think about your Comprehensive Plan map, your zoning map, densities, maybe allowed and conditional uses that you might have in your development regulations. It may talk about things like how you would do an Urban Growth Area boundary change – the process for that, when they can occur. So it really is that framework.

Then we get to the Housing Element – so you can see how those all kind of work together. So the Housing Element identifies local policies and regulations that result – that – well, let's just focus on how they – so it includes an inventory and analysis of existing to projected housing needs. These include the housing for moderate, low, very low, and extremely low income households, emergency housing needs, emergency shelters that permit support of housing. The Housing Element identifies sufficient capacity of land for housing for people making incomes and housing that supports that, so we've talked about needing to supply housing types at different – for what different incomes that people make and what types of housing correspond with those. Those are part of the Housing Element.

But the County does have a little bit of a challenge and some of our policies that we're going to float to the Planning Commission address this. So within – there are some areas around our cities

that are unincorporated Urban Growth Areas, so they're areas that the Cities are going to annex in the future. In many counties in the state, urban growth happens in those areas prior to them being annexed. So – and there's a variety of them. And the Growth Management Act actually anticipated this should occur. Urban growth happens in these areas. They're Urban Growth Areas. So water and sewer is provided to those areas by the City or the service provider. Urban growth happens. Annexation then occurs.

The County's approach with the Cities – so at the Countywide Planning Policy level it's been a little different over the last 30 years. It's not unique. This happens in other counties. But urban growth is not really facilitated in the Urban Growth Areas until it's annexed. And so those areas kind of – they have a(n) Urban Residential Reserve designation on them. And essentially they're kind of like holding zones. So they're identified as Urban Growth Areas, but urban growth is not facilitated within those areas until they're annexed. We've talked about this with the City. The issue this creates is we can't really assign capacity to those areas. We can't plan for urban densities in those areas because it can't happen until annexation occurs.

So every community kind of goes through its kind of challenges and how you facilitate growth and challenges. I mean, the downside to that is that, you know, it's an untapped kind of market of areas that could be developed around cities. There's good reasons it's happened. The Cities haven't done anything wrong. If urban growth happened outside of their city, unless there was agreements in place maybe it wouldn't look like the kind of growth that they're wanting within their city. It could be developed with different types of infrastructure – the sidewalks not be the same or the road standards might be different. So sometimes it's not as easy to annex areas if they don't develop to the standards that you have within your City. But there are ways to work around that. Interlocal agreements. You can have ways of the County using some of the City's regulations. Some of the annexation laws have changed too that can help make these things happen a little easier. But right now that's – so where there's growth targets that are assigned to the Cities, all of that growth will happen within the City; but there's no portion of that that's allocated to the unincorporated portion of it.

So what you're going to see in some of the policies that \_\_\_\_\_, we'll talk about a little bit tonight is just moving forward it would be good to continue this conversation with the Skagit Council of Governments and the Cities about, Is this the best way to be doing things? Or if there's concerns about providing growth in these areas, how do we overcome them? What are the tools?

The neat thing is it's really impressive to see how the Counties and the Cities work together towards common goals. And this issue may not have come up as much before because our Housing Element requirements changed since the last update. It's not about just providing capacity for housing. It's about having to provide all these different housing types for people at different income levels. It's much more challenging. This is a bigger challenge and it recognizes the housing challenges that we have. But wanted to set the table as we go through policies so you can look at them through this lens, because the County's really planning. So just to make sure we're clear, the County is really planning for the 20% of growth that's going to happen in the rural areas. But when we're talking about Housing Element policies that focus on urban growth, urban densities, variety of housing types in urban areas, we're not going to see a lot of that in the unincorporated Skagit County around our cities because those urban services currently aren't provided that would facilitate it. So there's some planning left to do that I think is worthy.

Now the upshot is, in working with the Cities, they have a lot of capacity within their existing city limits to accommodate a lot of this growth. So it's not like it can't be accommodated. But I think that there're some things that could be done in the future that would even be more focused on

these issues. So – long story – but it’s a way of saying I think that maybe there’s some policies we can set that would set actions in motion to say it’s a priority to continue to work on these issues, that we’ve got to be working with the Cities on maybe some alternatives. Maybe you end up not making any different decisions, but at least this is a worthy conversation. Does that make sense?

Any comments or questions before we start talking about the Elements?

Commissioner Angela Day: I have a question.

Chair Raschko: Please. Commissioner Day?

Commissioner Day: Thank you. You mentioned that there are areas – the Urban Growth Areas are set aside to be annexed by the Cities in the future. So there’s some period of time where they are part of the county before they’re annexed. So before they’re established as an Urban Growth Area, are there urban services provided? Or is that time period between creating an Urban Growth Area and annexation a time to extend those public infrastructure services to that? In other words, what is the delay time between creating an Urban Growth Area and annexation, and what has to happen in between?

Mr. White: Well, I mean, there is no requirement for there to be a time period between when an Urban Growth Area is established and when it’s annexed.

Commissioner Day: Are there circumstances or conditions that a City generally is interested in seeing happen before it completes annexation?

Mr. White: I don’t think it’s the circumstances for that property. It may be circumstances within the City of wanting to – it may be advantageous to add some additional land; it may be looking for capacity. I mean, there’s a variety of reasons that they may want to do it but there’s nothing that’s compelling someone to do an annexation. So the timing could be really short. It could be a year later. But then also there’s areas that have been there for – that could have been there for 20 years that haven’t annexed. And so the way the Growth Management Act is set out is you can’t assign – you know, in order to assign capacity to it, like to say, This property has the capacity for 16 dwelling units per acre, you’d have to show you have the zoning that actually says you can have 16 dwelling units per acre. So that’s really the challenge, and so the County really doesn’t even have the urban zoning right now that they can apply to those areas because this isn’t the way things have been done.

And so, again, the Cities generally have the capacity to support the targets, but there could be an opportunity to, you know, if there’s ways to get the Cities comfortable with it, I mean, this could be like a good conversation to really open up more land, to have more options. And I think there’s ways where everybody can – everybody’s needs can be met, and I think it’s worthy of a pretty broad conversation.

Commissioner Day: Great. Thank you. Just one more question.

Mr. White: Of course.

Commissioner Day: Are Urban Growth Areas gen – do they generally already have things like public sewer or water availability, or is that not necessary before an Urban Growth Area is established?

Mr. White: Before an Urban Growth Area is established, you have to – the City would have to show they have the capital facilities and utilities and service to be able to serve it. So they'd have to show they have the sewer capacity, they have the utilities, the transportation infrastructure. But it doesn't have to be in those areas. And usually it's development-driven that would happen. The exception is that sewer is called an urban governmental service, so you can't – water's a rural governmental service – so you might find times that water systems may – they could be in those areas before they became an Urban Growth Area. Generally sewer would not. So they're just \_\_\_. You know, one of the jurisdictions I worked before – what's called the Southwest Urban Growth Area in Snohomish County, I think is one of the largest cities in the state of Washington. It's just an unincorporated urban area. So what's happened here is not unique. There's lots of counties that have this kind of – that growth happens in these areas as they're annexed. But because of these new housing laws and changes and a big focus on housing, it may be a time to go, Maybe we need to be talking about this more. And so we have been talking to the Cities. The County's been actually talking to them and trying to really, like – there's no reason on the back end of comp plans to work through; let's just communicate right now. And that process is going well. But you will see policies that we'll talk a little bit about tonight and they're in here, that are focused on continuing this conversation, not just for housing but for jobs and economic development as well. Because this affects where you can put businesses and jobs and everything else.

Commissioner Day: Thanks.

Mr. White: Yep.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else?

(silence)

Mr. White: Okay. We'll keep going. So at this point I'm going to turn it over to Lisa. We're going to talk a little bit first about the Land Use Element. Lisa, are you there?

Lisa Grueter: Yes. Can you hear me?

Mr. White: It's quiet but we can.

Ms. Grueter: Okay.

Mr. White: Give us one minute. Go ahead. We'll see if we can hear you.

Ms. Grueter: How about now?

Mr. White: Yeah, just – speak at the voice as loud as you can, but I think we can hear you pretty well, Lisa.

Ms. Grueter: Okay. Thank you, Clay, and thank you to the Planning Commission. This slide is a summary of some of the land use policies that reflect what Clay was just describing. So first was to update the policies so that they address housing at all income levels. So again, not just a *single* housing target, but a – multiple targets that are based on income levels. And then adding some of the housing types that the Planning Commission suggested and that are in the new laws. So accessory dwelling units allowing at least two per lot in urban areas, so that's more about what Clay just described in joint planning for those Urban Growth Areas. But there's also opportunity to do accessory dwelling units in LAMIRDs and in some cases rural areas, as well.

And then, as Clay mentioned, we worked on some policies to address pre-planning for those Urban Growth Areas, both for the densities but also the infrastructure. So the idea would be to do advanced planning and phasing of annexation and infrastructure.

So for example, in 2016, Sedro-Woolley asked to change its boundaries for its Urban Growth Area to add an area and reduce in another location, and the County required them to do a sewer expansion study. They did do that. So one of our policy recommendations was to remove that older policy because it had already been accomplished. So there is a history of the County and Cities working together, at least on particular requests.

So the recommendations revolve around new policies to plan for growth in the Urban Growth Areas, and then coordinating with the Council of Government (sic) and the Cities to explore options to provide housing in Urban Growth Areas along the lines of what we've been describing. Set urban zoning and show how you're going to serve it. And there're some examples in the area. Ferndale, up in Whatcom County, has done a good job with phasing annexation and showing its work, and doing it in a way that might be more logical for the services.

Next slide, please.

So now on to the Housing Element. We revised the text of the housing policies to allow for more housing types including those the Commission discussed last time when we were focusing on Limited Areas of More Intensive Rural Development. So you'll see reference to a wide range of housing types – manufactured homes, tiny homes per building code, and other forms. Also the part of the new laws that we've been talking about over time, HB 1220 requires the County and Cities to do a review of all the policies for being barriers to racially disparate groups – or to remove barriers to racially disparate impacts, and then also to remove pressures on displacement. So there's additional policies that were proposed as a result of that review. And again, more variety of housing types, especially in LAMIRDs and the County's land use management areas. And I think Clay well described with the other diagram this idea of having a better connection between housing in the Rural Element. So there's a little more cross-walking between those.

Mr. White: Does anybody have any questions on those two elements?

Commissioner Martha Rose: Speaking about this annexation that Sedro-Woolley did, I was puzzled as to why their proposed zoning for that annexation is only five lots per acre. And when I questioned the then-Planning Director about it, he said, Well, that's what's normal around here. And I'm, like, We're not in normal times. So I don't know. It seems like there should be – and then it may be that they can change that, but it seems like if we're talking about annexing additional land into the Urban Growth boundary, then it should be looked at as higher density.

Ms. Grueter: At the time – that's a very good question. At the time it's true that a lot of areas around beyond town centers and corridors and things like that are typically more like three or four units an acre, and I think the area they were pushing into was around a lake. But now with some of the changes in state law about having a certain number of dwellings per lot instead of it being based on density – middle housing types – they will have to be planning for those other housing types at least two units per lot. And so that changes things, and they'll be addressing that for the urban areas they serve.

Mr. White: Yeah, I very much agree. I think that now – it may be something at the next round of the Countywide Planning Policy update's going to progress, but there is this greater connection about it's not just providing for enough capacity. You're going to have to provide for the types of

housing that fit within these \_\_\_\_\_. So there's going to be some relationship between that zoning and housing needs that they have to fulfill. And right now there's such a wide variety of housing that's needed, sometimes that's going to be multifamily or townhomes or it's going to be different housing types, because there's such a more granular focus on it.

Ms. Grueter: Clay, I would add too that some Counties and Cities through joint planning policies have identified an average minimum density they would like to see so that the urban areas are more efficient and compact. So, for example, I think Clark County has a minimum of six units an acre. Other Counties have set other numbers as well.

Mr. White: So if you go this and you have thoughts on this, these are things that we could address. Like in the Housing Element, I'm encouraging working on annexations. What would you like to see when annexations take place? There's a new annexation method – the interlocal agreement method of annexations, which would have to be a coordinated process between the County and the Cities, which can work really, really well but it requires interlocals between the County and the jurisdictions, which – so we could develop policies about how that interlocal process could work. So, yeah, we can – I mean, if you've got those kind of thoughts, we can be kind of looking at how the County would – you know, giving them that support for how they would enter into those conversations with Cities as this work continues.

Chair Raschko: Commissioner Day?

Commissioner Day: I appreciate that. Thank you. I think that is a really fruitful avenue to pursue, because those are urban areas or designated areas that are expected to have urban density growth that currently in our current policies – I can't remember which one, but it says it allows for rural densities. Well, once you have a piece of property developed, you know, you build a home, you hope it's going to last. It kind of precludes more dense development. So I think it makes sense to encourage the County to focus on interlocal agreements or working with Cities in order to create an opportunity to make urban type densities within the UGAs.

But I have another question too. In thinking, I especially appreciate all the folks who came to speak to the Planning Commission tonight. And one area that I am concerned about that we may not have policies or regulations to support is people being displaced from a rental unit. And so I wonder, Are there current policies in Skagit County that would allow for, like, you know, a cooperative type arrangement where there are several homes, manufactured homes or tiny homes, on a piece of property and people can have an ownership stake in that, so it's more affordable? Or really tiny lots so that there's some ownership of that, where they're not so at risk of, you know, having their home sold and not being able to find another one.

Mr. White: Yeah. I mean, that's a tough one. I mean, we have talked a little bit on LAMIRDs about whether you're wanting to have some incentives for, like, park model trailers – which are, if they're off their chassis, can be placed on foundations. Those are, like, sometimes 400 square feet. Manufactured homes can be really, really nice, but then they can be placed on very small lots and those could be leased. Those might be – those could be subdivided. They could be into condominiums. I mean, they could be in different ownerships. I don't know whether you're getting into, like, rental protections or if you're –

Commissioner Day: No, I was thinking some type of ownership. For example, I remember in Snohomish County we had instances where there were mobile park homes or manufactured park homes – parks – I know I'm having problems saying that! And so – but then the person that owned the park would be – have an interest in selling it or they would be offered, you know, a very nice

sum from a developer who would then come in and people would have to move their manufactured homes – which is really costly, if you can even find a place to take it – and then that land would then be developed. But as an alternative, I know there are some arrangements where there are cooperatives that are formed where the mobile home or manufactured home owners purchase the property and they all own a share of it. I don't know if that, under current regulations, is allowed or, alternatively, if there are, you know, tiny home-sized lots that could be owned.

Mr. White: I'm sure you could get there. Lisa, I don't know if the policies are there, but you could get there through – like a binding site plan could create that because you'd create condominiums so you'd own the air space like you own in a condominium. So there, actually everyone would have that ownership interest. Did you have thoughts on that?

Ms. Grueter: Yeah. Well, there is some policy language that I think could support co-housing, home-sharing, some other forms that we did add tiny homes. We can bring back some examples, just like what you were mentioning in Snohomish. There're some other examples of rural cooperative housing that we could share. But I think you do have some policy openings. We'd have to check if your regulations – I think, Clay, there's still some regulatory barriers that the team is going to be identifying and working on.

Mr. White: Yeah, and I think the biggest thing was not just allow. You'd have to find some way to incentivize it as well, because it's the challenge of how does it get built or who builds it and why are they building it. Kind of that just making sure it makes economic sense. So if we can find some – I mean, we're hearing, I think, the Planning Commission, loud and clear on more housing options, some incentives, thinking creatively. We've got to solve some of these. So we'll take a look at that for you and see if we can find some policy direction.

Commissioner Day: Thanks.

Chair Raschko: Okay.

Commissioner Day: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Anybody else?

(silence)

Mr. White: All right. I've just got a couple more slides and then we're going to move forward. So just on Economic Development Element: So we've – we've – the Economic Development policies are pretty developed. You've got a lot of policies. They've generally been updated to align with the Skagit Council of Governments' Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy so there's consistency between the two. So looking at key industries; we want to coordinate on land use with jurisdiction and regional partners; provide infrastructure to support businesses and enhance workers' quality of life. You're going to see some policies in here that are kind of similar to the housing approach of – I think that there's some coordination that can be done with the Cities and other entities to facilitate more growth – job growth. But that also goes hand-in-hand with what can happen within our Urban Growth Areas. So if we're working to coordinate more jobs in the county, while we have a lot of industry in our rural areas more of your jobs are going to happen in urban areas. So this kind of does go hand-in-hand. So you're going to see a few policies work with the Cities to align comprehensive plans in future economic development opportunities through zoning and development regulations. We talk about working with jurisdictions and

agencies to identify appropriate areas for increased business diversity and explore options for implementation. Especially as you are thinking about higher density housing. You're wanting to think about the businesses that would go along with that housing so that – one of the things you don't want is you have a city with a downtown core, and then you're now required to plan for a lot of multifamily housing and then you put it on the *outskirts* of the Urban Growth Area further from jobs, transportation. You need to be thinking about all these things together, and then work with SCOG jurisdictions and organizations to identify new strategies to support other key industry sectors like construction, advanced manufacturing, clean technology, energy, and healthcare.

So a lot of the policies right now we've proposed to stay the same. We've introduced some new ones, but we look forward to getting comments back on those. But this *will* be that part of the conversation hopefully with Cities on, you know, How do we work on these issues together? But that key is if there really isn't – I mean, SCOG's a really powerful organization to have these conversations because it *is* so much better if the County's working with Burlington and Mount Vernon and Sedro-Woolley on shared kind of goals and policies. I mean, you only have so much staff and resources, like, to think about what you can accomplish when you're kind of all on the same team and working towards common goals. So this policy direction will kind of say those are good things to be working on.

I'll take any comments. That concludes, I mean, so just kind of summarize. We've got these three preliminary draft elements. They're short and to the point. So hopefully people that have an interest from the community can look at these in just a few minutes and say, Hey, here's some things that you've touched on that we really like. Here are the things that we'd really like you to look at. We'll do that over the next month. We'll be back with you next month to open up a couple more elements and then we'll do it again and again, and then we'll bring everything back together. So if comments come in, we'll be evaluating those. And the next time you see the draft Comprehensive Plan, you'll see changes. So that big piece is the community voice and making sure that we set policies that kind of set actions in place between now and when the Comprehensive Plan is updated again.

I'll take any questions if you have them.

Chair Raschko: Any questions?

Commissioner Jen Hutchison: I'm just wondering if we'll be seeing the comments as they come or if we'll get a report with the final summary of comments, like we often see from the County.

Mr. White: How would you like to receive them? And the thing is, like, the comment period from last month's meeting is just ending now so we just got comments, like, today. So we could wait till all four months conclude and then package them up into a summary for you, because we're going to need to do that. Or we could do it monthly. What do you think?

Robby Eckroth: I like that option just because we're going to be working through a lot of these comments ourselves and want to actually show the work that we did as well, if that's okay with the Planning Commission. But if you would like to see the comments immediately afterward we can post those as well.

Commissioner Kathy Mitchell: We should do both, because we need to see what's happening and what's being said along the way with the work and then everything at the end too.

Mr. White: Sure.

Chair Raschko: Sounds good.

Vice Chair Candler: When you say “both,” you mean they should just be posted as is for us to read, but they don’t have to summarize it until the end. Is that what you’re saying? To bring it to a meeting. Is that what you mean? You want to read them but you don’t need them summarized until the end. Is that –

Commissioner Mitchell: Exactly.

Vice Chair Candler: Okay.

Commissioner Mitchell: Where we can read them. Staff can do whatever they need to do to work on them. If they want to tell us some of the work along the way, that’s fine, but we need to see what those comments are so we can think about things while we’re going through it too.

Mr. White: Yeah, that’s fantastic.

Chair Raschko: That was my thought as well.

Mr. White: Okay. Yeah, we can do that.

Chair Raschko: Does that require a lot of effort?

Mr. White: No.

Chair Raschko: I didn’t think so. Okay. Anything else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Thank you very much.

Mr. White: Great. We’ll see you next month.

Chair Raschko: Okay. It’s time for Planning Commissioner Comments and Announcements. We can start with Martha.

Commissioner Rose: So most of you know by now this is my last meeting. I’ve been on this commission for seven years and it’s been a really – an educational opportunity and it feels like it meshes with my 52-year career in construction. And this is a topic – this current topic is one of my wheelhouse specialties, having built a lot of infill housing in the urban core of Seattle where a typical new home in Seattle sits on a 2,000-square-foot lot or less. And people around here need to adjust to that way of thinking. A lot of people bristle when I suggest that every single family lot should have four to six townhomes on it. They don’t like that. But that’s really what it’s going to take to get where we have to go. And maybe each townhome has within itself an accessory dwelling unit. So that’s the kind of thinking I believe that it’s going to take to solve this problem, but I’m not going to be here to help solve it. But any rate, I appreciate all the years and the discussions of many topics, and I’m moving to Bellingham. So any rate, that’s all I have to say. Yeah.

Chair Raschko: Jen?

Commissioner Hutchison: You will be missed. That's it.

Chair Raschko: Go ahead.

Vice Chair Candler: It's been a pleasure working with you.

Commissioner Rose: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: It has been a pleasure, and it's too bad at the timing – that we'll miss your input on this Comprehensive Plan work. Gosh, I usually go last! I just – another aside. I learned just today that the sawmill in Sedro-Woolley is going to shut down. Not in Sedro-Woolley – excuse me. DC Timber and Sales, down just north of Everett alongside I-5. That'll leave the sawmill in Everson, the one out here at Sierra Pacific and one in Darrington, and nothing else until you get to Tacoma. And, boy, that's getting to be – it'd be like if all the farmers in our county had nowhere to sell their produce. What would happen to agriculture? So it's – I think that the element on Business here is an important one as well. Go ahead.

Commissioner Mitchell: I've got nothing.

Commissioner Day: Thank you. I agree. I noticed the policy that emphasizes small businesses. I don't know if a sawmill would be considered a small business, but I think that it's not – they're generally not a conglomerate and so I appreciate that policy, and also all the economic development policies I thought were very well done, trying to strike a balance between jobs, quality of life, and industry that's specific to this county. So I appreciated that. And also, Commissioner Rose, I wish you the best. And we'll miss your expertise and helpful comments. So I wish you luck.

Commissioner Rose: Thank you.

Chair Raschko: Okay, anything else?

(silence)

Chair Raschko: Okay, we'll stand adjourned. Thank you, everybody. Oh, one last thing. I just wanted to say I enjoyed this meeting but I thought that the public input in the beginning really set the stage well for what we discussed and I appreciate everybody's input. Thank you. We're adjourned (gavel).