



TO: Jack Moore, Planning and Development Services Director
Robby Eckroth, Senior Planner
Tara Satushek, Senior Planner

FROM: Clay White, Director of Planning

DATE: September 13, 2024

RE: September 24, 2024, Planning Commission briefing – 2025 Periodic Comprehensive Plan Update – Transportation, Capital Facilities, and Utilities Elements.

We look forward to the opportunity to brief the Skagit County Planning Commission on September 24, 2024, regarding the 2025 Periodic Comprehensive Plan update. The briefing will focus on providing a:

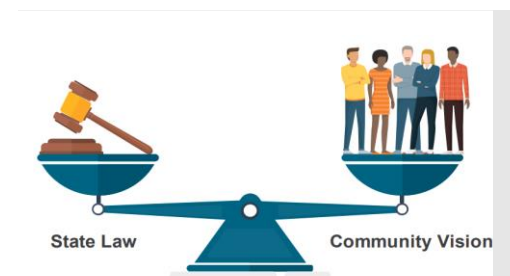
- Project overview
- Project schedule overview and update
- Community engagement overview
- Presentation on Preliminary Draft Policy amendments for the Transportation, Capital Facilities, and Utilities Elements.

We look forward to answering any questions the Planning Commission may have and receiving feedback on the Preliminary Draft Policy amendments. Your comments will help as we continue efforts to engage the community and develop a complete Comprehensive Plan draft this winter.

Background

The Washington State Growth Management Act (GMA) requires cities and counties to update Comprehensive Plans and implementing development regulations every 10 years (RCW 36.70A.130). Comprehensive Plans are 20-year policy documents which guide the community vision for growth population, housing, and employment), transportation, capital facilities and utilities, parks, recreation and open space, rural areas, and protection of natural resource lands (RCW 36.70A.070). While the deadline to update the comprehensive plan was June 30, 2025, recent legislation ([House Bill 2296](#)) extended the deadline to December 31, 2025. Skagit County is still focused, however, on completing this project by June 30, 2025.

Comprehensive Plan updates are an opportunity to revise the existing Plan to ensure consistency with updated state laws/case law since the last update, Best Available Science (BAS) for incorporation into critical areas regulations and changes in local conditions. Given the Growth Management Act (GMA) is a bottom-up planning process, having robust engagement as part of the update will ensure the community vision is captured in the Plan as we look out to 2045. Strong community engagement also ensures the Planning



Commission and Board of County Commissioners have the best information as updates to the Plan are considered.

Schedule Overview

The 2025 Periodic Comprehensive Plan update is currently on schedule for completion by June 30, 2025. Efforts this spring have focused on community engagement and early data collection and analysis, which provides the foundation for the project.

The next phase of the project is policy drafting. The goal is to ensure the Skagit County Comprehensive Plan not only aligns with the GMA and Countywide Planning Policies, but also reflects the community vision as the the county plans for growth out to 2045.

To ensure the community can provide robust input and the Planning Commission has ample opportunity to provide early direction, the project schedule has a two-step policy review process. Preliminary draft policy amendments, for each comprehensive plan element, will be prepared and brought to the Planning Commission for initial comments between July and October 2024. In addition, a 30-day comment period will be provided each month for the public to provide early comments. More information about the schedule and opportunities to comment on these early drafts may be found on the [project website](#).

After these early briefings with the Planning Commission and public comment, a draft comprehensive plan will be developed and issued in early 2025. The draft comprehensive plan will also be released to the public for comment and the Planning Commission will review as part of public meetings and hearings before being completed.

Summer/Fall 2024 preliminary policy review schedule

Topic	Planning Commission – Preliminary Review	Comment Period	Planning Commission Second Review
Rural (Complete) Natural Resource Lands (Complete)	July 23, 2024	July 23, 2024, to August 22, 2024, 4:30 p.m.	Early 2025
Land Use (Complete) Housing (Complete) Economic Development (Complete)	August 20, 2024	August 20, 2024, to September 19, 2024, at 4:30 p.m.	Early 2025
Transportation Capital Facilities, and Utilities	September 24, 2024	September 24, 2024, to October 24, 2024, 4:30 p.m.	Early 2025

Climate & Resiliency Environment	October 22, 2024	October 22, 2024 to November 14, 2024, 4:30 p.m.	Early 2025
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Overall project schedule



Community Engagement overview

As of September 2024, the following engagement initiatives have been completed.

- Development of project website.
- First community survey to gather high level input from residents.
- Pop-up events to advertise the project and engage with the community.
- Eight stakeholder interviews with various interest groups.
- Three open houses around Skagit County to collect existing conditions data for multiple comprehensive plan elements.
- Issuance of preliminary draft policies for the Rural, Natural Resources, Housing, Land Use, and Economic Development Elements. This includes presentations for the Planning Commission and 30-day comment periods to receive initial feedback from the community.

Key themes from engagement completed thus far include:

- **Resource Lands** – “Preserving agricultural land” was deemed as the #1 priority for the next twenty years based on community engagement conducted thus far. Updated goals and policies are focused on protecting agricultural lands of long-term commercial significance. Protection of Forest lands of long-term commercial significance was also a key theme.
- **Housing** –Based on community input thus far, “Improving housing supply and affordability” is the #2 priority for the next twenty years. Given limitations on providing more dense housing in rural areas, we are exploring policy options that will focus on maintaining rural character while providing more options for people who live in rural communities.

- **Environment** – There have also been substantial comments on the desire to protect the environment as the county grows. As policies are being reviewed, we are looking to balance environmental and climate policies with the need for housing and jobs.

Following the County’s Public Participation Program, the upcoming engagement events are outlined below. Visit the project website for more details.

- Climate and environmental open house in October.
- Climate related community survey.
- Climate and environmental policies preliminary drafts presented to Planning Commission in October.

The updated engagement report is attached and includes detailed comments collected that may be addressed through policy revisions in the comprehensive plan. From the public engagement data there are several important themes that have been considered for policy revision so far. We will discuss these at the September 24 Planning Commission meeting.

Policy Revision Approach

As part of its periodic update, Skagit County is auditing each Comprehensive Plan element for its ongoing applicability and consistency with state laws and local trends and needs. The Comprehensive Plan is used to set goals and policies for management of land use, rural character, natural resource lands, critical areas protection, housing, economic development, capital facilities, transportation, utilities, and more.

Skagit County Comprehensive Plan’s goals set forth intentions and directions, and policies provide strategies or principles on how to achieve the goals. Each month one or more elements will be reviewed in a preliminary manner and brought forward for initial feedback. This month the preliminary draft policies presented to the Planning Commission are the policies for the Transportation, Capital Facilities, and Utilities Elements.

Our review of the County’s Transportation, Capital Facilities, and Utilities Elements policies focus on a few overarching objectives as follows:

- New goals and policies based on community input.
- Consistency with the Growth Management Act (GMA) and current law changes
- Streamlining of policy language to make it easier to apply across the planning period, leaving details in the County Code
- Use of active verbs to enhance readability and engagement

Furthermore, our focus includes identifying outdated policies for potential removal and recommending the integration of pertinent discussions from policies into relevant sections, thus fostering a more cohesive policy framework.

This memo aims to provide an overview of our approach and findings during the policy audit, highlighting key areas of review and consideration.

PRELIMINARY DRAFT POLICY REVISIONS - SUMMARY

The preliminary draft policy revisions are provided within the attached appendix. The following summarizes the preliminary draft policy changes.

Capital Facilities and Utilities Element Preliminary Draft Changes

- Addition of “action” terminology, where compatible with CPPs.
- Updating planning period references to 2025-2045.
- Remove time-bound policies that have been implemented or are no longer applicable.
- Consider removing the policies under the “Capital Facilities Needs” heading between pages 289 to 293 and moving them to be their own section of the Capital Facilities Element.

Transportation Element Requirements and Preliminary Draft Changes

Washington Growth Management Act (GMA) transportation element requirements have changed from auto-oriented to multimodal with an emphasis on active/human-powered modes, such as walking, biking, and rolling (wheelchairs, mobility devices, etc.). The GMA now requires policies to address:

- ADA Transition Plans
- Multimodal Level of Service (MMLOS)
- Active transportation networks
- Complete Streets for County roads and State highways
- Safety for Vulnerable Road Users
- Equity in transportation investments
- Transportation/Land Use integration
- Reduction of Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT)
- Reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions

Key Legislative Changes, State Plans, and Implementation Realities

SB 1181 Climate Element. Requires MMLOS standards in Transportation Element and policies to reduce VMT and GHG.

SB 5452 Transportation Impact Fee (TIF). Authorizes revenue to fund improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities.

RCW 47.04.035 Complete Streets for State highways. Requires all WSDOT projects of \$500,000 or more in population centers to include sidewalks, bikeways, crossings, etc. for all ages and abilities, consistent with Complete Street principals.

2021 WSDOT Active Transportation Plan. Requires WSDOT to provide “Level of Traffic Stress Type 1 or Type 2” (Physically separated or protected) pedestrian and bicycle facilities on State highways, consistent with needs identified by local agencies.

Target Zero and Vulnerable Road Users. 2019 WSDOT Highway System Plan with a goal of reducing deaths and injuries to zero. The 2023 Vulnerable Road User Safety Assessment adopts the Safe System Approach with an emphasis on equity and vulnerable users.

Grant Funding. Most transportation state and federal grant funding agencies now prioritize active transportation and safety for vulnerable road users, as well as socio-economic and demographic equity. Most require or award points for Complete Streets ordinances.