



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

FROM: Clay White, Director of Planning

DATE: August 13, 2024

RE: August 20, 2024, Planning Commission briefing – 2025 Periodic Comprehensive Plan Update – Land Use, Housing, and Economic Development Elements

We look forward to the opportunity to brief the Skagit County Planning Commission on August 20, 2024, regarding the 2025 Periodic Comprehensive Plan update. The briefing will focus on providing a:

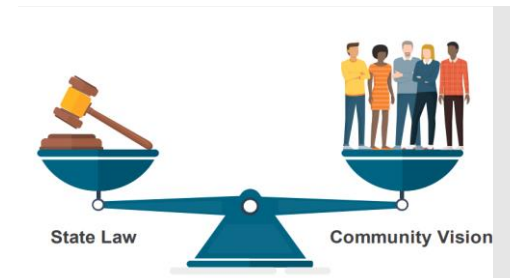
- Project overview
- Project schedule overview and update
- Presentation on Preliminary Draft Policy amendments for the Land Use, Housing, and Economic Development Elements

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.

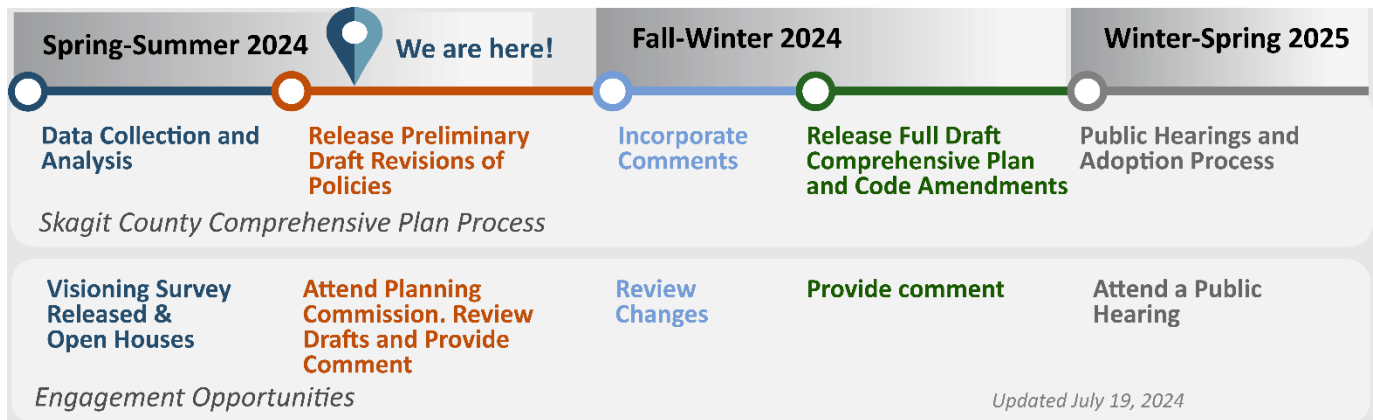
To ensure the community can can provide robust input and the Planning Commision has ample opportunity to provide early direction, the project schedule has a two-step policy review process. Preliminary draft policy amendments, for each comprehensive plan element, will be prepared and brought to the Planning Commission for inital comments between July and October 2024. In addition, a 30-day comment period will be provided each month for the public to provide early coments. 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 comprehsnsvive plan will also be released to the public for comment and the Planning Commisison will review as part of public meetings and hearings before being completed this June.

Summer 2025 preliminary policy review schedule

Topic	Planning Commission – Preliminary Review	Comment Period	Planning Commission Second Review
Rural Natural Resource Lands	July 23, 2024	July 23, 2024, to August 22, 2024, 4:30 p.m.	Early 2025
Land Use Housing Economic Development	August 13, 2024 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

Overall project schedule



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 Land Use, Housing, and Economic Development elements.

Our review of the County’s Land Use, Housing and Economic Development 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.

Land Use Element (Preliminary Draft Changes)

- Policies to analyze patterns of development as a criterion to consider in designating and/or expanding UGAs.*
- Policies to plan for housing based on income level of the jurisdiction’s residents. Income level is defined as the percent of earnings you make compared to the area median income (AMI) or median family income (MFI) where someone lives.*
- Policies have been revised to allow accessory dwelling units’ requirements allowing at least 2 accessory dwelling units in the UGAs*.
- Remove time-bound policies that have been implemented or are no longer applicable.
- Including policy on annexation prioritization or phasing plans as it relates to utility expansions.

***Policy changes proposed based on changes to state law since the last update**

Housing Policies (Preliminary Draft Changes)

- New housing types have been introduced to explore how to allow a variety of housing types for different income levels Housing types introduced range from tiny homes, duplexes, triplexes, and manufactured homes that may provide housing for low-income, seniors, special needs, or could be used as transitional housing.*
- New policies to explore housing programs. The policies are drafted to emphasize coordination with other County departments, cities, SCOG, local organizations and agencies.
- Policies have been revised to address issues identified in racially disparate impact analysis, as part of the housing needs assessment.*
- Include language to accommodate moderate, low, very low, and extremely low-income households.*
- Add policy language to support programs for housing affordability such as technical support, self-help housing efforts, and working with financial institutions etc.
- Include policy to allow a variety of housing types in the UGAs and LAMIRDs.
- Add clarity in policies to specify diverse housing needs such as needs for families, people of all ages and levels of mobility, couples, single persons, and persons with disabilities or special needs with adequate accessibility and safety, older adults, and people who have experienced homelessness.*
- New policy language to allow diverse housing types appropriate in the rural areas such as manufactured homes, ADUs, tiny homes etc.
- New goal, objective, and policies for consideration on anti-displacement.*
- Move language from policies that can be integrated in the development regulations.

***Policy changes proposed based on changes to state law since the last update**

Summary of New State Requirements impacting Housing Element

New Statutes	Requirements
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HB 1220 – Housing and Equity	Requires communities to plan for and accommodate housing affordable to all economic segments of the population of this state. Also requires addressing and undoing racially disparate impacts of past policies on housing.
HB 1337 – Accessory dwelling units	At least two ADUs (both attached, both detached, or one attached and one detached) per lot must be allowed in residential zones in urban growth areas (UGAs) within all zones in urban growth areas where single family homes are permitted.
ESHB 1293 – Design Review	Clear and objective design review standards to the exterior of new development.
Senate Bill 5275 - LAMIRDs	Adds that development and development within limited areas of more intense rural development (LAMIRD) be permitted subject to available public facilities and public services and be consistent with local character. Note – while this bill impacts the Rural Element to a greater extent, there is also a connection to the Housing Element.

Economic Development Policies (Preliminary Draft Changes)

- Policies were grouped into the following categories: economic growth and land use, industry growth and diversification, infrastructure, quality of life, public-private partnership, ports, skill-building, fiscal impact, and tourism and attraction.
- Policies were recommended and revised to define how land use can bolster economic growth and enhance natural resource industries and other key industry sectors identified by SCOG’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.
- Policies were created to coordinate land use comprehensively across jurisdictions to support the balance between rural, natural resource lands and urban areas.
- All policies were revised to align with SCOG’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy.
- Policies for Skagit County to identify new strategies to maintain and expand infrastructure that supports economic growth and industry.
- Policies were expanded to consider how economic opportunities for individuals like wages, job type, education, talent and retention, should be established in coordination with businesses that support quality of life.